

The Authority of the Soul

by Zhiming Yuan

The authority of the soul is the foundation of true democracy and freedom, and it is rooted in faith and conscience.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, John 4:24, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Faith And Politics", "Christian Civilization"

Description

Zhiming Yuan delves into the intertwining of faith and politics, reflecting on the Los Angeles riots of 1992 to illustrate the limitations of rule by law and the power of the human soul in upholding righteousness. He questions the foundation of American principles of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, emphasizing the importance of faith in maintaining these rights. Yuan contrasts the reliance on knowledge with the necessity of practicing faith, highlighting the transformative power of faith in individuals and societies. He explores the impact of Christianity on democracy, drawing parallels between the authority of the soul and the roots of Christian civilization in Western societies.

Transcript

After writing the article "God and Democracy", I became increasingly immersed in my personal experience with God. However, sometimes when I speak with others, political issues slip into the conversation. The following are bits and pieces of my faith and politics.

Rule According to Law - The Los Angeles Riots (1992)

Contrary to the deeply rooted autocratic tradition of the absolute authority of human governance in Chinese history, rule by law may be taken as the chief characteristic of Western democracy. Take America, for example. The many books of statutes, the huge number of attorneys, the independent status of law firms, the rigorous approach to due process of law and the sacred inviolability of the law in people's hearts - all these show that America indeed is a country ruled according to law.

However, during the Los Angeles riots of 1992, illegal methods were used to protect human dignity and social justice. When the court pronounced the white policemen who had beaten a black motorist innocent, thousands of Americans, not only Afro-Americans, were deeply offended. Los Angeles turned into a battleground, full of billowing smoke. People used myriad means to demonstrate their indignation. The court was left with no choice but to reopen the case.

I am not here to encourage violence as a solution to problems. I am, however, trying to show the unreliability and non-supremacy of rule according to law. The Los Angeles riots demonstrate that the dependability and supremacy of government rule by law does not ultimately belong to the law itself. Neither is it embodied in the laws, nor in the court. Rather, the power of the law is housed within the human soul. The authority of a chief judge lives in the human soul, a strength as powerful as a volcanic explosion. It is the souls of billions of people that support the law, supervising its practice. This is what enables the entire system to operate as a tool of righteousness.

This reminds me of the American Declaration of Independence -- that people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When the government is unable to protect these rights, the people have the authority to change the government.

The question is: why have Americans been able to exercise such principles both historically as well as in present reality? John Rawls, the writer of *On Righteousness*, said that people have an instinctive confidence in the priority of righteousness. Everyone has a sense of inviolability based on righteousness which cannot be overcome even in the name of the entire society.

Likewise, a similar question arises: how does instinctive confidence become a reality in the human soul? I wonder about those countries which have no Christian tradition and have remained basically unaffected by Western culture such as India, Arabia, and especially China.

Human Rights - "Quiju Goes to Court"

The West is forcing China to improve its human rights record and it appears China is hard at work. The legal case presented in the movie "Quiju Goes to Court", a Chinese movie which won the German "Silver Bear" award, is a good example.

In the movie, Quiju's husband was viciously kicked in the crotch by the village head. The film details how Quiju, the leading female character, pursues her attempt to sue the tyrannical village head, refusing all hush money. She simply desires the release of a statement, a fair verdict. She takes her case through three levels of courts - township, county, and provincial levels - before the village head is finally brought to justice. In the end, it appears there is a victory for human rights.

After seeing the award winning movie, however, many expressed sympathy for the village head for being so unlucky to have run into such an obstinate woman. In reality, this kind of village heads have existed throughout the years all over China, the kind that one dares not to provoke as by Quiju's action. Therefore, the movie is not very representative of reality.

If the Los Angeles case had been tried in China, absolutely nothing would have happened. There are far too many unjust cases much more severe than even this. Who dares breathe a word?

It makes me think back to the time during the democracy movement in 1989 when an elderly Beijing woman told me, "Don't make such a big fuss over lifeless dogma. Nothing should be taken so seriously! It's useless."

When the authority of the soul is lost, righteousness has no ability to express itself. When you call for human rights, no one responds. Is this because of ignorance, or lack of courage? Ignorance? -- If the problem belongs to the realm of knowledge, it should be the work of the so-called enlightenment activists. Courage? -- If it is a lack of courage, this is a problem of the political structure and the work of democratic

reformers who struggle for structural change.

