

Productivity and Religious Liberty

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Written for Dr. Billy Graham's Visit to the
People's Republic of China, 1988

The Key to Productivity

People produce for one of two reasons: either they *choose* to do so or they are *forced* into productivity. Those who choose to produce are driven by an inner sense of purpose and, ultimately, take great pride in the productions of their own labor. Their desire to produce and their pride of accomplishment is shown in the higher quality of their work. Forced production, too often, is accompanied by apathy and sloppiness; quality suffers because the hearts of the people are not in their work.

A government concerned with increasing productivity in its people can set policies designed to encourage production. At the heart of such policies, however, must be an incentive for people to view their work as inner-directed rather than forced upon them. Government policies should therefore be constructed to allow individuals to act upon their own sense of purpose.

Individual Worth and Purpose

Purpose in life necessarily begins with a sense of individual worth. Often governments have tried to supply that worth themselves; they have sought to define a person's worth through the contribution a person makes to the State. But in doing so, they have made the individual simply one small cog in a giant machine, thereby further lowering his sense of worth.

Individual worth cannot be provided by the State. It is generated from within, primarily through religious beliefs. In this case, religion supplies what the government cannot: a personal relationship to the creator and sustainer of all things. Religion offers an explanation for life and furnishes a divine purpose. Basic questions are answered, questions such as "Who made me?" "Why was I made?" and "What is my duty?"

The Christian responses to these questions lead not only to a sense of purpose, but also to a productive life. Christians are told to do their work with all their hearts, as if everything were being done expressly for God, and not merely for other men. The testimony of history is that men who are governed by God are inner-directed and become hardworking, conscientious citizens of the country in which they reside.

Too often, though, governments view strong religious beliefs with jealousy, as though allegiance to God automatically means no allegiance to one's own government. They neglect to take into account, at least with Christians, the many commandments in the Bible that call on believers to obey their government, pray for all those who are in authority, and to live peaceable, productive lives that harm no one.

Religious Liberty

People, then, who have a sense of purpose—provided by their religious beliefs—should be the most productive members of a society. A government that severely restricts the free exercise of these beliefs, therefore, will only hurt itself. Restrictions on free exercise will have at least three bad consequences:

1. They will discourage those who do not have that sense of inner purpose from exploring the realm of religious beliefs; such people will continue to need governmental controls to force them to be productive and usually will be less productive than those with a God-directed purpose;
2. They will discourage religious believers who will be hindered in the practice of their faith; this also could cause a loss of productivity;

3. They will run the risk of alienating from the government the religious portion of the people; despite the entreaties of the Bible to obey and pray for those in authority, restrictions will increase the temptation to become less loyal toward that government.

The reverse of all these is also true. Free exercise of religion will increase the loyalty of believers because they will appreciate the efforts made on their behalf. The government will find more favor with these people and they will work more energetically in its behalf. In addition, the nonreligious will be encouraged to investigate religious beliefs; if more people are added to the community of believers, the government will have increased its number of productive workers.

Historical Examples

Since my own perspective is that of Western Civilization, I will draw upon that heritage to illustrate the truths already presented. Regardless what era one examines, it is demonstrated again and again that control over individuals' religious beliefs and practices only creates greater problems for the one imposing the controls. I offer two major European examples.

Western Civilization's Middle Ages, commonly the time between 500-1500 A.D., was dominated by religious control. Strangely, though, the control was not by a *government* seeking to deny religious expression, but by the hierarchy of an established *church* that would not allow any dissension. All of Europe was under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church and everyone had to believe that church's version of the truth--there was little room for real discussion or the development of different interpretations of the Bible.

People were not well educated and, generally, a higher level of education was not actively encouraged. It was much easier to control the people if they had to rely on whatever the church claimed was truth. The Bible was a closed book and all the people could know was what their priests told them.

Gradually, the emerging European nations that had to live under this system grew restless. They resented their lack of religious selfgovernment and the abuses of power that the Church was exhibiting. Great alienation set in toward the latter stages of this era. The Church maintained external control, but it was losing the loyalty of the people in the process.

