

# Democracy and Religion

*Comments by Dave DeWitt*

## A Quote from Harvard Professor Clay Christensen

Some time ago, I had a conversation with a Marxist economist from China. He was coming to the end of a Fulbright Scholarship here in Boston. I asked him if he had learned anything which was surprising or unexpected. And without any hesitation, he said, “Yeah, I had no idea how critical religion is to the functioning of democracy. The reason why democracy works,” he said, “is not because the government was designed to oversee what everybody does, but rather democracy works because most people, most of the time, voluntarily choose to obey the law. And in your past, most Americans attended a church or synagogue every week, and they were taught there by people they respected.” My friend went on to say that “Americans followed these rules because they had come to believe that they were not just accountable to society but they were accountable to God.” My Chinese friend heightened a nagging concern I’ve harbored inside, that as religion loses its influence over the lives of Americans, what will happen to our democracy? Where are the institutions that are going to teach the next generation of Americans that they, too, need to voluntarily choose to obey the laws? Because, if you take away religion, you can’t hire enough police [<https://www.youtube.com/embed/YjntXYDPw44>].

## Observations

I suspect the point of the Chinese Marxist economist was that democracy won’t work in China, or anywhere in the future, because religion is fading away. The professor’s point, and that of the company making the recording (I guess), is that we need more churches and religious institutions.

## The Marxist Economist from China Made Three Mistakes

1. He makes the mistake of thinking America is a democracy. I find that most foreigners and many Americans make that mistake. That’s why they think Hillary Clinton actually won the 2016 election. But America is not a democracy, it’s a democratic republic. Democracies only work when you have good people, such as in a club or local chapter of some organization. Usually, a democracy can be described as “the lunatics running the asylum,” which fails when people figure out that they can vote themselves free access to other people’s money. In a democratic republic, lunatics may elect a lunatic to represent them, but more knowledgeable people will elect a more knowledgeable representative who, even if they represent less people, can offset the lunatics.

2. The Marxist economist from China makes the mistake of thinking “religion” is critical to the functioning of democracy. He ignores his own illustrations of churches and synagogues (which are basically just churches, since synagogues were a minute part of American history). The early immigrants who came to America were primarily Bible believers who worked hard and were morally and financially responsible because they were following the Bible. The Chinese Marxist ignores the fact that religion did not help people keep the law at all when Muslim countries became democracies. The remaking of Iraq into a democracy and the spread of democracy through the “Arab Spring” brought radicalization and chaos. It is those who followed the Judeo-Christian Bible that allowed for what he (mistakenly) called democracy. Religion does not generate people who voluntarily choose to keep the law in Muslim, Hindu, or any other religious country. The best functioning, most sane government in the Middle East is Israel, because it at least has a distant memory of the Bible’s moral and economic values.

3. The Marxist economist from China makes the mistake of confusing democracy with freedom. What he is observing, that works because of the Judeo-Christian Bible, is freedom. **If you decrease the belief**

**in the Bible, you will increase the need for government.** That's why the decrease of a belief in the Bible is followed by an increase in government control, say, with the American democratic party, socialism in Europe, and Marxist Communism in the old Soviet Union and China.

### **But the Marxist Economist Was Right about Two Important Things**

1. Early on, America worked with limited government because people believed "that they were not just accountable to society but they were accountable to God." A belief in and fear of the God of the Bible is the only thing that limits the need for government.

2. What the Marxist economist called democracy, which is actually freedom, "works because most people, most of the time, voluntarily choose to obey the law." I have seen this in the aviation community. There is no way the FAA and the air traffic controllers could sufficiently police aviation. Aviation works because most pilots, "most of the time, voluntarily choose to obey" the laws of aviation.

### **There Is One Time in History Where This Worked Perfectly, Where People Required No Government At All**

The one group of people who were brought together without any governing structure was the church started by Jesus and the apostles. Jesus said the world's leaders have authority, *but it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant* (Mark 10:43), the greatest leaders being the greatest servants (Luke 22:25-27). The only authority in the church they started was Jesus Himself and the apostles who brought the revelation of God to His church (Luke 24:44-45) in what we call the New Testament, which included a belief in the inspiration of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:16). But the apostles appointed no apostolic replacements, they only appointed elders, overseers, deacons, and leaders, all of whom were to be servants with responsibility, not officers with authority. They taught, encouraged, and served, they did not control, punish, and legislate. **The church was a band of brothers and sisters, where the more mature served the less mature.** There was absolutely no government in the church they started because people believed "that they were not just accountable to society but they were accountable to God." They required no government because Jesus said, *if you love Me, you will keep My commandments*, and "most people, most of the time, voluntarily chose to obey" Him because they loved Him. Those who didn't, and strayed from the path, were brought back to the path by the discipline of loving brothers and sisters, not the punishment of authorities.

**The bad news** is, as soon as the apostles left the scene, the church began to be defined, not just as believers, but as an entity, an assembly, an organization or some structure where anybody could come. Instead of it being a band of believing brothers and sisters who, among other things, gathered **themselves** together (Hebrews 10:25), the gathering itself was called a "church," which became a social entity, which included unbelievers, so it required a governing structure. It required bishops and pastors and metropolitan bishops and cardinals and popes and patriarchs. It now required government because it was no longer a band of believers but a social structure. They *invalidated the Word of God for the sake of [their] tradition* (Matthew 15:3), and that requires government. Those who love *to be first among them* (3 John 9) warped the church the apostles started by creating a social structure.

**The good news** is, that original church, the real **band of brothers and sisters, where the more mature serve the less mature**, still exists. Some are involved in the social structures we have set up, some are not. But they are not identified before God by those structures. They are identified by the fact that they see themselves as "not just accountable to society but... accountable to God," and most of them, "most of the time, voluntarily choose to obey the law." They also tend to find each other and assemble themselves together.