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## **A Religious Society Promotes a Flourishing State**

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### **Abstract**

Religion has its roots deep in every sector of society. Throughout history, governments have been established through religious societies and found their legitimacy based upon the principles found in those religions. Religious doctrine helps to shape government statutes, guide individuals in their journey of morality, and provide cultural cornerstones. Christianity has proven to endure time and testing while positively impacting culture. Without religion, a nation will crumble. This essay examines the correlation between thriving societies and religious freedom, and how a religious society leads to a prosperous nation.

### Introduction and Hypothesis

In every corner of the globe there is evidence of religion. Every household, public square, and political institution has been influenced by religious doctrine. The sociopolitical climate of every nation has roots in religion, and people's ethical codes are often formed by their faith. These beliefs, when held in unison, create a cultural bond between people and define characteristics of culture. Since religion is so prevalent across the globe, it must have significant reasons why it touches every aspect of life. Since it is something that has been conserved and cherished by so many, religion must offer benefits to life. The basis of this research essay began with the questioning of what objective benefit religion brings to individuals and civilizations. Some philosophers have argued against the necessity for religion and spirituality while offering a secular model of reason and morality. Though not every secular idea is thoroughly anti-religious, the increasing popularization of secularism promotes reason over faith, and the importance of oneself over that of a religious ideology. Despite the criticism of religion in the name of promoting reason, many renowned thinkers support the freedom of religion. Many philosophers who were not theologians provided a "perspective of the statesman concerned with protecting the common good..." and they insist "...that religion is necessary to a healthy political community".<sup>1</sup> Throughout time, across every nation, and amidst political uprising and persecution, the significance of religion has survived in every culture. It is evident that religion is fundamental to civilization, and that a religious society promote a flourishing state.

### Analysis

If religion truly supports societal flourishing, data must support it. Since governments exist to preserve and protect life, data regarding crime would be a helpful litmus test for healthy societies. Although the correlation between disadvantageous living standards for youth and crime is strong, data shows that religious youth and crime have an even stronger negative correlation<sup>2</sup>. Crime control techniques are often correlated to punishment, but the unique benefit of religion is that it promotes positive standards for living rather than just punishing bad behavior. Religion also helps the individual by providing functional benefits to the society<sup>3</sup>. These benefits come through the functionality of religion giving purpose to life, providing stability through shared beliefs, helps control social behavior, advocates for psychological health, and encourages people to work towards positive change in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Religion promotes altruism in society. It takes individuals out of the comfortable state of belonging only to one's own ideology and one's own "truths", and it calls them to a higher state of being. Christianity, which is the prominent religion in this research, calls believers to lay

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Flick, "Christian Quotes from the Founding Fathers," Christian Heritage Fellowship, Inc, June 30, 2022. <https://christianheritagefellowship.com/christian-quotes-from-the-founding-fathers-2/>.

<sup>2</sup> Byron Johnson, Sung Jang, and Michael Hallett. "Religions." Mdpi.com. Accessed November 29, 2022. [https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special\\_issues/Religion\\_Criminology](https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/Religion_Criminology).

<sup>3</sup> Emerson, M. O., S. C. Monahan, and W. A. Mirola. *Religion Matters: What Sociology Teaches Us about Religion in Our World* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> [Author removed at request of original publisher]. "17.3 Sociological Perspectives on Religion." In *Sociology*. University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing edition, 2016.

down their life, carry their cross, and follow Christ.<sup>5</sup> This means to cast aside personal prejudice, pride, and selfish desires to follow the commands of Christ. He demonstrated a love for others that surpasses any others, and his example promotes giving up selfish ambition to serve the least of society. This example of servant leadership is imperative for living an altruistic life. Following the example of Jesus binds people to a calling that is higher than themselves, and this is altogether beneficial and nurturing to society. Postmodernism promotes a religion of oneself, which is self-seeking and in denial of objective truth. But the religion of sacrifice and servitude is sustainable throughout all of time. A people who are concerned for their welfare of all of those around them is a people who have the potential to grow and flourish.

### **Government and Religion**

Freedom of religion is crucial to the American life. The First Constitutional Amendment supports and protects it, the Founding Fathers fought for it, and many men and women gave their lives to ensure that it would last. America is a global leader in economy, freedom, equality, opportunity, and prosperity. If the founding principles that brought about this flourishing society were preeminent in the beginning, how then can they be anything but necessary in protecting what the founding era produced? If America is to diverge from its founding principles of freedom from religion, it is destined to lose freedom in every corner of life. The founding fathers intended for Americans to have the right to believe what they wanted and to act out their practices of faith without fear of governmental control. James Madison, known as the author of the Constitution, said in his Memorial and Remonstrance speech that a “Religion not invented by human policy, must have pre-existed and been supported, before it was established by human policy”.<sup>6</sup> As a pre-existing source of knowledge and wisdom, Scriptures consist of an infallible set of laws that are intrinsically unblemished by the minds of erroneous humans. Christianity also need not be affirmed by human policy to corroborate its validity, but rather affirmed by nature of agreement in policy to show reverence to its authority. George Washington is often remembered for his Christian faith. He was a strong proponent for religious practices and a society of high moral standards, and he did not separate the two ideas. In his Farewell Address, Washington declares the role that religion plays in safeguarding the nation:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports... And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusions of religious principle.<sup>7</sup>

