

MUSLIM DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS HAVE SOME IGNORANT IDAHO DETRACTORS

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Idaho Congressman Bill Sali is making a fool of himself once again. First, it was his bill to outlaw the law of gravity as his way to show that minimum wage laws violate the law of supply and demand. Now, he is claiming that the election of Keith Ellison, a Muslim representative from Minnesota, and a Hindu prayer in the Senate are contrary to the Christian principles on which our country was founded.

Sali must have missed the civics lesson in which the concept of representative democracy was traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, and not the New Testament which advises Christians to suffer the oppression of bad government. Using passages such as Titus 3:1—"be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates"--American Loyalists claimed solid support from Scripture in refusing to engage in a political revolution which they thought would end in anarchy.

Sali perhaps is not aware of the fact that the Greek and Roman texts that contain republican political philosophy were preserved in the great libraries and universities in medieval Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus. Until Renaissance Italians retrieved the original Greek texts from Constantinople in the 1450s, they arrived in 12th Century Europe via Islamic Spain as translations from Greek to Syriac to Arabic and then to Latin.

Sali also does not appear to know about the Treaty of Tripoli, whose 11th Article begins: "As the United States is in no way founded on the Christian religion. . . ." This treaty was sent to the Senate by President George Washington, where it was ratified with no recorded debate, and then signed by incoming President John Adams.

In a debate on religious freedom in Virginia, a delegate moved to insert "Jesus Christ" as "the holy author of our religion." Thomas Jefferson reported that the motion lost by a "great majority, in proof that they mean to [include] . . . the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, and infidel of every denomination." Did the good Virginians actually imply that the world religions have the same God?

With regard to prayer in Congress, James Madison objected to state-supported chaplains in Congress and to the exemption of churches from taxation. Jefferson thought that prayer in the schools should be strictly voluntary and there should be a separate room for that purpose. Our founding thinkers were religious liberals par excellence.

Bryan Fischer, head of Idaho Values Alliance, has agreed with Sali on both Keith Ellison's election and the Hindu prayer, and added that Islamic nations have "no

freedom of religion, no freedom of speech, . . . no fundamental rights for women, and no freedom for ordinary citizens to choose their leaders."

Perhaps Fischer has not been following the news of the July 22 election in Turkey, where a mildly Islamist Justice and Development Party (AK) won 47 percent of the vote in an election that drew 85 percent of eligible voters. The AK vote was an increase of 13 percent over the 2002 election.

The number of Turkish women in the 550-seat Parliament doubled to 50, not too far from the 74 women who currently serve in our 535-member Congress. Women have been elected as prime ministers or presidents of Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, all Muslim countries. Bangladesh has had two female prime ministers.

Harvard-educated Benazir Bhutto, twice prime minister of Pakistan and now living in exile in Dubai, was the first Asian woman to be elected president of the prestigious Oxford Union. In 1988, at the age of 35, she led her Pakistan Peoples Party to victory and became the female prime minister of any Muslim country. Even though she is still under the pall of corruption charges, she is currently the most popular politician in Pakistan. The U. S. government is now attempting to broker a deal between General Musharraf, who would remain president, and Bhutto, who would be allowed to return for the Fall, 2007 elections.

Returning now to Turkey, AK Prime Minister Tayyip Erodgan has led the most successful Turkish government in 50 years. During his five years in office, the economy has grown 7.3 percent and there has been lower inflation and record foreign investment. The Turkish lira has gained 19 cents on the dollar over the past year, compared to the Euro's rise of 6 cents. Erodgan has reduced corruption and expanded human rights, although the minority Kurds still complain about injustices.

The real threat to democracy in most Muslim countries is not radical Islamists; rather, it is the military, which has ruled occasionally Pakistan and Indonesia, and has intervened frequently in Turkey. In 1999 Erdogan was arrested by military police and served a four-month prison term for reading a Muslim poem in public. Over the years Turkish generals have said that their interference was necessary to preserve the secular ideals of Kemal Araturk, who founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923, following Greco-Roman ideas not religious ones.

Araturk's party, the Republican People's Party has prohibited Turkish women from wearing Muslim head scarves in public and refused to participate in a recent parliamentary vote on Erdogan's candidate for president. The candidate's wife insisted on wearing the scarf and the Republicans feared that Erdogan would move the country in the direction of theocratic Iran.

In 1992 an Islamic party won national elections in Algeria. Military intervention plunged the country into a civil war that led to 150,000 deaths. Saddam Hussein, a secularist and socialist condemned as an infidel by Osama bin Laden, used his military and police to suppress the majority Shiias, and the now we are experiencing the

disastrous results of not allowing religious factions to experience the moderation that full political participation affords them.

In 1953, acting to protect oil interests in the Middle East, American and British intelligence agents engineered the overthrow of duly elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. The U.S. supported Mohammad Reza Shah who used SAVAK, his ruthless secret police, to suppress political and religious dissent, making way for the anti-American Islamic Revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

For almost three decades, the U. S. supported the military government of General Suharto in Indonesia. In 1975, using information gathered by the CIA, Suharto's forces killed upwards of one million Indonesians suspected of being Communists. Today, Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world with 200,000 people, is ruled by a democratic government based on Greco-Roman principles, not Islamic ones. As early as 1974, the Suharto government replaced Islamic marriage customs with a secular marriage act protecting basic women's rights. The current government has established a National Commission on Violence Against Women and the set up a Ministry for the Empowerment of Women.

In May of 2003, three Saudis were given ten-year sentences for starting an Al Qaeda cell in Morocco and planning to blow up ships in the Straits of Gibraltar. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has also proscribed the teaching of the fundamentalist Wahabi theology from Saudi Arabia. A good sign that Moroccans reject the jihadist cause is found in a recent University of Maryland poll. To the general question of whether it is ever justified to kill civilians, 79 percent of Moroccans answered "never." What is interesting, and not a little shocking, is that in the same poll only 46 percent of Americans said "never" to the killing of civilians.

As both the head of government and religion, Mohammed VI has issued a decree that Moroccan men must limit themselves to two wives, down from the traditional limit of four. (Actually only two percent of Moroccan men have more than one wife.) He has also ruled that women have a right to divorce, a right to sign the marriage contract, and the right to approve of a second wife. The king has also supported the abolition of the death penalty, which would be a first for any Muslim country. It has been rated as the best Muslim democracy by *The Economist* magazine.

In 1492, when the King and Queen of Spain declared that all Jews would have to convert, face death, or leave the country, Morocco embraced thousands of Jewish refugees. For 500 years the Jews of Morocco prospered until most of them chose to immigrate to Israel. Today 30 percent of the Israeli army is staffed by Berber Jews from Morocco and Algeria.

One must remember that when King Faisal was brought to Baghdad in 1921, he enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. A prominent Jew was appointed Iraq's finance minister, and Baghdad's Jews and Christians were invited to a reception at Faisal's coronation. (Remember Tariq Aziz, Saddam Hussein's

Christian foreign minister?) Faisal kissed a Torah that was presented to him and declared that in his country "there is no distinction between Muslim, Christian, and Jew."

The crucial turning point in Jewish-Muslim relations was the Suez Crisis in 1956, when it was discovered that Israel had joined Britain and France against Egypt, and had thus betrayed the principle of Middle Eastern cultural unity implied in Faisal's gracious gestures in 1921.

It's taken me more than a few words, but I believe that I have refuted each of the charges that Bryan Fischer has made against Islam. Fischer warns Congressman Ellison that he had better follow Christian political principles, but I'm sure that he will rather follow ancient republicans to whom liberal democratic politicians around the world, many representing 650 million Muslims, have been firmly committed for decades.