Knowledge - Easy to Understand, Difficult to Carry Out

Would a Chinese person stand up to defend his rights just because you told him that John Rawls said that individuals are created with inviolable righteousness? If the words of the American Declaration of Independence were written into the Chinese constitution, would the Chinese people rise up to protect social justice like the citizens of Los Angeles?

Does knowing what is good mean that you will be able to put it into practice? Among all of the ancients, who could recite the words of Confucius; how many actually became sages?

Knowledge is a servant which stands at attention waiting on human interest. But unless something is believed to be truth and is transformed into faith, it will never be worthy of sacrifice.

Faith is a substance that is worth living and dying for. One's very existence is bound together as a part of faith. On the contrary, knowledge functions as something that will live and die for a person, the servant of human preference. Its very existence is subordinate to one's life.

Similarly, It does not matter how much emphasis you place on the social function of Christian morality, and it does not matter how much effort you put into introducing and popularizing Christian culture in China. If there is not a significantly large number of sincere Christians living out the life of Jesus Christ, your efforts will be in vain.

Knowledge can be introduced and taught; faith has to be practiced. Knowledge roams around in the mind; faith anchors itself within the soul.

The explosive power which emerges from the soul often surprises the mind; deceptive ideas that stir within the mind, however, often cause the soul to feel guilty.

People control knowledge; faith governs people. God-given human rights and supreme righteousness have been part of the American faith for generations. But Chinese enlightenment activists have taken knowledge as something to be studied and introduced. As a result, they themselves are not even able to live out what they know. And the result is disaster.

It is absurd to view the contents of faith, such as human rights and justice, as merely knowledge to study; it is pitiable to take bits of knowledge, such as Marxism, as one's faith to be lived.

Autocracy - and Mainland Chinese Christians

Some people say that the soul flourishes under the democratic system and perishes in an autocratic system. That simply is not true. An autocratic system is able to suppress thought and arrest the body, but it has no ability to exterminate the soul.

During the last forty years, under harsh persecution, the number of Christians in mainland China increased from three million in 1949 to the present estimated 60 million. This is the power of the soul. In terms of human rights, they are living out what they teach. Even though they live under the harshest conditions, they have been the largest and most persevering group of human rights protectors in China.

They are not motivated by the knowledge in their mind, but by the faith within their soul. And when faith sinks its roots deep within the soul, the strength of heaven descends upon it.

The authority of human behavior lies within the law; the authority over knowledge belongs to humanity; and the authority of the soul resides with God. Wherever or with whomever the authority resides, it is that entity that will support and look after its own realm.

John Adams, the sixth president of the United States, said, "There is no government in the world which has the authority to force people to live kind lives. Kindness has to come from within the heart." Similarly, there is no government that can remove the spiritual joy given by God. In fact, it is this joy which can shake governments.

Democracy - A Christian Tradition

Karl Marx's belief that society forms people's consciousness is partially true. Society cannot, however, shape their souls. On the contrary, it is the soul of people that determines society. What then is society? It is the accumulation of humanity. And the totality of a person's accomplishments comes primarily from within the soul.

People often trace the beginning of Western democratic society back to ancient Greco-Roman thought and law. But if one actually examines the issue more closely, one finds that the fountainhead is not in democracy itself. All the democratic societies of the time had Christian traditions.

And not only did such Christian tradition appear in the writing of their constitutions and become popularized among their peoples; most importantly it was grafted within their souls.

Today, most of the world's 1.6 billion Christians live in democratic societies. They believe firmly, and not merely by intellectual knowledge, that God created all people equal; that both life and freedom come from God; that all people are sinful and have limitations, and therefore, must live under God's guidance and each other's supervision. God clasps the sword of eternal righteousness and absolute justice. This is a power which all people of all ages and places should revere with great awe. Faith is the power from God that abides within the soul. It is faith that oversees people without submitting to people's control. And consequently this faith constitutes the very makeup, the genes of the Christian, expressing itself through one's life. It is this faith by which the Christian lives as well as dies.

Of course it is possible to analyze the historical function of the Christian faith in Western society on many different levels, including culture, economics, and political power. I believe that all of these social functions are constituted by the unchangeable gene of the faith of the Christian, by the authority which emanates from within the soul of the Christian, and by the lifestyle of the Christian which no one without faith can duplicate. This one thing is very clear -- without Christians there is certainly no Christian civilization with all of its influence. Many people look at Western culture but fail to see its essence -- Christian civilization. Others look at Christian civilization, but overlook its body -- Christianity. Many see Christianity, but ignore its life -- Christians. And yet even some see Christian individuals, but fail to see Jesus their Lord -- God in them.

