

## **"Moral Convictions and Politics are One"**

Jim Minnery - Guest Columnist - Anchorage Daily News  
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Lord Melbourne, a distinguished member of the British House of Commons in the late 1800s, was befuddled and agitated. He had just persevered through another sanctimonious and, in his view, naive testimony from William Wilberforce, a runt of a man who just couldn't seem to keep his personal moral convictions out of the important work of running government. The tide was turning and parliament members were actually starting to support the arguments the inexorable Wilburforce had painstakingly laid out year after year.

"Things have come to a pretty pass," Melbourne noted with disdain, "when religion is allowed to invade public life."

In February of 1807, 20 years after Wilberforce began his crusade to stand up for the oppressed in his country, the slave trade was outlawed.

How does this relate to today's political environment? Should people with deeply held and life-encompassing religious worldviews detach themselves from their faith before venturing into matters related to the state? Is society best served when the church and its people are truly separated from the machinations of government?

I'd like to say these answers will unfold easily as you enjoy your raspberry scone and skinny latte. Not so. The intersection of politics and religion is like Tudor and Lake Otis -- potential for danger, heavily traversed and rarely without controversy. Let's consider a few ideas, however, as we idle at the light.

Some view religious people as foisting a narrow-minded and subjective value system onto everyone else, ultimately seeking to inflict a theocracy on society. Although there are incidences of backwoods bigots assaulting others with Bible verses, the bigger story, in my view, is the effort to erase all vestiges of faith from public life despite the prominent role it has always served in American law, government and politics.

Noah Webster, no slouch as a wordsmith, defined politics, partly, as the preservation and improvement of morals. John Adams, the second president, noted that the U.S. Constitution was "made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." His son, John Quincy, the sixth president, stated that the "highest glory of the American Revolution was this; it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity." It may come as a surprise to some that John F. Kennedy, not George W. Bush, said "The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the Hand of God."

Ironically, in the name of tolerance, many Christians involved in politics today are asked to check their religion at the door. Some comply, stating although they may have private concerns about a particular issue, their role as a public servant precludes them from legislating morality onto the masses. That decision, however, presupposes that there is a greater good and a better course of action. By whose authority is that judgment made? What kind of compass is a person using when they put aside a deeply held belief when making a public policy decision? Is that kind of duplicity really worth preserving?

The point is that people's worldviews, religious and secular, inevitably do "invade" their public life. Their foundation for making decisions may be based on shifting sand or on solid rock. They may choose to abuse, ignore or emulate that system of beliefs but it is still a part of who they are.

The challenge for those of us flailing in the substantial footsteps of Wilburforce is not how to establish a theocracy or get others to worship a particular way. The difficulty is that public policies are made from the 30,000-foot level. They are macro in nature and based on the premise that political decisions can change society and thus individuals. The truth is the reverse. Ultimately, as scripture tells us, the heart above all is deceitful. Change must occur within a person first before society can be transformed and renewed. As Wilberforce's friend and former slave trader, John Newton, aptly penned, "I once was blind but now I see."

Seems to me like a good way to move forward. Oh ... and the light's green anyway.