

## Religion and Politics

Conventional wisdom can help us to avoid some of the pitfalls of life. Here are a few that are worth considering:

- a) Don't bite the hand that feeds you.
- b) Let sleeping dogs lie.
- c) A fool and his money are soon parted.
- d) Don't forget to say "Please" and "Thank you."

What about conventional wisdom concerning religion? I didn't have to look too hard to find some:

- a) Religion is a private matter between a person and God.
- b) There are no atheists in foxholes.
- c) Religion and politics don't mix!
- d) "Spirituality is for people who've been to Hell and religion is for those who haven't."

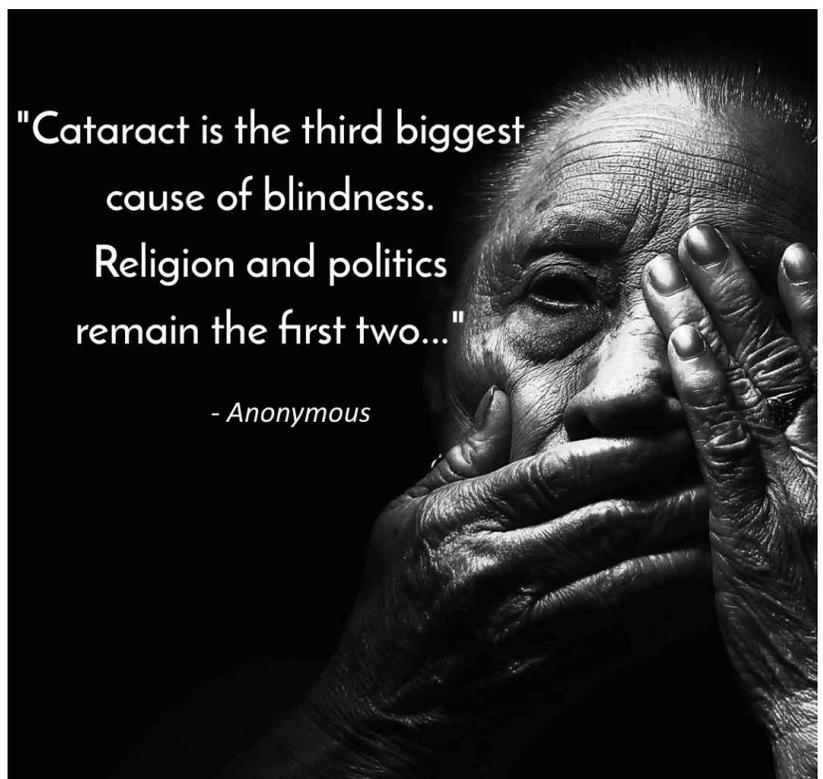
There are many sources of wisdom, but I am most interested in those that are based on religious sources. However, whichever sources we rely on for wisdom need to be able to stand up to some questioning. Our training and life experiences may predispose us to question some sources less frequently than others.

For example, the proverbial claim that "religion and politics don't mix" is particularly difficult for me to accept. Some of us recite this claim as if Moses himself brought it down from the mountain with the original 10 commandments. Yet I have experienced occasions in which my religion, which is based on my faith in God, helped me to cope with what life sent my way. In my lifetime this has included sexism, racism, war, abuse of children by clergy and non-clergy people alike, the Shoah (the murder of 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany), genocide and the lack of adequate healthcare for tens of millions of people.

Yes, these issues are often treated as best dealt with by civil authorities OR by religious authorities. My claim is that the needy, and that can be any of us (i.e., during massive natural disasters as well as war, insurrection, genocide), need our religious and civil authorities to work together. That can be risky, but it can also be risky to stick our heads in the sand and ignore the good that results from trusting God to work through both religious and civil authorities.

Here are some reasons that some believers insist that such trust is not warranted. Some of them don't even come close to making sense to me:

1. "The idea that religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country." (attributed to Jerry Falwell)



2. "Religion and politics mix about as well as strawberries and sardines."
3. "Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is."  
(attributed to Mahatma Ghandi)
4. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."  
(Jesus quoted in [Matthew 23:23-24](#)). Stratton; Original Blog Source: <http://bit.ly/2JgVEkf>)

I have to acknowledge that a mixture of strawberries and sardines is one of the worst combinations of foods that I can imagine. Yet even this disgusting mixture is better for our well-being (mental, spiritual, physical and social) than living with a minimalist approach to generosity (i.e. tithing only mint, dill, and cumin and neglecting social justice issues).

When God calls each person, we need to be listening! We need to continually focus our prayers, time and energy on doing God's work. We don't get to focus on straining out the gnats in our lives--much less swallowing the camels. We need to BE the "Family of God."

This means living in such an inclusive way that everyone watching us sees the difference that God's love makes for each person. New believers as well as non-believers need to know that God's love outweighs any fear of those who differ from us. We also need to help each other to recognize the danger posed by people who would rather split Christ's body (the Church) into ever smaller pieces than unify the Church through prayer, mutual love and compassion for each other.

We DO differ from one another. There is no denying it. But we are not so different that we need to let our differences become walls that divide us from other parts of God's family. To do that is to allow the "world" to set the standards for how Christians "Love one another as I have loved you!" ([John 13:34](#)) in the midst of our struggles to understand our differences.

Christians cannot avoid mixing religion and politics. If we deal with people who are non-believers, we are going to be affected by their political beliefs. There is no reason to suspect that they will not be affected by our religious beliefs! May God make it so for the glory of God and the growth of God's realm.

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

2 March 2020