RETHINKING POLITICS IN A SCIENTIFIC AGE CONSTRUCTING A TRUE WORLD POLITICAL AUTHORITY LESSONS FROM AN UNLIKELY PLACE: LEBANON

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Abstract

The Statist framework that has dominated political structures in the West for the last four centuries, and which has progressively become more secular over the ages, is in need of reform. The two world wars of the twentieth century, and the European wars of modernity, in which these world wars were rooted, are, to some degree, a result of this modern Statist framework. In the light of the new global reality, this reform must be based on striving for some sort of true world political authority, wherein a proper balance is struck between the religious (sacred) and civil (secular) spheres. In spite of the chaos and madness that befell the modern state of Lebanon, this tiny county still provides valuable guidance when it comes to showing how the necessary reform should proceed.

Keywords: free-will, statist framework, world government, secularity, Lebanon, religion, human rights

1. Introduction

If the attempt in the last century to apply the categories of the natural sciences to the social science of Politics taught us anything, it taught us how futile this effort was. One revolution after another caught political scientists totally by surprise. The reasons for this failure are not hard to surmise: the drama of the battle between good and evil is as complex as the human beings who find themselves right smack in the middle of it are. Free will, as Schelling taught us in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), is more terrible and more wonderful than we can ever imagine. And, of course, unpredictable! What is predictable, however, precisely because of the unpredictability of free will, is that if globalization continues to develop, politics and political structures will have to be rethought and refashioned along global lines. That is to say, that unless organizations such as the United Nations —

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organizations that had this insight decades ago — are not reformed into units with true political authority worldwide that operate according to an internationally credible idea of global justice, then the future of the planet is dismal indeed. More specifically, it is my contention that the last four hundred years of a Statist framework in the West has been the condition for bringing progressively more and more violence to the world — the climax being when the European civil wars burned out of control into World Wars One and Two. I am not attributing the progressive increase of violence essentially to the Statist framework, but only claiming that this framework sets the stage for ever increasing violence. When political institutions have complete and radical authority over a given territory and a certain segment of a given population, as in a Statist framework, it tends to bring out the nastiest in the human animal. By contrast, the operative framework in the Middle Ages, wherein rulers were compelled to share authority with vassals both above (Pope and Emperor) *and* beneath them, then no such radical supremacy over a given territory or a given segment of the population (Christian population in the case of the Middle Ages in the West) was possible, making for a condition less conducive to violence. Of course it is impossible to go back, and that is the last thing I would argue for, but a reform of the Statist framework along the lines of a true world political authority that operates according to an internationally credible idea of global justice seems to be the only way forward [1].

This reform, however, to be effective, should resist the tidal wave of secularism and must be rooted in a philosophical anthropology that is not naïve when it comes to the human potential for great glory and unspeakable depravity. Again, I want to claim that the root cause of this violent and hideous decadence is a deep and mysterious disruption/schizophrenia in the human heart, not the kind of political framework we happen to live within, but it is also the case that some frameworks are better than others. To many, it may be surprising, if not shocking, that Lebanon, of all places, may offer some modest lessons when it comes to envisaging what a viable and true world political authority that operates according to a publicly viable idea of global justice ought to look like, but that, nonetheless, will be my claim — at least, that is, in terms of striking a balance in politics between the sacred and the secular — a balance that is crucial when attempting to fashion a viable and genuine world political authority.

2. A World Government?

The notion of world government is found in ancient, medieval, and modern times, but there are differences regarding how and why this idea was put forth. One common impetus, which has gained significant momentum in our own times, is the prevention of world war, a motive which we can read about at least as early as the fourteenth century in Dante's *Convivio*. Typical of most medieval philosophers who wrote about one world government, Dante advocated a single monarch who would have absolute authority over all other lesser kings or rulers, and although he directly mentions the elimination of war

and its causes as *one* of the desired effects of such rule, this is probably not his main motive. For that, we must look to the ancient world. And when we do, we find that when the idea of world government is discussed, as it is in ancient India, China, and the Greco Roman world, it is so not so much in terms of preventing war, but in terms of how such a unified political authority might appropriately reflect the unity we find at the anthropological and cosmic levels. That is to say, if the Cosmos is one, and all human beings are one, then there should also be one *political* world authority. It was natural, then, that in the medieval period, a similar cosmological motive was present in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic monotheistic appropriations and developments of the idea of one world rule.

