

Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Theocracy and Fundamentalism Worked Examples

Well, hello everyone. This is our concluding session on the topic of Theocracy and Fundamentalism in our 2019-20 NPTEL Ideologies course. We're going to look at two very good documents, one on theocracy, the other on the United States religious Right. Now I've mentioned one of them in the lecture, we're going to do it in much more detail today in this particular worked, as a worked example or an example for our analysis.

There are two documents; one is by Muhammad Al-Atawneh, written in 2009, published in 2009 in the journal *Middle Eastern Studies* Volume 45 Number 5, not a long article, I think about 15 or 16 pages in all. The title is, 'Is Saudi Arabia a Theocracy?' The subtitle is 'Religion and Governance in Contemporary Saudi Arabia'. That's the first one, Muhammad Al-Atawneh. The second one we look at is one I've already mentioned, we'll do it in more detail now, by Randall Balmer, published in 2014 in the journal *Politico* on the 27th of May.

The title is "The Real Origins of the Religious Right.' Now the Al-Atawneh item is not freely available, which is why I'm working through it in detail here. I'll talk through the arguments and the analyses. If you do have access to an academic database, perhaps through an academic institution then the journal to look up is *Middle Eastern Studies* and of course we'll be sending you this PowerPoint listing the two items, the two sources anyway.

The Randall Balmer article is freely accessible on the net and I have, I will be sending you the link. It's also linked in the book. Well, let's take a look at the article by Muhammad Al-Atawneh, a very distinguished scholar who has written a great deal on the Middle East, a long academic career both in the region and elsewhere. He's had a long academic career, and we'll take a look at what he says about theocracy and governance in Saudi Arabia.

Let us take a look. Right. So, this is the paper - Muhammad Al-Atawneh, published in 2009 – 'Is Saudi Arabia a Theocracy? Religion and Governance in Contemporary Saudi Arabia', published in *Middle Eastern Studies* Volume 45 Number 5, issue number five, pages 721 to 737. He is a very distinguished scholar, Muhammad Al-Atawneh, and he starts by citing Madawi al-Rasheed in 2007.

She says, 'Saudi Arabia is, I quote, 'politically secular and socially religious'. The Wahhabi or Salafist ulama that is the, how I shall I put it, the college of cardinals, the priesthood, again I quote, 'relinquish' political authority to the ruling family and the machinery of state'; that word 'relinquish' is used by Al-Atawneh. So the Wahhabi ulama relinquish political authority to the ruling family and the machinery of state.

Now this amounts to, according to Madawi al-Rasheed, this amounts to a challenge to existing academic orthodoxy. Al-Atawneh goes into detail here and quotes several authorities. He goes on to investigate al-Rasheed's proposition that, the proposition that the religious authorities in Saudi Arabia have basically ceded political authority to the ruling family, that is the political authorities.

And Al-Atawneh explores concepts in Islamic thought in some detail, in particular the concept of sovereignty, Hakimiyyah, and that of holders of authority in the plural wulāt al-umūr. So explores those two concepts, sovereignty and holders of authority. And he then looks at the part religion plays in politics and governance in Saudi Arabia, in the light of the actual relationships between religious scholars and rulers and the mechanisms for the implementation of authority.

So, Al-Atawneh discusses at some length ancient and more recent Islamic scholars writing on the philosophy of governance in Islam and the Arabic term is 'fiqh siyasi' or 'fiqh siyasi' if I've got the accent right. In modern times, political parties in majority Islamic countries by the way have been severely criticized for failing to state clear political programs. So this is an issue and has long been an issue in Islamic or Islamic-constituted States, or Islamically constituted States.

Al-Atawneh says the modern disputes on this issue, that is, on the relation between governance and religious authority, the modern disputes are the most significant. What are the main disagreements? First of all the disagreements are, well, some argue that democracy is an alien Western concept; other Islamic scholars argue that Islam and democracy are compatible and that Islam has a democratic character.

Yet others argue that represented democracy, representative democracy can be implemented in an Islamic society. They all seem however to share a common theme, and that is that religion and the state are inseparable; government is needed to protect the faith and its values. But Al-Atawneh notes here that both religion and the state fail in three particular respects: they fail to delineate the ruler's authority, to specify it, they failed to define the relation between the ruler and those who are governed, and they fail to give a practical model for an Islamic state.

