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***Banning Politics Strengthens Religion***  
Paul Flesher

In human societies, we make known our needs and desires in two different ways. We use political activity to tell our human leaders what we want. We vote, sign petitions, write letters to our congressman, join protests, and so on. We use religion to let our God know what we want and need. We pray, we worship in our church, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship, we visit the shrines of holy men and women, etc.

Here in the United States, our society and government are designed to permit both kinds of expression. But what happens when the free exercise of political expression is banned? The answer to this question helps explain some of the armed conflicts in our world today.

Politics can never be completely banned because people must govern themselves. So the most extreme form of political restriction is "the one-party" system, where the only people who can express their political views belong to, and agree with, the party in power. When this happens, more people turn to religion and it becomes the main way that the people's needs and desires reach expression. They send heavenward more and more requests for assistance of various kinds. The prayers and petitions of individuals, families and communities for health, good harvests, jobs, and other needs are addressed to God rather than to government or social entities. Attendance increases at religious worship as does participation in the rituals of the faith.

Another way that religion takes the place of politics when free political expression is banned comes when a small group of believers (small in percentage terms at least) will use religion to communicate their desires and demands to the human government. To the extent that these groups use violent or radical means to express

their demands, they become known as extremists, fundamentalists, or may even be damned with the label "terrorist."

The demands of the extremists are partly determined by their identification with the nation as a whole. If the extremists belong to the same ethnic and national group as the government, then their demands may include overthrow of the government itself. A successful example of this was when Ayatollah Khomeini opposed the government of Iran, then ruled by the Shah. The hatred of the Iranian ruling class, led by the Shah, was so great that Khomeini's small group of extremists ultimately gained the support of the vast majority of the population, and then succeeded in overthrowing the Shah's one-party rule.

By contrast, if the extremists identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic or religious group different from the ruling class, then they may demand the creation of a separate state or nation. This explains, at least in part, the Chechnian view of the Moscow government as well as the Kosovars' view of the central government of Serbia, especially before the NATO bombing. In both cases, the difference between the ruling class and the extremists (often labeled as fundamentalists by the press) was one of religion. In both cases, the religion became a lightning rod for nationalist sentiments and led to attempts to separate themselves from the dominant country.