In the modern period in the West, Hobbes, Rousseau, and especially Kant all devote considerable time and energy to the notion of one world government, but since this period marks the beginning of a turn away from ancient and medieval preoccupation with transcendence, the more practical motive of preventing war becomes prevalent. Moreover, the emphasis is no longer on monarchy in the modern period, but on some kind of world federalism brought about gradually through the construction of what we might call cosmopolitan democratic institutions.

At any rate, in our times, the main impetus for world government, as already mentioned, is the desire of preventing world war. And since war today could mean total destruction, this desire has become a vital necessity.

Now the United Nations, the World Federalist and World Passport movements, and the World Constitution and Parliament Association, are all examples of what this kind of 'federation of the world' might look like, while the many regional efforts such as the European Union, The African Union, the Union of South American Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Central American Integration System, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Community, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Union State, the Arab League, the Caribbean Community, the Turkic Council, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, to mention some of the more recent and better known, all provide models for what could ultimately develop into international organizations and unions, as their principles are usually conceived along the lines of designing cosmopolitan democratic institutions that could contribute as models to the construction of some kind of world federalism and one world political authority. Moreover, the global support for the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court are further indications of how universal the desire for a global political authority and justice really is — what Lord Tennyson referred to as the common sense of most.

3. Arguments against World Government

In spite of what appears at times to be widespread, international, intercultural support, there are many severe critics of the universal trend towards economic, legal, and political unity, and even more resistance to forging some kind of military or cultural unity. Critics argue that such universalizing tendencies prepare the way for unprecedented totalitarianism, which could be even more brutal and more dehumanizing than any war could ever be. Many also point out that the tendency to universalize could undermine what is perhaps most precious and beautiful in the world, namely, cultural diversity and genuine freedom. What could be more deadening, one argument goes, than a homogenized, artless, mechanistic, completely controlled and controlling, world order wherein the only value is non-conflict so that the global markets might function effectively enough to give everyone just what they need in order to live economically productive lives? Variations of such criticism come from both the left and the right alike and have been the theme of many award winning films and novels for over half a century now. I am sympathetic to such arguments, but more so in terms of warnings than as prohibitions, since I believe the only way forward for humanity at this stage of human history is to forge some kind of world political authority that operates according to some sort of universally accepted notion of global justice. This is a tall order indeed, but as we enter the second year of the second decade of this twenty-first century, we do find unprecedented achievements in the last century upon which we might build — the first of which is the widespread acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To be sure, there are things to constructively criticize in the Declaration, not to mention the plethora of problems associated with the very organization itself that generated it, but it would be a mistake in my judgment to throw the baby out with the bathwater and irresponsibly declare that these real achievements were failures from the beginning and ought to be done away with. What is needed is a thorough structural reform of the United Nations so that the highpoints in its history, things like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which go a long way in helping us to describe what global justice could look like, might be taken more seriously. With this, let us now look more closely at some of the difficulties associated with the very idea of a *Universal* Declaration of *Human Rights* — problems that are intimately related to the complex challenge of forming a true world political authority, a world state.

