

COULD SANTORUM'S RADICAL RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM PROPEL US INTO RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE?

Despite the fact that our country was founded in part by immigrants seeking to escape religious persecution, the current crop of Republican presidential candidates (with the exception of Ron Paul, who gets no media airtime anyway) have carried the Republican party's "God and country" theme to even more of an extreme than usual. Taking the clear lead in this push to extremism is Rick Santorum, who now is not only proclaiming his radical faith as a principal reason to vote for him, but he also is deriding the faith of others, primarily that of President Barack Obama.

The Washington Post notes:

When Rick Santorum accused President Obama of having "some phony theology" last weekend, it was neither an isolated event nor an offhand remark.

Instead, Santorum's comments were a new twist on a steady theme of his Republican presidential candidacy: that Obama and other Democrats have a secular worldview not based on the Bible, one they are intent on imposing on believers.

The Republicans' religious fundamentalism comes through in response to concrete policy issues:

The relationship between religion and government has emerged as a flash point in the presidential campaign in recent days after an effort by the Obama administration to require religious

institutions to include contraception in health insurance plans for employees. All of the Republican candidates objected to the effort, which the administration tweaked after a massive outcry, especially from Catholics.

The “Founding Fathers” that conservative Republicans so want to emulate on some fronts took pains to establish the separation of church and state. Because many had come from persecuted religious minorities, they pushed for the First Amendment’s prohibition both on establishment of an official religion and for the freedom to practice all religions.

Yet, with his extreme devotion to a radical fundamentalist Christian version of Catholicism, Santorum is moving in a direction that could lead directly into the kind of religion-fueled violence we see in other parts of the world. Until now, only the occasional murder of an abortion provider has cropped up as violence that could be attributed to radical religious fundamentalism in the US. But when a candidate for president openly charges the current president with adhering to a “phony theology”, how far away are we from situations like that now in Afghanistan, where violence has erupted over the burning of Korans at Parwan prison?

When radical fundamentalist religion and government are intimately intertwined, violence seems to follow. In the current fiasco in Afghanistan, we see the mullahs in the Taliban calling for violence as a voice for the outrage at the burning:

An Afghan soldier joined protests on Thursday against the burning of copies of the Koran at a NATO base and shot dead two foreign troops, Western military sources said, as the Taliban urged security forces to turn their guns on foreigners.

Protests against the burning of copies

of Islam's most holy book drew thousands of angry Afghans to the streets, chanting "Death to America!" for the third consecutive day in violence that has killed 11 people and wounded many more.

The Taliban urged Afghans to target foreign military bases and kill Westerners in retaliation for the Koran burning at Bagram airfield on Tuesday, later directing its plea to the security forces, calling on them to "turn their guns on the foreign infidel invaders," it said on its site shahamat-english.com.

But, remarkably, members of the Afghan Parliament have joined in with the Taliban in calling for a violent response:

The fury does not appear likely to abate soon. Some members of Parliament called on Afghans to take up arms against the American military, and Western officials said they feared that conservative mullahs might incite more violence at the weekly Friday Prayer, when a large number of people worship at mosques.

"Americans are invaders, and jihad against Americans is an obligation," said Abdul Sattar Khawasi, a member of Parliament from the Ghorband district in Parwan Province, where at least four demonstrators were killed in confrontations with the police on Wednesday.

Standing with about 20 other members of Parliament, Mr. Khawasi called on mullahs and religious leaders "to urge the people from the pulpit to wage jihad against Americans."

Is there anything more chilling and disturbing than government figures and religious figures

teaming up to advocate violence together? It doesn't even take the specter of an invading force to provoke such violence. In Iraq today, at least 60 people died in attacks that appear to be a return to the Shia vs. Sunni sectarian battles that have plagued the region for centuries.

Whether it is Catholic vs. Protestant or Shia vs. Sunni inside a country or Muslim vs. Christian in repelling an invading or occupying force, once radical religious fundamentalism becomes a part of government, violence appears to follow.

Calling for radical religious fundamentalism to have no part of government is not persecution of a particular religion. It is merely a part of the American concept that no particular religious view should become the position of the American government on any issue. The persecution the Founding Fathers fled and the fundamentalist-fed violence we see in the world today are all the evidence we need to know that Santorum risks taking the US in a direction that could negate one of its most precious founding values.