GET THE POINT
BY: Fritz Pointer

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE or CODDLING RELIGIOUS FASCISTS: A GLOBAL ISSUE

If we believe absurdities, we will commit atrocities. Voltaire

I am worried about how close we, Americans, are to living in a Theocracy. I appreciate the concerns of those who may think I harbor delusions of doing away with *Religion,* altogether; however, I am not one to, as they say, "throw out the baby with the bathwater." There has not, as far as is known, ever been a society without religion (of some kind or another). Nor am I one to accept man-made myths, fantasies and stories as historical or literal fact. Nor am I one to trade one set of "priests" (of religion), for other "priests" (of science). I think one of the most feared and revolutionary possibilities of all time is humanity thinking for itself, of people thinking for themselves. Starting from the fundamental premise that children everywhere are born without beliefs of one kind or another until indoctrinated. Our children need an education that will "promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" *(UN Charter*, Article 26).

Perhaps, I can word it differently. My confession, my admission is that I read Dr. Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* as well as Dr. Frans De Waal's *The Bonobo and the Atheist* and Dr. Peter Gomes' *The Good Book* (and learned that *morality* predates religion and humanity itself). In fact, I used Harris' book in a course in Critical Thinking, at Contra Costa College in San Pablo, California, for a couple of semesters; until, summarily, I was required to stop using this text or stop teaching: I stopped teaching. Harris says the following:

"Our world is fast succumbing to the activities of men and women who would stake the future of our species on beliefs that should not survive an elementary school education. That so many of us are still dying on account of ancient myths is as bewildering as it is horrible, and our own attachment to these myths, whether moderate or extreme, has kept us silent in the face of developments that could destroy us. Indeed, religion is as much a living spring of violence today as it was at any time in the past."

When Religious Fanaticism Kills

The recent conflicts in Palestine (Jews v. Muslims), the Balkans (Orthodox Serbians v. Catholic Croatians; Orthodox Serbians v. Bosnians and Albanian Muslims), Northern Ireland (Protestant v. Catholic), Kashmir (Muslims v. Hindus), Sudan (Muslim v. Christians and animists), Nigeria (Muslims v. Christians), Ethiopia and Eritrea (Muslim v. Christian), Sri Lanka (Sinhalese Buddhists v. Tamil Hindus), Indonesia (Muslim v. Timorese Christians), and the Caucasus (Orthodox Russians v. Chechen Muslims; Muslim Azerbaijanis v. Catholic and Orthodox Armenians) are merely a few cases in point. In these places, religion has been the *explicit* cause of literally millions of deaths in the last ten years…If history reveals any categorical truth, it is that an insufficient taste for evidence regularly brings out the worst in us. Add weapons of mass destruction to this diabolical clockwork, and you have found a recipe for the fall of civilization (Harris, 26).

And, let us not forget, as the framing goes, the Christian West (including America) v. the Muslim Middle East (The "Crusades" all over

again). Should we or can we avoid a discussion of the role of religion in the nuclear brinkmanship playing out between India (Hindu) and Pakistan, (Muslim) between Israel (Jewish) and the Muslim world, between "Christian" America and the Muslim world, because it may hurt someone's feelings or stop them from reading?

I think Amy Coney Barrett is a religious fanatic and Christian Fascist and needs to be called out for such. In the same way that Arundhati Roy calls out Narendra Modi for the Hindu Fascist he is; or Hassan Rouhani, in Iran, for the Muslim Fascist he is, or Benjamin Netanyahu for the Jewish-Zionist Fascist he is, and of course the Christian Fascist Trump (hard to say since neither he nor his wife have very much education and no ideology except "self" so can be used by Christian extremists). Most of the people in the world, believe that a Creator of the universe has written a book; there's one for each of the religions noted above, "each making an exclusive claim as to its infallibility (Harris, 13).

Secular Government Shoved Aside

Perhaps there's a way to 'soften' my critique; or reword it, without losing the essential message that: Separation of church and state is being lost, in America and around the world, as we coddle religious fanaticism. If Amy Coney Barrett learned from her mentor, Judge Antonin Scalia, and I think she did; he believed in the death penalty because he *believed* there is an afterlife for the soul – now where is the evidence, where is the proof for that? In Scalia's opinion, for the nonbeliever to deprive a man of his life is to end his existence. So, in preparation for execution, along with sterilized needles, some clergy or another is stationed next to the death chamber. Recall Dr. Harris' admonition above that "If history reveals any categorical

truth, it is that an insufficient taste for evidence regularly brings out the worst in us."

For example, in a speech given at the University of Chicago Divinity School on the subject of the death penalty Scalia said that "government – however you want to limit the concept – derives its moral authority from God…Indeed, it seems to me that the more Christian a country is the less likely it is to regard the death penalty as immoral…I attribute that to the fact that, for the *believing* Christian, death is no big deal…government carries the sword as 'the minister of God,' to 'execute wrath' upon the evildoer."