4. Human rights and its discontents

I shall not devote too much time to the well-known criticisms of the Universal Declaration revolving around the claim that it is not so much a *universal* document as a *Western* document, except to say, in defence of its universality, that (1) its most important architects were not Westerners and that (2) many non-Western nations immediately embraced it. These facts speak volumes. Regarding its architects, Charles Malik was a Lebanese citizen who

belonged to an Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition and who also had a deep knowledge of Islam, and P.C. Chang was a Chinese national, whose lectures on the cohesion and reciprocal influences between Chinese and Arabic cultures, which he delivered in Turkey in the early 1940's, revealed his deep knowledge and appreciation of the world's great religious, cultural traditions. Moreover, if the document was essentially a Western document, one is left trying to explain why so many non-Western nations immediately embraced it. Now it cannot be denied that, in some respects, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was influenced by some major 'right' documents that preceded it, documents such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and even the United States of America's Bill of Rights, but I have long argued that the influence of these earlier documents on the Universal Declaration is not essential. Whereas one can see the nationalistic, Western, and even secular tendencies in, say, the French Declaration or the Bill of Rights, it is difficult to find such tendencies in the Universal Document. What we find, rather, is the influence of *Rerum Novarum* and similar documents, interpreted and developed by philosophers such as Jacque Maritain, and statesmen such as Charles Malik and P.C. Chang, who paved the way for something truly universal [2].

At any rate, what is even more problematic than the question of Western origins, is the way in which all kinds of contradictory activities are justified in the name of human rights — activities that are contrary to those very core values which the Universal Declaration and the United Nations in its original charter tried to promote and protect. To give one example — perhaps the grossest and most absurd — is the argument made for the legal propriety of the direct destruction of human life (male and female) 'in the womb' based on the *rights* of women. If such abuses in the name of human rights can be addressed and corrected, then there is a possibility of constructing a true world political authority that will operate according to a universally accepted idea of global justice. In addition to restoring the core values presupposed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is urgent need of a structural and moral reform of the United Nations itself. The suggestion that the UN is beyond reform and that a completely new model ought to be introduced if we are to achieve something as lofty as a true political world authority is not realistic. After all, the United Nations organization is presently the only inter-governmental assembly that enjoys universal membership and is still by far the most important formal organization, which on a global scale, coordinates activities between sovereign states. Moreover, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the International Telecommunications Union, the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization are all affiliated with the United Nations through its Economic and Social Council; these, too, need to be reformed, not abandoned.

5. The nature of the reform

I have mentioned above that any reform should resist the tidal wave of secularism and be grounded in a philosophical anthropology that is realistic when it comes to the human potential for great glory and unspeakable depravity. By secularism, I mean both the retreat of religious belief exclusively into the private sphere and the actual decline or rejection of religious faith. And I make a distinction between secularism and secularity — wherein the latter does not entail the characteristics of privatization, decline, or rejection of religious belief — but simply refers to a realm distinct from the properly religious or sacred realm. One could argue, in fact, that without a proper secularity, it is impossible to have a properly sacred realm — just as without the natural there can be no supernatural [3].

But the challenge is to keep these realms distinct without separating them, held just in the right balance. Philosophical attempts to construct global ethics based entirely in natural reason without having recourse to values in the world's great religious cultures, is bound to fail because most people, whether they are religious or not, inherit their values from these religious cultures. And this says nothing of the claim that human beings, by nature, are not only rational and social, but religious. This claim continues to gain ground in sociological, anthropological and psychological circles, with even natural scientists occasionally lending support. There seems to be enough in common among human beings to outline the parameters of a universal global ethic that does not deny diversity, but celebrates it in such a way as to strengthen and promote universality. If this can be realized, then a true world political authority, free from totalitarian tendencies, becomes a real possibility.

6. Lessons from Lebanon

As already mentioned, to many, it may be surprising, if not shocking, that Lebanon, of all places, may offer some modest lessons when it comes to envisaging what a viable and true world political authority that operates according to a publicly viable idea of global justice ought to look like, but this, as I have said, is my claim. What I am getting at here has to do with what I have just been discussing regarding the necessity of distinguishing but not separating the realms of reason, nature, and the secular, from the realms of faith, supernature, and the sacred. Rather than speak in the abstract, I shall make reference to Lebanon's modern history to illustrate my point.