The Founding Fathers knew that a religious people would live morally upright. They also knew that a moral society was necessary for a nation’s longevity and flourishing.

The idea of religion that the Founding Fathers supported was that of freedom of religion. This is distinctly different than the freedom from religion. If our government were to dissolve into a government free from religion, then the ties of religion that bind culture would dissolve while objective truths fade in importance. No longer would the family be the epicenter of virtue,

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<sup>5</sup> *ESV Holy Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2022), Matthew 16:24

<sup>6</sup> John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution: The Faith of Our Founding Fathers* (Ada, OK: Baker Academic, 1993), 107

<sup>7</sup> George Washington, “*Washington’s Farewell Address*” (1796)  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc21/pdf/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc21.pdf>.

but every person would discern what goodness and morality is for themselves. This turns into lawlessness. A free society needs religion, and a freedom of religion is far more beneficial than a freedom from religion.

A free society can be proven by its freedom of religion. The greater the freedom of religion, the freer the society. De Tocqueville says that this would be the case with America, that her religious liberty would signify her flourishing. To De Tocqueville, as to many other thinkers and citizens alike, the good life is denoted by a life of liberty.<sup>8</sup> Democratic values, freedom of speech, fair elections, a free market, and overall economic prosperity could all be predicted by the level of religious freedom. De Tocqueville states that “religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must nevertheless be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of free institutions.”<sup>9</sup> The United States is not a theocracy, nor are religious institutions created by the US government, but they influence and are supported by the freedoms that the government protects. It is imperative to maintain free institutions, support freedom of speech and religion, and to ward off aggressors who would offer guidance contrary to those of liberty and equality. Religious liberty, social capital, and democratic institutions are complimentary of each other.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, to promote a flourishing nation, religious freedoms must be maintained and supported by government and citizens alike.

### Literature Review

There was a great number of resources available for this topic of religion in culture and flourishing societies. A great number of ancient philosophers discussed these topics, such as Aquinas, Augustine, and Aristotle. Christian and seculars alike are challenged with balancing faith and reason, and any good philosopher will not neglect to face that challenge in their work. There were several authors during the American Revolution and the Founding era that discuss these topics. Religious liberty was a serious concern for the United States’ Founding Fathers, and so they were in desperate need of concrete beliefs and standardized ideas. De Tocqueville, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Locke are just a few of the great thinkers and leaders that discussed topics of religion in societies. Modern and post-modern thinkers still have much to say about this, as the age of reason has turned into the age of “me, myself, and I”.

### Research Methods

This research required a wholistic approach. It is primarily philosophical in its format, but it has pragmatic functions in its conclusions. The research that informed the opinion came through quantitative data, such as the crime statistics that inform practices and the references from the American Founding Era as they pertain to American values. There were also qualitative measures used, such as the deduction of promoting human flourishing through encouraging practices that benefit society. Many of the philosophical concepts were based upon theory, but the principles used to explain what to do with the ideal concepts were developed through historical precedence. Finally, the world around us relays information constantly. Social media,

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Bilakovics, “*Human Flourishing Tocqueville Text*,” (Aei.org, 2016), <https://www.aei.org/spotlight-panels/human-flourishing-tocqueville-text/>.

<sup>9</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume I* (Conduit St., London: Saunders and Otley, 1997), 334

<sup>10</sup> Christos Andreas Makridis, “*Human Flourishing and Religious Liberty: Evidence from over 150 Countries*,” *PLoS One* 15, no. 10 (2020): e0239983, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239983>.

news outlets, interactions with coworkers, conversations with strangers, and debates with peers, these are all vessels that relay information about the world that we live in. While these unreliable sources were not the main drivers of the hypothesis, they were informants on researching the problems needed to be discussed.

### **Conclusion**

Religion is a part of everyday life, and it is impossible to get away from it. Secularization has provided benefits in that it promotes the use of reason and logic while also separating the church and state, but it becomes hostile to people of faith by overshadowing those beliefs with what is tangible and visible. Religion has been shown to produce better citizens, healthier minds, and stronger moral codes. Without religion there would be no unified civilizations. It is imperative to the free world to promote religious liberties to enhance the flourishing of nations.

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