

What is Caesar's, and what is God's?



by Lev Tsitrin

Jesus' retort to a Pharisee who, contextualizing the promise of the kingdom to come, asked whether it makes sense to pay taxes – “give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's” enunciates a general principle, but gives no specifics as to the line separating the two. The general understanding is, that the demands of the church and the state are different – the former sees a person as a spiritual creature, the latter treats that person as part of a civic commonwealth.

Needless to say, what's understood by “what is due to God” differs from one religion to another and has evolved. Aztecs, for instance, daily offered a dozen or so humans to their Sun god. Nowadays, people belonging to ISIS, Hamas, al-Qaeda and suchlike, see their best chance to give to God what is God's in blowing themselves up in the midst of a crowd of those they consider “infidels.” Clearly, such expressions of one's religiosity cross the boundary of what a state should allow;

such people violate the proper balance by taking away from what is Caesar's – their civic duty to contribute to the common good – so as to “give” to their perception of God.

But there is more to the frequent imbalance between what's God's, and what's Caesar's. People believe in all kinds of things, those beliefs justifying all kinds of action. And when that action is not harmful to others, the state rightly stands aside, permitting people to act just as their beliefs call them to do. Constitution's First Amendment is perfectly clear in leaving to the individual the definition of “what is God's” – for a simple reason that “what is God's” is in itself uncertain, heavily influenced by one's heritage. Hence, “what is God's” is treated in the Constitution by half a sentence; the rest of the document is all about “what is Caesars'.”

But there is one aspect of “what is God's” that is not subject to the cultural difference: the laws of Nature. There is no interpreting the law of gravity this way or that way. At the time of Creation (call it Big Bang if you want) it was decreed that the force of gravity should be proportionate to the square of the distance between objects – and so it is, no amount of priests, mullahs, ayatollahs, or Justices of the Supreme Court being able to alter this fact, or interpret it away. What God presumably speaks through the mouths of those who say that they speak for Him can be interpreted or doubted – but when God speaks through Creation, there is nothing to debate, nothing to dispute, nothing to doubt, nothing to interpret. Caesar can (and in fact, must) punish the would-be suicide bombers even at the cost of denying them the right to “give to God” what is, in their view, God's; but Caesar cannot push the line of “giving to God what is God's” when it comes to laws of nature – such option simply does not exist.

Or so it seemed. While it would not occur to anyone to claim that it is the moon that gives us warmth rather than the Sun, for some reason biology became an exception. While “male and female He created them” is respected when the state issues

birth certificates, yet when creatures decide that their sex was not part of their creation and is therefore not set, but that men can be women, and women can be men, the state humors them – crossing the line between what is God's and what is Caesar's.

A true-blue libertarian may reasonably argue (and in fact does so, starting right with John Stuart Mill) that self-harm should be one's private right. That may be a valid argument – but the flip side of it is, that such self-inflicted harm should stay private. Yet amazingly, “trans” people managed to impose their self-harm on the society – and to humor them, Caesar crossed the line and, in a sense, started acting as God, by altering the records of sex in birth certificates and passports, in the policies on sport events and the use of bathrooms.

Not that it matters in the world of actual reality. God's law stands, immutable and unalterable: drugs and surgeries that presumably alter one's sex do nothing of a kind, producing perhaps some cosmetic results, but not the true conversion: a man-made “trans woman” can compete with a God-made woman in a swimming pool or a running track – but unlike the God-made woman, cannot give birth.

So how do we reconcile the private desire to do what one wants, with the public's right to not care or know? The answer follows clearly from the First amendment – those who think that they “give to God what is God's” by trying to alter how God created them are within their rights. But the society at large, represented by the State, should not bend over backwards for them – in fact, in line with the First Amendment, it should ignore them. If they want to hold private events, competing against one another in sporting competitions – who's in the way? But their demands on the society to accept them for what they think they are rather than for what they are, are unreasonable, going far beyond what Caesar owes them in return to their giving Caesar what is Caesar's.

A general principle that some things are God's and some are Caesar's is clearly not enough. A specific line between those has to be drawn – and never crossed.