

Non-POM and Religion

So far as I know all human cultures have religion. Those religions vary from culture to culture, of course. One's religion is often the first thing people notice when distinguishing a member of one culture from a member of another culture. Religion serves as a marker for "us" and "them." As such, religion is often "flourished" by those who want to reject or attack members of another group. It is easy and tempting to say that their beliefs show that they are evil and a threat to us and must be destroyed. Note that this is a use that people make of religion, not what the religion, itself, would necessarily have them do.

Religion also keeps groups together. An excellent example of this under very trying circumstances is the Jewish faith. Despite social factors that would have destroyed the group identity of most cultures, the Jewish religion has maintained itself and its cultural identity over thousands of years with no corresponding national or societal identity until recently. There are Jewish persons of all sorts of societies and cultures.

My point here is that religion has many consequences, some good and some not so good. Please note that I am talking about religion, not faith, not doctrine, not spiritual truth, not God. I am talking about what people do with faith, doctrine, and the social organizations that develop around these beliefs. It is about those not-so-good uses that some people have made of religion that I want to address here.

We have all heard about the "Elmer Gantry" type of man who preys upon the religious to get their money. We have also heard of those who exalt religion as a means of raising their own status as the priests of ancient Egypt did. We have heard of those who use their high place in a church to live a life of luxury and ease. There is even the Biblical case of the money changers in the Temple. And we know of those who use religion as a political device to control others.

These cases all involve a large element of money. Acquisition of money is the objective or motive in some cases. In others, money is used as a tool to bring about a desired, non-religious end. But in all these cases, religion is being abused, subverted, debased, and exploited.

Physical object money (POM) lends itself to such unworthy ends and means. In fact, it provides the temptations that motivate much of it. But what about a non-POM? Would that kind of money have any affect on religion?

A money which has no physical object representation, which comes into existence when earned and ceases to exist when spent, would have a considerable affect on the unsavory aspects of how people have used religion in POM societies. For one thing, one would never have to suspect an ulterior money motive of the minister. One *cannot* give one's non-POM to a church or anyone else. It ceases to exist when spent and can buy only luxuries. Therefore, the minister would have no incentive to ask for your money. The minister could ask for luxury goods and services, of course, but that rather makes his greed transparent. One doesn't ask for a fancy sports car for the minister to show the glory of God.

Also, unless they are doing things which actually benefit others, the highest officers in a church would be gaining no money regardless of how exalted they claimed to be.

If a politician attempted to use a religion to justify conquest it would do him no good because conquest always costs far more than peace and generates far fewer benefits. Therefore, the armed forces would not obey orders to march in conquest since it would end their being paid.

Many religions use tithing, the giving of a certain percentage of one's money income to the Church. Obviously, the gift of money would no longer be possible. But that does not mean that one would be unable to give to one's church. The most precious thing one can give is one's self. I think that this giving of one's self would greatly increase and would likewise greatly benefit the churches.

However, if one did want to give material things to a church, one could give any of one's property whether acquired by purchase, as in the case of luxuries, or by gift as with capital goods. But the church, itself, cannot own any property. Only individuals can own property. This would be a significant change from the current situation.

Some individual would own the church building and grounds (including any cemeteries). When one gave to the congregation by helping to build or maintain the building, one would be giving that labor and materials to the one who owned the church building. If benefit were derived from that building, all the contributors would be paid accordingly. In other words, people would be rewarded for their gifts. This might give rise to interesting theological questions of whether one is getting credit in heaven for works which are rewarded on Earth. If one wanted to give secretly one would need to be careful to not let the Payers know of one's good works.

A church might have available for its use a comfortable building and equipment which was constructed and maintained by those of some other faith. On the other hand, if some church building were not used to benefit

anyone other than the owner, there would be no pay for those who labored to build or maintain the building. Those who had provided the materials would not be paid. Thus, those churches which clearly provide benefits to the community will prosper. Those which do harm (preach hatred and such for example) would tend to wither and die.

So the wealth and magnificence of a church building would reflect the good being done by the congregation and its ministers.

Those who are called to the ministry by their faith today must find some means of support, some congregation or other source of money. Congregations would not even be able to pay their ministers. In a non-POM society, those who are called to the ministry need have no concerns about survival. They will be provided with their body's requirements while they attend to the requirements of the souls of themselves and of others. No inspired person will be prevented from preaching by the need to support a family.

I cannot say whether non-POM will result in a greater attention to religion and its place in our lives. I cannot say whether non-POM will bring anyone to Christ, for example. But I can say that non-POM will reduce the incidence of sin (as defined by every religion I know). If this is important, if less sin contributes to religion, then non-POM will be an important contributor to religious life.