Well, Al-Atawneh then looks at Wahhabi or Salafist political thought because in Wahhabi political thought, as he says, “a total fusion of religion and politics is the informing idea.” That makes, according to Wahhabi thought, Islam a religion and a comprehensive system for all governance. Therefore, according to Wahhabi thought, Islamic law is, I quote from Al-Atawneh, “a complete moral code for every eventuality.”

That then means that government is needed to maintain and enforce the Sharia - that is, a temporal ruler is needed and must be obeyed, but must be obeyed only as long as their orders conform to the Sharia, and in that case, if their orders do not conform, then, according to the religious authorities in Wahhabi thought, the ruler can be disobeyed.

Al-Atawneh gives detailed sources. He does give details for earlier Islamic philosophers, and outlines several severe disagreements over the nature and extent of human agency. For example, some of the scholars he cites see humans as vice-regents of God; some of them also, occasionally, some Wahhabi scholars also occasionally specify temporal powers. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the religious authorities issued a fatwa, an edict, in 1975, which said that a court can identify a crime and specify an appropriate punishment, but the king can accept or reject the punishment or can ask the court to reconsider its decision.

Well, that was issued by the religious authorities and says something about the powers in relation to the legal system, the judicial system, of the king. Now Al-Atawneh is very clear that in this system of thought there is no consensus on the relation between the spiritual and the political. Some authorities say the ulama, the priestly or the religious authorities, have ceased to be an autonomous body in Saudi Arabia, but they retain a lot of influence.

So they've ceased to be autonomous, but they're still very influential; others say they have lost that power in the religious and the political sphere and these are political scientists and other analysts writing about them. So, we get broadly two positions; the ualama have ceased to be an autonomous body, but they retain influence, a great deal of it. Others say, “Well, they've lost their power in their religious and the political sphere.”

But recent studies show that the ulama have considerable direct influence on several ministries and they are directly involved in drafting legislation on things like criminal law and procedures, ethical and moral matters, family law, ritual prescriptions - what is to be considered part of a ritual, how ritual is to be performed and so on. Now, Al-Atawneh concludes that this shows, I

quote “full interaction and cooperation between the religious and the political establishments” or, as he says, ‘siyasa shar’iyya’.

And Al-Atawneh notes that fatwas may be non-binding, but a royal decree in Saudi Arabia can turn them into binding law. The result is, as Al-Atawneh says, a series of very interesting tacit compromises on a lot of legislation. For example, banning the rejection of marriage proposals on behalf of daughters or sisters for non-legitimate reasons, that’s one, so compromise there - and that I understand became the law.

[Other examples are] Letting dowries be determined by local custom or creating government loans for young people requesting permission to marry. Now one aim of these on the part of the religious authorities seems to have been to prevent prostitution, which is banned in Islam, and Al-Atawneh makes that point; and he says, well, there were compromises, the monarchy and the priesthood compromised over creating law to bring these principles into effect, banning, you know, requiring legitimate reasons for rejecting marriage proposals on behalf of daughters or sisters, letting dowries be determined by local custom, creating government loans for young people requesting permission to marry, right, there were compromises.

Another area where there were compromises between the political authority in the form of the monarch and the religious authorities, another area was the specification of women's roles in the workplace and the permitted social contexts and social relationships that were involved. Now, Al-Atawneh adds here that the monarch has passed many very socially conservative decrees in the last 50 years or so; he gives many examples.

And the clerical authorities, well, gave clerical approval, they gave religious approval to things on which the rulers were particularly anxious to get approval. Two things, two issues – the rulers made sure that they have got clerical approval, religious approval for: first, the use of weapons in the Kaaba sanctuary in to remove fundamentalists who’d taken over that particular mosque, using weapons in that area, a sanctuary area, secondly, allowing U.S. troops to land on Saudi soil in the first Gulf War.

The rulers, the political authorities, made sure they got religious approval from both of those, for both of those policies, and implemented them. Al-Atawneh concludes that Saudi Arabia is neither theocratic nor secular in what he calls a Western sense. Instead he says it is, I quote, “a theo-monarchy” - again I quote - “a genuine monarchy that accommodates Islam and involves”, as Al-Atawneh says, “an ongoing compromise between the clerics and the monarch.”

So according to Muhammad Al-Atawneh Saudi Arabia is neither theocratic nor secular; instead it's a theo-monarchy, a monarchy, and a real one, a genuine one, that accommodates Islam and therefore involves a continuing compromise between the clerics and the monarch. Now, of course, questions will arise; Al-Atawneh does say that further questions will need further exploration in other research, he does say that.

