



"Important principles may and must be inflexible."
—Abraham Lincoln

24-Jul-09

Why So Many Religions? (Part Two)

Part One, published several weeks ago, ever so briefly covered one aspect of why there are so many religions. It drew upon a letter written by an undoubtedly sincere person who felt free to determine for himself on which day he chose to worship. Though one is certainly free to reach such a conclusion, this process does not make their choice right in the eyes of [God](#). Without question, such an approach has produced many divisions among religious groups, but it is in fact only one of the tremendous multitude of issues over which disputes have arisen and generated division.

On July 9, 2009, an article titled "Without a Doubt" by Kathleen Kennedy Townsend appeared in *Newsweek*, timed to take advantage of President Barack Obama's visit with Pope Benedict the next day. In the article, she encourages American Catholics to perceive Obama as more in alignment with their beliefs than the Pope and the Church's College of Cardinals in Rome. She opens her article with the following two paragraphs:

Tomorrow Pope Benedict XVI and President Barack Obama meet for the first time, an affair much anticipated and in some circles frowned upon by American Catholics in the wake of Obama's controversial Notre Dame commencement speech in May.

Conservatives in the church denounced Obama's appearance as a nod by the premier Catholic university to a conciliatory politics that heralds the start of a slippery moral slope.

In truth, though, Obama's pragmatic approach to divisive policy (his notion that we should acknowledge the good [faith](#) underlying opposing viewpoints) and his social-justice agenda reflect the views of American Catholic laity much more closely than those vocal bishops and pro-life activists. When Obama meets the pope tomorrow, they'll politely disagree about reproductive freedoms and homosexuality, but Catholics back home won't care, because they know Obama's on their side. In fact, Obama's agenda is closer to their views than even the pope's.

Undoubtedly, the pope and the President can agree upon a number of areas of discussion. The pope has just published an encyclical, "Charity in Truth," in which he declares unions, regulation of capitalism's excesses, and environmentalism to be ethical imperatives. This agrees with much of what President Obama has declared in recent months, so they most certainly would have much to talk about in which they would agree.

However, religion and most especially church doctrinal positions would not be one of them. Ms. Townsend, formerly Lt. Governor of Maryland and a member of the Catholic Church, apparently views Catholic Church governance to be every bit as much a political institution as a religious one. From this brief article, it is difficult to determine which one she believes dominates the church's concerns and activities.

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church has been and is still deeply involved in the politics of [this world](#). This fact helps to establish them as a institution of this world, which God commands Christians to come out of lest we share in its sins and receive of its plagues ([Revelation 18:4](#)). However, there is a major difference between the operational agendas of politics and religion.

Politics is all about compromise and pragmatism. In order to operate effectively, a politician is required to listen to different points of view and make adjustment to his own convictions. However, for a person of faith,

religion has doctrinal boundaries established by the Creator that must not be crossed lest one lose his salvation ([Romans 14:23](#)). Worldly politicians are not dealing with absolutes coming from on High, but with concepts, programs, and proposals of mere men that, in many cases, are highly speculative and based on questionable research, even though they fervently believe them to be good and needful.

Politicians poll the public to access the people's counsel. Here in America, at least, they are supposed to do that, as the people give political power. This is not so with a religious organization that looks to the Bible, and thus to God, for its authoritative teaching. A church is to be bound by truth, the truth of God, and not the whims or even the fervent desires of its members unless those desires are also in alignment with the truth of God.

Thus Ms. Townsend, feeling that she knows the desires of the Catholic membership, especially, it appears, its women members, believes the Catholic Church's hierarchy is completely out of step on such issues as abortion, homosexuality, and gay relationships, including homosexual marriage. She thus accuses the hierarchy of not listening to and thus not making the doctrinal adjustments necessary to accommodate the beliefs of that membership.

Clearly, Ms. Townsend is in harmony with most Americans who do not truly trust the Bible to be true. She is not looking at these disputed moral and ethical issues from the Creator's point of view. Yet, regardless of other faults one might find in the Catholic Church, it is not out of line doctrinally on these issues. The Bible—in no uncertain terms—condemns them as perversions.

Ms. Townsend further states:

Yet polls bear out that American Catholics do not want to be told by the Vatican how to think. Despite the rhetoric of [love](#) and truth, the Vatican shows disdain (if not disgust) toward gays. But 54 percent of American Catholics find gay relationships to be morally acceptable, according to a 2009 Gallup poll.

Appeal from the masses of the membership does not give the leader of a religious group that claims the Bible as its source for its teachings leeway to change from what God clearly shows. But how many churches have produced splits because someone in the congregation deviated from what God clearly states and forced the issue on the leadership? Multitudes of divisions have occurred over such matters. In fact, not submitting to the truths of God's Word is probably the most common reason division occurs in religious organizations.

The Catholic Church does not fully subscribe to biblical truths either. For example, it has published a scornful tract against Protestant religions showing conclusively from the biblical perspective that the [Sabbath](#) (Saturday) is the only day the Bible authorizes for the worship of God. However, Catholics do not keep it either! Why? Because the Catholic Church has given itself permission to establish Sunday based on its own authority, claiming God has given that permission to it! However, the Protestants say such permission is nowhere in the Bible—to which we agree—yet still they will not keep the Sabbath!

Man is, as God charges, a stubborn being whose heart is turned away from God. He will not willingly submit to God but insists on setting his own rules on the basis of his own experience, even in the face of humanity's sorry historical record. This produces such a mass of opinions that agreement with God is impossible unless God Himself personally intervenes in a person's life to set the record straight for him. God will not change His teachings because they are absolutes, and no amount of appeals for Him to do so will find Him bending before man's will. To do so would be a denial of His sovereignty, His character, and His [goodness](#).

David says in [Psalm 12:6](#), "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." [Proverbs 30:5](#) adds, "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him." In [1 Peter 1:24-25](#), the apostle says, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever." The opinions of men attempting to

treat church doctrine as negotiable, as in politics, are folly. It is in God's Word that man *must* put his trust for direction regarding spiritual, moral, and ethical concerns.

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[We Must Believe!](#)

by John O. Reid

In an environment in which we are continually lied to (in politics, popular media, marketing techniques, insurance adjustment, etc.), it is no wonder that our faith in anything is flagging. Nevertheless, we are asked to believe in a Being nobody has directly seen or heard, whose written word has been vilified and scorned. Without faith, we can't please God or receive the benefits from a relationship with Him. In the wake of the systematic destruction of sound doctrine by the leaders of our former affiliation, it has become imperative that we rebuild the foundation of our faith, rehearsing the proofs of God's existence and the proof of the promises in His Word, guarding our minds against factors that destroy faith. Hearing God's Word and boldly acting upon it, following the model of Abraham and Jesus Christ, will strengthen our faith.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Whatever Happened to Gnosticism? Part One: False Knowledge](#)

by David C. Grabbe

"Gnosticism" sounds like an old and very dry Greek philosophy, the subject of a somnolent college lecture. Not so, says David Grabbe. Gnosticism is very much in vogue today in books and movies—and in the belief systems of a great many people who profess to be Christian.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