Now if we take a brief look at Lebanon in the three decades after its establishment as a modern state, we find a society that was excelling in primary, secondary, and higher education. The American University of Beirut and the Jesuit University attracted some of the world's most important intellectuals in a variety of disciplines, especially Philosophy and Medicine. Lebanon had become the financial, touristic, and cultural centre of the region, and one of the financial, touristic and cultural centres of the world; but in addition to all this, Lebanon

was also a model of profound religious co-existence. Jews, Catholics, Orthodox and Protestant Christians, Druze, and Sunni and Shiite Muslims, all lived together in relative harmony wherein what could be called a public morality, rooted in common religious values, not only held things together, but enabled Lebanon to flourish in remarkable ways. This modern golden age was not simply an accident or a twist of fate, but was the fruit of what Lebanon has been historically over the long ages. The late, great John Paul II was so impressed by Lebanon's ancient and modern achievements and so disheartened by its failures, that he devoted a high level of magisterial teaching to the situation in Lebanon — no less than an 'Apostolic Exhortation' — titled *A New Hope For Lebanon*, unprecedented I believe in magisterial teaching — in which he taught that Lebanon was not just a country, but a mission, a message, a model of charity for the whole world. This may be surprising considering how dark and depressing the situation became after 1975, when the war officially began, but the great miracle of Lebanon was that it somehow survived, and managed not to digress into a brutal dictatorship as did so many of the other modern states in the region. One reason why the so-called Arab Spring is not happening today in Lebanon is that Lebanon never fell into totalitarian dictatorship. I suggest that the very religious confessional system which is so fashionably attacked today as the root cause of its 'civil' war, and is thought to be at the heart of its present day inability to make substantial progress, was/is, on the contrary, part of the reason why Lebanon survived and still survives, and even threatens, in between her own civil strife and the brutal and unjustified wars against her, to flourish. Lebanon still maintains in her confessional system of representation a valuable model from which other countries might learn good lessons regarding the proper relation between Religion and the Public Sphere, when that public sphere is comprised of people from different religious traditions. Lest I be accused of idealizing Lebanon and its unique complexion of religious diversity upon which the modern state was founded, or of exaggerating the external conspiratorial intrigue that caused her near total downfall in the modern period, I must say that her enemies were not only from without, but from within, and that the religious confessional nature which prevented her from falling into the hands of a dictator after World Wars One and Two, was indeed the same system that fuelled the fire once it had been lit and, again, however, and again, paradoxically, the same system that enabled others to pull her out of the flames, at the official end of the war in 1990, once the fire seemed to be burning out of control.

The present stability in Lebanon, albeit fragile, is also due in large part, I maintain, to that delicate balance of power rooted in her various religious confessional identities. In 2010, in fact, Christian and Muslim youth, some of whom were my students, together with high ranking officials, commemorated the beginning of the horrendous 1975-1990 war in Lebanon with a drive named 'Peace Between Us. . .Or Goodbye Lebanon'. This is quite remarkable when we consider the horrific events that occurred on that very same day, April 13th, thirty-five years ago. And more striking than this, perhaps, was the government's 2010 decision to make the March 25th Christian feast day of the

announcement of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary (also narrated in the Qur'an) a joint Christian/Muslim religious feast day; if I am not mistaken, this has never happened anywhere before, something mentioned by attending dignitaries. To be sure, these are high points, but they do represent, I believe, something real and valuable underneath. To better illustrate what this 'something' is, a bit of history is in order.

