

A Constitution for Everyone

The debate about changes in the constitution for the Commonwealth of The Bahamas that will provide equality for all is most refreshing. However, there are loud voices who are trying to push the “Christian agenda.” They feel that it is imperative that the country be considered a “Christian nation” and they want the constitution to reflect this. I am a deeply devout Christian but I do not support the idea that there should be any national or governmental policy, law, or constitutional item that will require the country to be Christian.

In 2011 I wrote an article entitled “I am Happy We Are Not a Christian Nation” when I explained my views about being a secular government is better than being a Christian government (or nation). Here is what I said: “A secular state is a concept of secularism, whereby a state or country purports to be officially neutral in matters of religion, supporting neither religion nor irreligion. A secular state also claims to treat all its citizens equally regardless of religion, and claims to avoid preferential treatment for a citizen from a particular religion/non-religion over other religions/non-religion. Secular states do not have a state religion or equivalent, although the absence of a state religion does not guarantee that a state is secular.” If by constitution The Bahamas were Christian, then there would be policies and laws in place dictating the way each citizen should live, thus restricting freedom of religion and speech. This is the case in the Islamic states today where each citizen is required to abide by Islamic beliefs or face a penalty.”

I further explained that “many Christians who are fed up with the social ills in society are being misled to think that the government must provide some spiritual guidance for the people. They are also saying that since we profess to be a ‘Christian nation,’ we should have no alcohol saloons, illegal drugs, strip joints, pornography channels, dance halls, etc. While I do wish these were not in our country, the real problem is not the presence of these things but the inability for Christian leaders to promote godly Christian living, and to teach personal censorship instead of national censorship.”

The drive to have a national constitution to be a spiritual document is not new. In 1863 in the United States of America, John Alexander, a local attorney, delivered a paper on the topic "Religion in the Nation" at the Xenia Conference with the arguments that the constitution should be changed to reflect the nation being a “Christian nation.” He proposed the following amendment to the preamble (amendment in italics): “We, the People of the United States *recognizing the being and attributes of Almighty God, the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, the law*

of God as the paramount rule, and Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior and Lord of all, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and to our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

What if this amendment did pass? It would have made the United States like other nations where religious leaders are head of state and a specific religion governs the country. Ironically, these are the countries where religious freedom does not exist or is limited. I want to live in a country where there is total religious freedom. Far too many Christians do not understand the meaning of and the scope of religious freedom.

“Religious freedom is the notion that people of religion (Christian or non-Christian) can freely partake of the practices of their religion without opposition (privately or publically). A secular government promotes religious freedom (every religion) and also the freedom not to have religion—atheism.

Christians believe that God made every human being with the freedom to choose. That is the freedom to choose or not to choose even the One (God) who gave us the freedom to choose. Therefore, any faith/religion should be allowed to function in a free country. This proposes a challenge to Christians because it is all about numbers. The larger the number of non-Christians the less powerful and influential are the Christians. Hence, the Christian leaders, thinking that “Christian voices” should be the most powerful and the ones to follow, insists that the “Christian way” is the only way for the nation. While this might sound plausible, the Christian Church must not require government to have policies that excludes other faiths or non-faiths.

The constitution is not a code of moral standards. It is not a document to provide a prescription for social ills. It is a document allowing all peoples of all faith and non-faiths to live and grow in harmoniously in the same country. I want a constitution that will allow me the freedom to live as a Christian and practice all my beliefs. At the same time the constitution will allow another person not to believe in God or anything religious. This is freedom.

Barrington H. Brennen is ordained minister of the gospel, marriage and family therapist, and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to barringtonbrennen@gmail.com or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or call 1-242-327-1980.