One question I raise, you might want to raise your own, of course, is something like this: what happens, what happens, when the two sides differ significantly on an important issue, which does not involve, for example, the safety of the realm? Not a military matter, or something which involves use of troops in, or armed police in a religious sanctuary area, what if it's another kind of issue, and it's important, and the two sides differ?

Well I raise that question, but Muhammad Al-Atawneh's excellent analysis enables us to understand something of the relationship between the priesthood and the monarchy in Saudi Arabia, a very significant country, as we all know - and I might add, if I'm not mistaken, India's largest single supplier of oil. So we need to remember that Saudi Arabia does matter in other parts of the world, not least India. So that is the Al-Atawneh paper.

There's another one here which we should look at; that is one that I mentioned earlier in the lecture, and this is the Randall Balmer article published in 2014 in *Politico*, 27th of May, 2014. It is really accessible on the net. The title is 'The Real Origins of the Religious Right'. There's a subtitle, which may have been put in by the journal - The Real Origins of the Religious Right, title; subtitle, well, published a second-deck if you like or strapline: 'They'll tell you it was abortion, sorry, the historical record's clear, it was segregation'.

Balmer is blunt. He says there is a widespread idea that the religious right or the New Christian Right was outraged and energized by the *Roe versus Wade* judgment in the United States Supreme Court in 1973. *Roe versus Wade* says there's no prohibition, or the ruling says there's no prohibition in the first trimester of pregnancy, but there are progressive restrictions in the second and third trimesters, but there is no outright ban on abortion. That is the judgement of the United States Supreme Court.

Now, New Christian Right leaders often repeat the myth that *Roe versus Wade* was decisive for them, for example, Jerry Falwell, the fundamentalist preacher, says that this was, this ruling was decisive and that's what it, that's what catalysed and enabled the New Christian Right to coalesce, for some of them even call themselves new abolitionists, like those who fought to end

slavery were called, you know, like those who fought to end slavery, some of them called themselves abolitionists, they were known as abolitionists at the time, in the 1830s and 1840s onwards.

But Balmer is clear: it's a myth that *Roe versus Wade* was the decisive factor. He points out that the New Christian Right made abortion an issue only in 1979, and his argument is that they did so to make sure Jimmy Carter did not win a second term - because they wanted, the New Christian Right wanted, to preserve racially segregated schools. They had, in fact, the New Christian Right has actually seen abortion as a Catholic issue. It still is by the way.

For example, for Catholic bishops, for example, in the northeastern United States, it has been documented, publicly written about, that Catholic Bishops in the Northeast of the United States put a great deal of pressure on Catholic representatives and Senators, particularly those of the Democrat Party, those are regions which tend to vote democrat over abortion. So for the first six or seven years, six years or so after *Roe versus Wade*, the New Christian Right were largely indifferent to abortion. We've noted that some Baptists even approved of *Roe versus Wade* for putting limits to state interference in personal life. In 1974 and 1976, the Southern Baptist Conference actually passed a resolution, it called on members to work for precise legislation to abort, allow abortion in certain situations such as rape, incest, and other situations.

So, what were the real origins of the Religious Right? Randall Balmer's argument is that we need to go back to May 1969. In that year, 1969, African-American parents in Holmes County Mississippi brought a case in the United States Treasury, the case is called *Green versus Kennedy*. Kennedy was the United States Treasury Secretary at the time, not I presume a member of the great, of the famous Kennedy family, but the Treasury Secretary at the time. Now, these particular African-American parents won their case against the U.S. Treasury. Their objection was over the point that three new whites-only private schools teaching the school syllabus, K12 it's called in the United States, twelve years of schooling.

Three new whites-only K12 private schools segregated their admission policy so as to exclude African-American children. But they enjoyed tax exemption, as did all other educational and school institutions in the United States. Now, these schools, these three new whites only private schools, had been founded in response to a very famous Supreme Court ruling, *Brown versus Education*, 1954, in respect of a school in the state of Kansas; this ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional.

So, African-American parents in the State of Mississippi brought this case against the United States Treasury, against the tax-exempt status of schools which practice racial segregation in their admissions. The Supreme Court issued a temporary injunction restricting these schools' - and presumably other schools' of the same kind - full tax-exempt status. In 1969, that year, the number of white children in publicly funded K12 schools was 771.