7. History of Lebanon

Under the well known Sykes-Pico agreement, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and later Italy (in a supplemental agreement) were to be given the Turkish provinces of the former empire, while France and Britain were to get the Arab parts; Syria and Lebanon went to France. The language used to describe these new situations is fascinating: the term 'sacred' in fact was used quite a lot as the League of Nations spoke about imparting to France and Britain 'a sacred trust of civilization'. For most, no doubt, this was simply disguised imperialism, but for others, and especially for some Maronite Christians of Lebanon, and perhaps a few French Christian visionaries, who still believed in divine providence and in the special spiritual bonds between France and Lebanon, this was indeed a 'sacred' opportunity. The result, as early as 1920, was the announcement of a Greater Lebanon, which evolved out of what was formally Mount Lebanon during Ottoman times; by 1926, its first constitution was adopted and in 1943 it was formally recognized as the modern state of Lebanon. A key actor in this drama was Maronite Patriarch and Statesman, Elias Hoyek, who was delegated by various religious communities throughout Lebanon to represent it at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. From the very beginning, and drawing upon a solid tradition of some three hundred years of co-existence in Lebanon, Patriarch Hoyek proclaimed that the new Lebanon was not to be a Christian state, but a pluralistic country for all of Lebanon's inhabitants. The astounding educational, cultural, and economic prosperity of three decades after independence in 1943 was proof that the foundations of the new state were organic and solid enough, though in the middle of this new golden age, a fissure did appear that had been there from the beginning and warned of possible trouble in the future.

In 1958 tensions flared up that had been there from the beginning in 1920 when the extension to Greater Lebanon from Mount Lebanon had begun. These tensions, though primarily between Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims, were not simply religious, but national; in some cases in fact, they cut across confessional lines. This reveals much about that delicate and complex relationship between the sacred and the secular and about how difficult it is to strike the right balance, in addition to the way these categories are intrinsically and dynamically connected to questions of personal and communal *identity*. For even some of the Maronite (let alone non-Maronite) Christian communities of Syria, who were forced to go along with French/Maronite plans for a Greater Lebanon, clung to a pan-Arab national identity (embodied for them in Syria)

while resisting the annexation. In fact, the leading figures of the Arab renaissance (awakening) were Christians (some Maronites), many of them with nationalistic ties to a form of Arab nationalism that conflicted with the Lebanese/Phoenician nationalism cultivated by what appeared to have tendencies towards religious and ethnic exclusivism or limited expansionism, and having something in common with the Zionism that was steadily gaining ground in the region. At any rate, the pan-Arabism, which many Christians helped create and sustain, was not tied up so much with personal identity, as with the communal. For Muslims, it was the *umma*, the Arab people or nation at large, certainly rooted in Islam, but the same notion was present among Christians, and also tied to their own Christian interpretation of this concept, which some of them claimed to be rooted in Christian notions of the Church, elaborated in ecclesiology.

By 1958, after Zionism's triumph, all these divergent and complex identities, inextricably tied up with various nationalisms, sacred and secular, finally erupted into the public sphere in all out civil war; and Greater Lebanon seemed to be in peril. But what evidently saved Lebanon, other than Eisenhower's marines, was that very same thing that partly contributed to plunging it into the crisis in the first place: a delicate balance of power rooted in various religious and national identities, which cut across confessional, political, and ethnic lines, creating a complex tension between the sacred and the secular — a tension that seems always to settle into the right balance when exposed to the lie of violence. The Maronite General of the Lebanese Army, Fuad Chehab, commander of a force that included Maronites, Orthodox, Sunni, Druze, and Shiites refused to take sides and insisted on fidelity to the original pluralistic principles. The fact that he was then elected president was an indication of how deeply these principles survived in the minds and hearts of Lebanon's citizens [4].

