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ETHICS - THE AVENUE TO RELIGIOUS PEACE

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Abstract. *Historically nations had little diversity in ethnic, religious and confessional areas. Usually the spiritual tone was set by majority religion. Religion created the culture, and the culture divided society. Two hundred years ago the United States of America broke the mold, welcoming all peoples, religions and giving equality to all. It was a dream come true. Laws, based on the ethics of love and respect, were enacted that would guarantee social peace, in spite of cultural and religious differences of immigrants. But such laws only works effectively when people are motivated by a selfless spirit. They honor the law because of their generous attitude, not because they fear its punishment.*

Religion, and the manner of discharging its duty that is owed to one's Creator, can only prosper under religious freedom, man's exemption from religious domination by others. Respect for the individual enables man to bypass the obvious differences, by tapping the basic spirit and teaching of all religion, which is to love one's neighbor as himself. One cannot love and force at the same time. They are incompatible. To mix force with religion is destructive to the one being forced and to the one using force. For religion to prosper it must be totally voluntary, even as a successful marriage is not based on force but on voluntary love and respect.

The challenge before Yugoslavia, and the world, is which way do we go? Do we go back to communism, when there was little religion, and little religious conflict? Do we go back to the monarchy when there was much religion, but little freedom to be different? Or do we go forward to a new day, a new life, to just laws and an even better people, where there is diversity and freedom from religious strife, because man sees every other man as his brother, a human being made by God. Let us strive to see the dawn of a new day when we no longer tolerate people, but love and respect them, and take life a step above coercive law to become a caring society.

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Truth and freedom are inseparable. Thomas Jefferson, a founding father of the United States, penned these inspiring words in the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Historically nations had little diversity in ethnic, religious and confessional areas. A majority religion ruler society. The United States broke the mold, welcoming all peoples, cultures and religions, giving equality to all. It was a dream come true. Ethical laws, based on love and respect, guaranteed social peace in a pluralistic society. The Religion Clauses mandated religious freedom and prohibited religious establishment. These principles, implemented universally, would bring religious peace.

The adhesive of social peace is the result of accepting the ethics of understanding others, their likes and dislikes, their religious and cultural values. Lacking this, is it any wonder that most oppression and wars are religious in nature?

In seeking peace and understanding, man's spirit toward the right of individual freedom is vital. Everyone has the divine right to choose to mold their own destiny according to the dictates of their own conscience. That deserves government protection.

Religion, and the manner of discharging one's duty to one's Creator, only prospers under religious freedom, which is man's freedom from religious domination. Respect enables us to bypass obvious differences, by tapping the basic spiritual teaching of all religions, to love one's neighbor as himself. One cannot love and force at the same time. They are incompatible. A successful marriage is not based on force but on voluntary love and respect. Forced religion is destructive to all.

We think it reasonable to encourage all to love and respect others, notwithstanding the faults and imperfections that may readily be seen in each of us. This makes people large hearted and generous. We ask no one to respect a religious belief or practice with which they do not agree, but we encourage all to honor the rights of others to hold and follow their religion. That protects all.

Most religions believe God is love. (1. John 4:8) Can we not embrace that as the highest ideal of our lives by loving the Creator supremely, and our neighbor as ourselves? (Luke 10:25-28) We are to attain eternal life by faith, keeping God's ten commandments and following Him. (Matthew 19:16-21; Ephesians 2:8-11; Revelation 12:17) By that perfect law of liberty all will ultimately be judged. (James 1:25, 2:12).

The law of self-preservation can only be achieved through self-sacrifice. Only when a seed sacrifices itself does it germinate and bears fruit. (John 12:24) Union with God cannot come about by government decree, church pronouncement, or by enforcing family religion.

God created each person individually to be personally responsible and answerable to Him alone. With divine help we are to form our own opinions as we will answer for ourselves to God.

Our relationship to God is personal, not corporate. And God fully allows man to choose whether he will serve God or not. He is fair, not manipulative, otherwise man would not be fully free. The sphere of government is to punish acts that violate man's social rights, which include religious freedom. (Romans 13:1-10) But government is not empowered to define our relationship to God, especially in worship matters. Centuries of governmental promotion of religion have proven destructive to society, to the church, to

the state, to individual freedom and development. Millions have been made second class citizens, and worse yet, died a martyr's death.

United States Founder James Madison wrote, "What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on civil society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty, may have found in established clergy convenient auxiliaries."