It fell to 28 that year; in 1970 it fell to 0. So in response to the decision in *Green versus Kennedy*, it seems clear that white parents simply took their children out of publicly funded K12 schools. Now, interestingly in 1969, President Nixon ordered the complete cancellation of tax exemptions for such schools. Well, Nixon took office in the beginning, at the beginning of 1969, he was President in 1969. He ordered the complete cancellation of such tax exemptions for these privately funded schools which practiced racial segregation in admissions. This case, this order was then confirmed in a case called *Green versus Connally* in 1970; the change of name has only to do with the fact that the Nixon administration had a new Treasury Secretary, a new finance minister, this was John Connally, formerly governor of Texas. He was actually sitting in the car with John F Kennedy when John F Kennedy was shot. The name spells C O double N A double L Y. So, *Green versus Connally*, the new name of the earlier Green versus Kennedy case confirmed Nixon's executive order that tax exemptions for schools practising racial segregation were to be canceled, they were to become taxable bodies.

Now, the point is here that this served as a chance for conservative evangelicals, Protestant conservative evangelicals, to mobilize. One of them, by the name of Paul Weyrich, saw his chance. He himself said, he'd utterly failed to mobilize evangelicals with campaigns on pornography, on prayer in schools, on the Equal Rights Amendment, even on abortion. He'd failed to mobilize evangelicals. Well, evangelicals did not have fears of communism, very widespread in the U.S.; anyway, conservative, Protestant evangelicals also were suspicious of Catholicism, no doubt for theological reasons which are very well documented.

But generally evangelicals kept out politics. Weyrich changed that. He deliberately defined this new tax-exemption issue in moral terms without using religious language - and - well, around that time Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina resisted the new ruling and the new legislation. They tried to get round the Internal Revenue Service by admitting only one African-American student, but this student dropped out after a month.

After that Bob Jones University admitted only married African-American students, apparently with the intention of preventing sexual relations across what they defined as racial groups. In 1976, the Inland Revenue, the IRS, cancelled the college's tax exemption. Now, for many evangelical leaders who had been following the issue since *Green versus Connally*, Bob Jones University was the final straw. Elmer L. Rumminger, a longtime administrator at Bob Jones University told Randall Balmer in an interview, The IRS actions against his University, I quote, "alerted the Christian school community about what could happen with government interference in the affairs of evangelical institutions" According to Elmer L. Rumminger that was the major issue that he said "got us all involved".

Weyrich saw that he had the beginnings of a conservative political movement and that's why, several years into President Jimmy Carter's term, 1976 to 1980, Weyrich and other leaders of the nascent religious Right blamed the Democratic president for the Inland Revenue's actions against segregated schools. That was, I'll put it bluntly, a lie. The policy was mandated by Nixon, and Bob Jones University had lost its tax-exemption a day before Carter was even inaugurated as president.

Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich and others were, as Balmer says, undeterred by the niceties of facts. In their determination to elect a conservative they would do anything to deny a Democrat, even a fellow evangelical like Carter, another term in the White House. But Falwell and Weyrich had really aroused the anger, they'd tapped into the anger, of evangelical leaders, but they were shrewd enough to recognize that organizing grassroots evangelicals to defend racial discrimination would be a challenge.

It had worked to rally the leaders certainly, but they needed a different issue if they wanted to mobilize evangelical voters on a large scale. And by the late 1970s many Americans, not just Roman Catholics, were beginning to feel uneasy about the spike in legal abortions which followed *Roe versus Wade*, the decision of 1973. The 1978 Senate races demonstrated to Weyrich and other evangelical leaders that abortion might be the motivating factor they wanted. That year 1978 in Minnesota, pro-life Republicans captured both Senate seats, one for the unexpired term of Hubert Humphrey, who was vice-president to Lyndon Johnson. So, pro-life Republicans got both Senate seats; they also won the governorship, a very important position in the United States politics is state governorships. In Iowa, Senator Dick Clark, the Democratic incumbent, was thought to be a shoo-in, a walk-in winner. Every poll before the election showed him ahead by at least 10 percentage points. On the final weekend of the campaign, pro-life

activists, mainly, primarily, Roman Catholics leafleted church parking lots. On Election Day Clark lost to his Republican pro-life anti-abortion challenger.

Now, Balmer goes on; according to him the 1978 elections, midterm elections, represented a formative step towards galvanizing everyday voters who happened to be evangelicals. And he goes into detail over correspondence between Weyrich and evangelical leaders who really thought their time was coming. They also joined forces with somebody called Francis A. Schaeffer, or Schaeffer, who was a very extreme theologian, and he was warning about the eclipses of Christian values in the advance of something he called secular humanism.

