

Religion at War with Itself  
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Last month, I wrote that Religion and Democracy are a combination destined for conflict. Religion requires belief in something without proof: faith. Democracy involves arriving at consensus on how to organize an orderly society. It requires thinking, discussion, and ultimately voting for either representatives or issues. Democracy also needs representatives and voters themselves with good character: something once shaped by religion. We seem to need both.

Human beings have always been thinkers and questioners: why does the sun rise and set was explained by the ancient Greeks and Romans imagining the sun god riding in his chariot across the sky. Until the invention of the telescope in the 15th century, mankind had no proof of planets, stars, and the fact that the earth was a globe, not a flat surface. Mythology was replaced by science.

Women had an intimate relationship with religious imagining. The moon's particular behavior: seeming to have a 28-day-cycle between birth (new moon), full moon, and ebbing back to new moon, replicated the female experience of monthly bleeding, pregnancy, birth, old age, and death.

It is possible that the first human mathematicians were women, who decoded the connection between sex and pregnancy. For eons, men didn't have a clue that these two realities were sequential. Women were the first to count months: nine of them, between a sexual act and childbirth. Until men caught on, they either feared or worshipped women. Men feared women's ability to bleed yet not die, and their mysterious control over childbirth. When men finally caught on, they spent the next millennia punishing women, putting male power back into the mystery of childbirth.

Men imagined that women were like empty vessels, made to hold men's magical fluid. They even imagined that sperm held miniature babies that they planted in fertile wombs.

Today around the world, we have remnants of these imagined religious systems that depend upon dictatorial power to sustain them. As historian Hannah Arendt once wrote: God was the first dictator. Although the founders of the major human religions told us they spoke with God, nobody else has. They have taken these spokesmen's words for it, calling dictators' laws "God's Law."

Entire human systems were developed out of this first premise: a prophet with dictatorial or very persuasive powers established rules, laws, and practices which whole peoples opted to follow. These rules and practices were a mixed bag of good and bad ideas, which once established, required a revolution to revise.

Ancient Judaism, established by Moses, was a legalistic tribal cult. There were ten orders that must be obeyed (Ten Commandments) some of them with death sentences for disobedience. Ancient Judaism was a system based on law. The first revolt against this was led by a young revolutionary, Joshua (Jesus) who urged his followers to practice compassion rather than legalism.

The collision of Judaism and Christianity led to a much more compassionate Judaism and a much more legalistic Christianity. People tend to absorb the values of their neighbors over time.

Islam was an amalgamation of Judaism, Christianity, and tribal Arab practice created by Mohammad, an Arab prophet. Like all other religions, its birth was bloody. Modern Islam has liberalized, but fundamentalist 7th century Islam lives on. Afghanistan is its model.

Religious systems have collided head on with the rational world of science and the political evolution of participatory government, Democracy. There is open warfare around the world today: a vast majority rejecting the imagined religions of the past.

Those that have modernized, however, emphasize moral teachings and have no enforcement power. They promote compassion, recognizing women as fellow human beings, and rejecting dictatorships of all kinds. They still have followers, fortunately.

Modern religions also provide communal celebrations, historic memory of culture, and rejection of evil and dictatorships. They practice the democracy of participatory community, promoting ethics and good works.

The majority of humans today are secular. But religious fundamentalists still fight back. They reject science, vaccines, birth control, and revere guns over compassion. Some even claim that Trump is a born-again Jesus, a mind-bending comparison!

If the earth were flat, these rascals would fall off.

683 words

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