Since God does not compel or force our conscience, what prompts man to do so in God's name? It is Satan that stirs sincere but misguided humanity to unholy zeal in persecuting God's children. God never authorized anyone to convert others to their own ways and views. We are to lead people to God but God directs their paths. Only God Himself can establish His kingdom, it is not a human prerogative. Today governments are being prodded in that threatening direction.

Jesus declared, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) "... for behold the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21 KJV) Earthly power does not mark its coming. A seductive spirit is crying, "We have ungodly people in our society causing all our problems. We will solve our social, financial, and religious problems by bringing our nation back to God, and we will use the government to bring it to pass."

The truth of God's character, His longing to fellowship with human beings now and here as well as for eternity, is unappreciated by those devoted to self willed power, pleasure, prosperity, and piety. (1 John 1:1-3) Such end up with a compromising religion, "Having a form of godliness, but denying its power." (2 Tim 3:5)

Government must use force to protect people from each other. Its sphere is social morality, man's relationship to man. The state cannot reach into the heart, read motives, nor define or punish sin. Spiritual morality, man's relationship to God, is the sphere of religion, not the state.

Water is a Biblical symbol for governments. (Revelation 17:15) Oil is symbolic of God's kingdom. (Matthew 25:1-8; Zechariah 4:11-14) Just as oil separates itself from the water by nature, so God intended the same with church and state. Homogenization can merge oil and water into a solution, by transforming the very nature of oil and the water, changing their molecular structure. The merging of church and state creates an unnatural and immoral relationship. It prostitutes both, so that neither can fulfill God's intended plan. (Revelation 17:1-6).

God established human government. (Rom. 13:1-10) But He forms no alliance with human government, and warns His followers to form no such alliance. (Exodus 23:32, 34:10) Man's covenant with God is the only means for the furthering of God's kingdom in man's heart, on which God writes His laws. (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 10:16-17) Merging church and state rejects God's rightful relationship to man, His ability to transform us, His permeating society with His goodness.

Some claim religious force is acceptable to God. Then why didn't God use it to control religious behavior in heaven when religious controversy arose? Or in the Garden of Eden to make Adam and Eve obey and prevent human suffering? The answer? Because He loved them and goodness can only be achieved voluntarily. Religious force never Builds, it only destroys.

A renewed heart transformed by selfless love is the only solution, an impossibility by

government, church, or family efforts. It requires discipline, a life and death struggle. But God can change willing hearts. The work of God, the example of Christ, of loving and lovable Christians, of adherents of other faiths, and that of non-believers who are led to by God to be compassionate and loving, are the result of the transforming power of God, when God's goodness leads us to be sorry and forsake the wrong we do. These are the only cures for a diseased society.

"Were the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Corinthians 3:17) Only by love can love be awakened. Force is a principle of Satan's kingdom. How we relate to choice and force largely reveals whose influence, God's or Satan's, is the greatest, and whom we emulate. God made man for self-determination, giving humanity one of His greatest gifts. It seems unthinkable to seek to take away from our fellowman something so precious and vital which has been given to him at such a great cost by such a wonderful God.

Moral deterioration reveals the ineffectiveness of government and organized religion to deal with it successfully. How should we respond when others do not respect our beliefs? We are counseled "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat." (1 Corinthians 4:12-13) I am convinced that the ethics of eternal truths are the solution of our personal, national and international ills. God does not need civil government to further His kingdom. If such were the case, we might conclude that Caesar is mightier than Christ. But God is greater than all. Let all religious adherents influence society, but without the taint Caesar. And we pay our respect and honor to non-believers, as they share a generous attitude toward their fellowman. For isn't that the very essence of the golden rule, to do unto others as we would want them to do to us? (Matthew 7:12).

Many non-Christians, both believers and non-believers, are filled with love for their fellow man and exert a very positive influence on society. Non-Christians see God in nature and He writes His law in their hearts, and they will surely be redeemed as others who have a conscious abiding faith in the Son of God. (Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15) Peter wrote, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality: But in every nation whoever fears Him, and Works righteousness, is accepted by Him." (Acts 10:34-35) A great generous God, full of mercy, is looking for ways to redeem, not methods to keep people out of His heavenly kingdom.

God made all nations of one blood. (Acts 17:26) We have been called by destiny to believe in a common Creator God, to accept each other as brothers and sisters, and to seek to better the lives of others by love, by caring, by forgiving. This is the ethic - the avenue to religious peace. We must not permit our nationality, our religion, our social and economic standing to eclipse the most vital realities of our commonality - God is our Creator - we are all His children.