8. Lebanon at war: 1975-1990

For almost two decades from 1958-1975 these foundations of co-existence held firm, until the onslaught of the ever growing Palestinian tragedy, which Lebanon had been destined to absorb from the very beginning in 1948, began to tear it apart at the seams. The three nationalisms that had collided earlier in 1958, pan-Arabism, Zionism [5], and Lebanese/Phoenician-ism, all of which had their own unique secular components, now collided again as Lebanon became the scene *par excellence* for not only the region's proxy wars, but for the world's as well. And when, after nine years of unimaginable chaos and brutal insanity, things seemed to be moving towards some solution with the expulsion of the PLO, the complexity was compounded due to the Iranian revolution, the perplexity of which emerged in Lebanon in totally unforeseen ways. One of the most seasoned analysts of the region did not exaggerate when he wrote that what struck Lebanon was "perhaps the most convoluted to have stricken any part of the world ever" [6].

And so what held things together? Why was it that the main pillars of its constitution did not completely crumble? Of course there is not just one reason, but if I had to identify a major one, I would say it had something to do with the deep religious faith of the Lebanese themselves. By 'deep religious faith' I do not mean reactionary religious ideologies that set up a dualism between the human and the divine, between the sacred and the secular. Such ideologies, in both their Christian and Islamic versions, wreaked great havoc in Lebanon by rejecting everything but their own myopic vision of the sacred and by labelling anything or anyone opposed to this vision as evil. Contrary to this, there are numerous examples of ordinary Christians and Muslims, moved not by an ideology, but by a living faith in the inherent goodness of creation and human life, and who acted to comfort, save, and protect one another from violence and indiscriminate killing. For these, there was no dichotomy between the sacred and secular realms because of the deep religious insight and conviction that the world was created by the one true God, and therefore had to be good and valuable *in itself* — something their own experience of growing up and living in Lebanon (with its characteristic 'love of life' philosophy) had confirmed. This, in fact, was something that virtually all Lebanese accepted at some level, and something that was (is) confirmed in the public sphere through religious symbols, public discourse, colloquial expressions and proverbs, and in even in public schools, let alone in the private ones.

This, and similar religious assumptions about the inherent value of life itself as a gift and about the special vocation of Lebanon as a model for peaceful co-existence could be detected in the rhetoric of the different political parties, and even in those parties whose labels would suggest a visceral anti-religious spirit. I am speaking here of the Lebanese Communist Party, which, since its founding in 1924, has cut across confessional lines, with Christians, Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze all taking leading roles during the last eighty-five years. It is quite remarkable that far from succumbing to some version of irreligious dialectic materialism, this party's greatest intellectual achievements are to be found in the work of two Shiite thinkers, Hussain Muruwwa and Mahdi ʿĀmil, both of whom were assassinated a few months apart from each other at the height of the war [7].

At any rate, the main point in all of this is that even Marxism in the hands of Lebanese intellectuals takes on a decidedly religious, mystical, and public flavour, which is indicative of a tendency in Lebanon never to completely separate the secular from the sacred, nor to ever confine the religious or divine dimension to the private realm. Western secularism, which is generally defined as a retreat of religious practices and expression from the public into the private sphere, along with an actual decline in religious belief and practice, is certainly not the kind of secularism we find in Lebanon. In fact, perhaps *secular-ism* is not the right word to use in the case of Lebanon. *Secularity* seems to describe the situation more accurately, that is to say, recognition of ways in which politics and public life are legitimately distinct from, but not totally separate from, religion. To be sure, this tendency can lead to the reduction of one to the other

wherein religion is reduced to politics or vice versa, both extremes of which occurred and still occurs in Lebanon, but what one will rarely find is a complete rejection of, or total disdain for, religion or the realm of the sacred [8].

9. Conclusion

If the events which I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the March 25th joint Christian/Muslim official national holiday, the movement 'Peace Between Us or else Goodbye Lebanon', are indications of what's in store for Lebanon's future, then there is hope for the future, unless, of course, in the name of a perverted notion of the sacred, another unjustified and brutal war destroys the delicate confessional balance of what could be called its con-sociational (confessional) democracy — a system of government from which the world still has a lot to learn. How these lessons can be applied to the task of constructing a true world political authority is work yet to be done. One impetus in writing this paper has been to encourage younger scholars to begin this task.

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