The problem, though disguised for a number of centuries, finally came to a head in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. This reformation began in Germany through the writings of Martin Luther and spread throughout Europe. The Church's refusal even to consider the reasons for the need of reformation led to more than a century of war and bloodshed as men fought for their desire to be God-directed rather than being forced to do whatever the authority wanted. At issue was the question of real truth and whether a man should be free to come to his own conclusions about the truth. As the Middle Ages reveals, the attempt to deny this desire resulted in the breakup and deterioration of a once-powerful church. The misery caused by an unnecessary power struggle decreased the church's effectiveness. A nation, in a similar struggle for the minds of men, would suffer through a very unproductive time.

The Protestant Reformation came to England and was established in the middle of the sixteenth century. But then the same problem again was revealed. The Queen of England, Elizabeth I, placed herself at the head of the English Church. She declared that there could be only one type of church in England—the Anglican Church—and that she was in charge of it. Everyone in her realm had to subscribe to the beliefs and practices of her church. No one was free to practice otherwise and any attempt to set up a separate church was to be considered an act of treason. Although done in the name of Christianity, this was just as restricting to the individual as any secular government's attempt to control the lives of its citizens. Not surprisingly, Elizabeth's official church did not please everyone.

One group in England that was most opposed to these restrictions became known as the Separatists. These Separatists were not bad citizens. In fact, they were quite hardworking, conscientious people, as is usually the case when individuals have that inner purpose from God. But they were persecuted for the belief that they should be able to meet together in their own churches. The persecution became so bad that, no matter how loyal they felt toward their country, they believed they had to leave.

In the early seventeenth century, these Separatists left England and took up residence in Holland. They were welcomed by the

Dutch, who were not threatened by their beliefs. In return for this welcome, the grateful Separatists became model citizens. The Dutch themselves were very impressed with their honesty, integrity, and diligent labor. England had lost some of her most productive citizens through a harsh restrictive policy.

The American Experience

These same Separatists, later known as the Pilgrims, brought their belief in religious liberty to America. Eventually, the concept that the government should not dictate the religious beliefs of individuals became the standard in the country. At the Constitutional Convention, in 1787, the framers of the United States Constitution did not give the new government any power at all over the minds and hearts of individuals. It was recognized that a national government should not intrude on private beliefs because that would ultimately alienate the people from their government. In the First Amendment to that same Constitution, it was specifically prescribed that the national government would not set up any official religion, nor would it prohibit the free exercise of religion.

Some state governments that maintained an established religion continually confronted alienation problems with their citizens who disagreed with the official church. The problems were solved, though, without bloodshed, as state legislatures slowly tore down all the walls barring total religious liberty. Finally, by 1833, all established religions ceased in America.

This approach, coupled as it was with unprecedented political liberty, was the foundation of an American era of unparalleled productivity and economic development. At that time, most Americans understood that religious beliefs were the source of their sense of purpose and they freely acknowledged religious liberty as the cornerstone of their productivity.

It is instructive to add a footnote to the American experience. The belief in a God-directed purpose in life, with hard work and productivity as its result, began to diminish in America in the late nineteenth century, until by the middle of the twentieth century, a much greater proportion of Americans were beginning to believe that they could look to the State for their sense of purpose and for the fulfillment of their needs. This rejection of religion as the primary inspiration for their outlook on life has created, among a distinct segment of the population, that same apathy and sloppiness in the quality of work that I mentioned as a fruit of forced productivity in this essay's opening paragraph. No longer guided by a sense of higher purpose, and viewing their jobs as simply work to be done for other men, and not for God, American productivity has been damaged. The damage is potentially as bad as could have been achieved by any restrictive government policy.

This tendency away from an inner purpose directed by God has led to another unpleasant development. In some instances, particularly in the desire of Christians to educate their own children in the Christian faith, government policies have prohibited the free exercise of religion. Such policies have run the risk previously mentioned of alienating Christians from their own government. New systems of government control, unless held in check, may result in the loss of that sense of individual worth and purpose essential to a productive people. America is in danger of forgetting its own lessons.

Conclusion

National goals and government policies must work together. If the goal of a nation is to become more productive economically, it must pursue policies that will increase individuals' desires to produce. The proper path to follow, contrary to a government's natural inclination, is to allow its people greater liberty. This must begin in the domain of religious beliefs because they are foundational to an individual's concept of self worth and his sense of purpose in life.

Restriction of religious liberty will bring only grief to a nation in the form of resentment, alienation, and loss of productivity. Permission for free exercise of one's religious beliefs, on the other hand, will spawn gratitude, loyalty, and increased productivity. A wise government will restrain its tendency toward control, give its blessing to religious liberty, and enjoy the benefits of its actions.