Schaeffer was not, he is considered to be the intellectual Godfather of the American Religious Right, but he was not known for his political activism. But by the late 1970s, he decided that legalized abortion would inevitably lead to infanticide and euthanasia and he wanted to sound the alarm, so they teamed up, including teaming up with doctors, surgeons, and so on, to produce a series of films under the title 'Whatever Happened to the Human Race?' And they argued, including one of the doctors concerned, somebody called C. Everett Koop, that any society that countenanced abortion was captive to secular humanism, whatever that is, and was therefore, caught in a vortex of moral decay.

Well, things have gone on since then. One thing we need to note is that the spike in abortions after 1973 was not surprising. The minute we relax a ban it's quite likely those who have been hesitating to act because they have been breaking the law, would have started acting; secondly, there could be other factors behind the increased figures. We're well aware that poorer classes in particular have much broader access to information and services on a great many things, particularly in matters of education and health care.

It's hardly surprising that poorer classes are adversely affected or may well be adversely affected by a need for abortions. We must also remember that particularly among younger women, and this is documented, you can find the research materials, the research, published research on this, that younger women have been documented as being under greater pressure from young men to participate in sex without protective measures.

Now these may all result in pregnancies which are not planned and may also be unwanted; and therefore, it's not surprising that after *Roe versus Wade*, a range of factors may well have contributed to a spike in abortions, a rise in abortion figures. Remember of course, these were now being documented because they were lawful. We actually got an idea what the figures

were. It's like improving, you know, it's like improving crime reporting practices or extending crime reporting practices on the part of the police. If people are more confident they will report crimes, and then we suddenly think, "Oh my gosh, We're actually much, much worse than we thought we were as a society," - why, because we're reporting crimes rather more, and recording them rather more. That's also quite likely to have happened in, after the *Roe versus Wade* judgement, but none of these issues were raised by the campaigners, perhaps I should say crusaders, against abortion.

As Randall Balmer concludes, these are not just campaigners against abortion; for them *Roe versus Wade* was something of a smokescreen, a catalyst, that they could use, which would have its own effects on United States politics, but their real aim was to promote, maintain and extend racial segregation. That's Balmer's argument. He offers us a postscript on Bob Jones University. The school, or the university, appealed the Supreme Court decision on its tax status. It had lost its tax exemptions; it appealed the decision in 1982. Well, the case reached the Supreme Court in 1982, and the Reagan administration announced that it planned to argue in defence of Bob Jones and its racial policies. There was a substantial public outcry, and the Reagan administration reconsidered; Reagan backpedalled, backtracked, by saying that the legislature should determine such matters, not the courts.

The Supreme Court made its decision, handed down on 24th May, 1983, and it ruled against Bob Jones University by eight to one. Three years later, Reagan made the only dissenter, William Rehnquist, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the Congress approved the nomination - that's the legislature. Now Balmer is making, putting a very important and interesting argument here. His key argument is that the real motivation for the resurgence, the rise in, well, resurgence of the New Christian Right in the United States and its politicization into a very intense and very powerful and very well-funded force was not abortion in the first place at all. It was, quite simply, racial segregation. Randall Balmer is an accomplished and noted university professor, he writes a lot and he writes in very accessible places in addition to his academic materials. This article by him, the detailed article, is available freely on the net, you can look it up. So, one thing we might want to note, I think Balmer mentions this, is that governor Reagan as Governor of California in the late, again if I'm not mistaken, the late 1970s passed the most liberal abortion law in the United States.

Well, he later trimmed his sails to other winds, as we know very well. Balmer's point is that the New Christian Right are motivated primarily by racial segregation and by fears that racial

segregation will be genuinely ended throughout American society, much more than they are by abortion. Even though, as we know, abortion is a powerful enough motivating factor in our time and has been in the United States since the early eighties.

Well, that concludes my analyses of these two papers. You will have the titles. I've gone through them in detail, the second one, the Randall Balmer is readily available on the net. The first one, the Muhammad Al-Atawneh paper, is available in academic databases and that's why I've gone through it in detail here, so that you at least know the arguments. You may well find similar analyses being published in heavyweight journals and newsmagazines these days.

So that concludes our topic of Theocracy and Fundamentalism. We shall go on in our next lecture, the next topic, to our tenth topic, which is, to our tenth subject, which is Technocracy and Managerialism.