"Government derives its moral authority from God" – now, how does Scalia know that that happened or how that happened? – it's in the *Bible.* A non-material being, a spirit, a (Holy) ghost has left material, physical instructions in a book, well, several books. And this is the kind of Christian Fascism on the US Supreme Court. Let's just substitute "Sinner" for "Evildoer" and we're back to the *Inquisition.* We need to remind Barrett that a *belief* is not a fact. I can *believe* that Halle Berry loves and is looking for me, or that I've got a diamond in my backyard big as a refrigerator, that doesn't make it true.

Scalia's thinking, of course, is very close to, if not identical with, 17th century European Protestants and Catholics alike that there was one true religion (in this case Christianity) and that it is the duty of civil authorities (like the Supreme Court) to impose it, forcibly if necessary in the interest of saving the souls of all citizens. Nonconformists, "evildoers" could expect no mercy and might be executed as heretics. Why? Because many evangelicals are more interested in saving souls than saving lives. It's the kind of warped, backward thinking that allowed 15th century Catholic

Spaniards to hang thirteen Native Americans at a time in honor of Christ Our Savior and the twelve Apostles (Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 72). Scalia would perhaps approve of this sort of sick logic and behavior by Christians and not likely regard this as immoral. These Native Americans, obviously, had been sentenced to death by Christian Fascists.

People of Praise and Magical Thinking

Barrett too is very likely to impose religious belief in place of evidence and logic in some of her decision making, as did her mentor. People of Praise, the religious group Barrett, and family belong to, preach what's called "Prosperity Gospel." The pernicious doctrine of "Prosperity Gospel" teaches that God blesses those God favors most with material wealth; that Jesus came to minister to our material needs, blessing believers with wealth and power. Amy Barrett is a member of this spiritual magical thinking: If you pray the right way, God will make you rich. However, people without Healthcare are those who have not *prospered* because of their unfaithfulness, or some such childish formulation. Climate change is not a problem for People of Praise because The Rapture is coming. Of course, she's not going to say it like that, yet she will be staking our survival as a species on beliefs that should not survive a second-grade education.

For the people of a country, any country, to be inculcated with and guided by such childish and infantile ideas ought to be considered a crime against humanity. It is yet another clear reason for the need for a world government: one with the responsibility to protect citizens - by establishing legitimate, transparent electoral and appointment processes - from this kind of religions imposition, in belief and policy, into their daily, secular lives; no matter how surreptitiously or cleverly achieved.

This too from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNUDHR) Article 25 should be instructive: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond one's control" – like a pandemic. A "Right" not dependent on whether one is a believer or not.

But according to the values of "Prosperity Gospel" if you are poor, if you lack healthcare, if you are paid substandard wages, if you are a field worker, if you are a victim of police violence, this is because you are not a good Christian. In this belief system, the one Amy Coney Barrett subscribes to, you deserve what you get. It's not the system it's you.

Human Rights for All

A justice Barrett might also bring her radical and extreme Christian views to bear in providing the deciding vote for reversing the Supreme Court decision protecting same-sex marriage. For instance, referring to members of the LGBTQ+ community as expressing a "sexual preference" gives a strong hint of her head stuck in Leviticus, 18:22 which reads: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." Leviticus 20:13 reads: "if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them." Can you imagine a kind and compassionate God spewing such rubbish? Here, Moses, not God, promulgates what has come to be known as "The Holiness Code."

Dr. Peter Gomes, Harvard U. Minister and Theologian can help us here. He states: “These rules are designed for a very particular purpose and in a very particular setting. The purpose is nation building, their setting is the entry into a promised but very foreign land.” He continues, “Thus homosexuality is an *abomination* in Leviticus not because it is inherently evil but because the Gentiles do it, and it is therefore ritually impure (Gomes 153-154). Let us remember, Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, for Jews, “any sexual activity that interfered with the possible birth of the Messiah was forbidden. The wasting of seed through non-procreative sex was destructive not only to the survival of the race but to the redemption of the race through the Messiah. Masturbation, coitus interruptus, and, understandably, sex without possibility of issue, that is, homosexual activity, was proscribed” (Gomes, 167). The legitimization of violence against homosexuals and Jews, and women and blacks, as we have seen, comes from the view that the *Bible* stigmatizes these people, thereby making them fair game. If the *Bible* - a collection of ancient oral and written traditions that were edited into a whole book over a long period of time – expresses such prejudice, then it certainly cannot be wrong to act on that prejudice.

Opponents of homosexuality, of gender and racial equality are given the sanction of the *Bible* (along with texts like *The Hadith*, sayings attributed to Muhammad, who like Moses speaks for the Divine saying things like “When a man mounts another man, the throne of God shakes. Kill the one who does it and also kill the one who lets it be done to him “ – my note) - to feed their prejudice and, in certain cases, cultural ‘permission’ to act with violence upon those prejudices (Gomes, 146). Why should

people in the US or anywhere in the world, for that matter, be bound by or coerced to adhere to two-thousand-year-old Jewish rules, for Jewish people, that don't even apply to them?