God is searching for people who will love supremely, be loyal in the midst of adversity, enjoy freedom from the enchanting and hypnotic power of selfishness and sin, honor His law of liberty (James 2:12), and reflect His character. He is looking for people who will gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from those who are easily deflected from following a straight course, and loyalty from the treason of others. Wherever they may be found, whoever they might be, they are truly God's children and will live eternally.

We are calling on government, on religious and non-religious people, to have greater compassion, restraint, and affection for one another and to seriously consider exercising a

personal growing trust in God or the higher principles of life. We challenge them to put no trust in Caesar to solve our religious moral dilemmas. The United Nations calls for religious toleration. Lets take it a step higher - respect peoples' rights to hold their religious beliefs and practices. When a married couple merely tolerate one another, that union is headed for serious trouble. Simply tolerating people who are different won't work. Love and respect will enable society to put away all bitterness, anger, and evil speaking so what we can be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as we have been forgiven by God. (Ephesians 4:31-32) "In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." (Philippians 2:3).

Living power is from within. It cannot be imposed from the outside. In religious matters there is no such thing as a life support system. The kingdom of God will never be established by decisions of courts or councils or legislative assemblies, nor by the patronage of the world's great men, but by the implanting of God's nature of love in humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures.

The fall of Communism revived old religious, national and cultural rivalries and religious persecution followed - it ravaged the former Yugoslavia. If we do not seriously address these growing conflicts, a holocaust will be repeated. Are we willing to influence government, society, and religious leaders that we are on a suicidal crusade unless we accept one another - respect peoples' right to differ - allow love to grow for all peoples, regardless of their religious or political views?

The challenge before Yugoslavia, and the world, is which way do we go? Do we go back to communism, when there was little religion and little religious conflict? Do we go back to the time before Communism when there was much religion, but little freedom to be different? Do we go toward a global religion that will not tolerate any competition? Or do we go forward to a new day, a new life, to just laws and an even better people, where there is diversity and freedom from religious strife, because every man sees every other man as his brother, a human being made and loved by God. Let us strive to see the dawn of a new day when we no longer merely tolerate people, but love and respect them.

ETIKA - PUT KA RELIGIOZNOM MIRU

John V. Stevens

Kroz istoriju, narod jedne države se nije mnogo razlikovao po svom etničkom poreklu, religiji i konfesiji. Obično je duhovni ton davala religija većine. Religija je stvarala kulturu, a kultura je delila društvo. Pre dve stotine godina, Sjedinjene Američke Države su razbile ovaj kalup i ukazale dobrodošlicu svim narodima i religijama, obezbeđujući jednakost za sve. To je bilo kao san koji je postao java. Bili su uspostavljeni zakoni, zasnovani na etici ljubavi i poštovanja, koji bi garantovali mir u društvu, uprkos kulturnim i religioznim razlikama među emigrantima. Ali, takvi zakoni efikasno deluju samo kad su ljudi motivisani duhom nesebičnosti. Takvi ljudi poštuju zakon zbog svog širokogrudog stava, a ne zato što se boje kazne.

Religija, i način na koji neko izvršava religiozne dužnosti koje duguje svom Tvorcu, može da prosperira jedino u uslovima religiozne slobode, kada čovek nije pod religioznom dominacijom drugih. Poštovanje prema pojedincu osposobljava osobu da premosti očigledne razlike, naglašavajući osnovni duh i učenje svih religija, a to je da voliš svog bližnjeg kao samoga sebe. Čovek ne može istovremeno da voli i da prisiljava. Ove dve stvari ne idu zajedno. Mešanje sile i

religije je destruktivno i za onog koji je prisiljen i za onog ko primenjuje silu. Da bi religija prosperirala, ona mora biti potpuno dragovoljna, kao što i uspešan brak nije baziran na sili, već na dragovoljnoj ljubavi i poštovanju.

Osnovno pitanje pred kojim se nalazi Jugoslavija, i ostali svet, jeste: kojim putem ići. Da se vratimo u komunizam, kada je bilo malo religije i malo religioznih sukoba? Da se vratimo u monarhiju, kada je bilo mnogo religije, ali malo slobode da se bude različit od većine? Ili da idemo napred ka novom danu, ka jednom novom životu, ka pravednim zakonima i još boljim ljudima gde postoji raznolikost i sloboda od religioznih sukoba, jer čovek vidi svakog drugog čoveka kao svog brata, kao ljudsko biće koje je Bog stvorio. Radimo na tome da ugledamo osvit novog dana kada nećemo samo tolerisati ljude, već ćemo ih voleti i poštovati, i podignemo život jedan korak iznad prisile zakona, da bismo postali društvo koje se stara.