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article16: 1-3 states: "Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal right as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." Regardless of one's religious faith or lack thereof.

The *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* takes these rights a step further adding: "The Criterion of legitimacy in human affairs is **moral universality**. The core of democracy is not majority rule but the protection of minorities from both majorities and tyrants. It is equal rights for all under just law" (*Earth Constitution*, 182). All, not some, not just those "born again" or "saved" or "washed in the blood" or Christian, or white, but, equal rights for ALL.

There must be on-going and lively critical thinking and analysis of these foundational, seminal texts including: the *Koran*, *Bible*, *Torah*, US *Constitution*, the *Charter of the United Nations* and *Earth Constitution*, etc., especially for the advocates and *disciples* of such texts. For example, the authors of the *Earth Constitution* note: "The United Nations has not led to a world where the many rights listed in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been extended to the Earth's citizens, but to denial of those rights for the majority and continuous increase in war, poverty, social

chaos, and environmental destruction…Citizens of Earth have the right and duty to create new institutions that represent the people of Earth" (183).

Life Is More Than Food and The Body More Than Clothes

As far as the Barretts' adoption of two Black Haitian children is concerned, some people may think this makes her some kind of liberal. Research indicates that, in this situation, the adoptees will grow up thinking of themselves as white or wishing they were white. African American children adopted into white families are isolated and lack the opportunity to interact with children or role models who resemble them (Goodwin, 6).

While teaching at Luther College in Iowa, I was called to a White family that had adopted a mixed-raced Afro-Vietnamese child. The child had attempted to commit suicide, unsuccessfully. And, asked why she responded; "Where is my white skin? I've been waiting and waiting and waiting and I want my white skin." As nice and good-intentioned as this white family may have been there was, obviously, in this case, something this white family could not give this black child. And, the brilliant and prolific Dr. Michele Goodwin observes how no one seems to think about the children in the United States who are in urgent need for safe homes and are overlooked by middle-class and well-to-do Americans who adopt abroad before considering domestic children from less exotic locations (like Haiti) instead of Milwaukee, Detroit or Newark (Goodwin, 3). In other words, adoption of Haitian children makes Barrett no less a Christian Fascist but, perhaps, even more-so.

Charity begins at home. "African American children wait longer in foster care than all other ethnic groups and represent 40 percent of all children in foster care, which is staggering considering that African

Americans are less than 15 percent of the total U.S. population" (Goodwin, 7). If she were truly honest, Barrett would recuse herself from this hypocritical charade and not let herself be used in this way by the worst President in United States history. Or, maybe he's her *head*?

For People of Praise, Men Must Rule Over Women

That is, how could Amy Barrett ever genuinely and honestly endorse a woman for POTUS when she follows the ideas dictated by Apostle Paul in the first century. For example, 1Corinthians 11:3,9 – "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God…Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." With this *belief*, Barrett easily accepts white male superiority, and the cultural assumption that their sex and skin color makes them entitled to rule (57 out 58 presidents since 1788) and enjoy the privileges of wealth and power. Amy Barrett's SCOTUS nomination is precisely because of her mediocrity, malleability, mendacity and shallowness.

Anyone with the slightest awareness knows that the *Bible*. *Koran*, and other so-called Holy-Books have been quoted to oppress and dominate women, to keep them out of leadership roles in church, mosque, synagogue and society; the *Bible* has been quoted to keep black Americans submissive and enslaved. Concomitantly, objectivity demands we recognize with Frans De Waal, that "Everything humans have accomplished anywhere – from architecture to music, from art to science – developed hand in hand with religion, never separately. It is impossible, therefore, to know what morality would look like without religion" (19). The UNUDHR Article 18 is relevant here: "Everyone has the right to freedom of

thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Secular Global Government and Separation of Church and State

As I've noted elsewhere: The failure to teach people, worldwide, to understand the joy, the depth, the metaphorical and symbolic meaning, the creative fun of oral stories, of folklore, creates the current religious madness and hysteria and rush toward nuclear war: in the name of God (Jesus) Allah (Mohammed) or Yahweh (Moses). It may be as simple as that; especially, when inflamed, exacerbated by sexism, racism, imperialism, and materialism.

In contrast to the coddling and accommodating approach of the Court's majority, Democratic World Federalists defend a separationist view. "The Establishment Clause should be interpreted, to the greatest extent practical, to require separation of church and state. Under this view, the **government should be secular;** the place for religion is in people's lives, their homes, and their places of worship" and not the Supreme Court or other institutions of government (Howard & Chemerinsky, p. xi).

Finally, the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth* reminds us that: "The only criterion is whether human rights, dignity, freedom, and justice prevail because of these institutions. This is why democracy is the ultimate criterion of legitimacy, democracy defined as any system that promotes rights, dignity, freedom, and justice in human affairs. Only global democracy represents the sovereignty of the people of Earth" (182).

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