But if one is able to see these, and under the light of God to grasp the contents of faith -- the transcendent life and the authority of the soul -- it will all become very clear. That is, it can be seen why the democratic societies of Western countries and the Christian tradition are inseparable.

If one, however, is to observe the dozens of Muslim countries, India with its Hindu tradition, and China with its historical basis in Confucianism and Buddhism, it is also possible to see indications that point to the inseparability of these social structures with the content of their faith systems. To discuss these, however, is not the purpose of this essay.

Exceptions - The Middle Ages and Japan

Some people point to two exceptions as cases against the inseparable relationship between democracy and Christian civilization. One is the European Middle Ages which was a period in which Christian civilization existed but was not democratic. The other is Japan and other similar Asian countries which have modernized but have no Christian tradition.

The darkness of the Middle Ages is simply proof of the departure of faith from Christianity as a religion. Human sinfulness, primarily the sinful desires of the clergy, was the most destructive barrier between Christians and God. In fact, it came to the point where sin was boldly committed in the name of God. It was not, however, until the Protestant Reformation, in which the personal relationship between individuals and God was reestablished, that the transcendent and godly qualities of Christianity were restored and the authority of the soul reemerged. Today it is very apparent that Western Christianity, although not facing the danger of becoming a political power, is becoming more and more secularized.

As for Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other Asian societies, it is true that they have no Christian tradition and yet are democratic in differing degrees. The reality, however, is also that all of these were strongly influenced by Britain and the United States. These countries transplanted the systems and cultural fruits that had been grown in the soil of Christianity.

Following the Second World War, Japan, under the American bayonet, unconditionally accepted the complete reform of their economic, political, and educational systems. At that time General Douglas MacArthur also called unsuccessfully for the sending of five thousand American missionaries. Consequently, Japan benefited from the fruits of Christian civilization without having its life root. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons that Japanese consumer products, but not Japanese hearts, are welcomed around the world!

Hong Kong and Singapore long existed as colonies of Britain; there is no need to mention the strength of its influence. South Korea has been heavily influenced by the United States; approximately one half of the population is Christian. It has the largest church in the world, and even the current president is a church elder.

As for Taiwan, the leaders of the Nationalist Party (KMT) - from Sun Yatsen, Chiang Kai-shek, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, to the current President Li Teng-hui - have all been Christians. Regardless of what people say about Chiang Kai-shek on mainland China, he did have a Bible buried with him. It is said as well that President Li once considered becoming an evangelist.

Is it strange then to find that all of these "exceptions" have had special relationships with Christian countries?

Christianity appeals to the soul, because the soul of a Christian possesses a light from heaven which shines gently and quietly over the world with freedom and democracy.

Reform - China's Flashpoint

The atmosphere in Chinese society today is like a dark room choking with nauseous cigarette smoke. A friend from the mainland described it by saying, "the expression in people's eyes is like the beady eyes of covetous baby wolves." You can see the power of materialistic desire like a fire burning within them.

Actually, this is not surprising. When capitalism began in the West, greed was even more widespread. The difference, however, was that both in Europe and in America, there was capitalism, but there was also Christianity. There was the "enclosure movement" in England in which people were uprooted from their homes just so more sheep could have space to feed, but there was also the gospel of the Good Shepherd proclaiming, "God loves the world". Even then there was a daily confession of sin and prayer, continuous Bible reading, and bells ringing for worship services in the churches. People could not get rid of the presence of a righteous God, the One feared by the strong and longed for by the weak.

But today's Chinese people have only secular greed, and no transcendent faith. They don't believe in God, Confucius, or Marxism, and they certainly don't believe in the essence of the teaching of Deng Xiaoping, "Whoever feeds me is my mother." The result, you may easily see, is a world of hot, steaming flesh and weak, fragmented souls. It may be difficult for you to detect even the tiniest bit of the clean world of the spirit.

Liu Xiaobo was correct when he said that there is a "sinful world" within which sin exists, but also God and repentance. There is also a "world of sin" within which exists neither God nor repentance.

In what direction is China's reform leading the country? Liu Xiaobo says that perhaps one day China will gain democracy and freedom but forfeit its soul. I believe that the fruits of democracy cannot grow from people who have lost their souls. And how can freedom be enjoyed when the spirit of the nation has been lost?

Today's so-called democratic society emerging in China is neither born from the life of Christian faith, nor is it one that has been transplanted by force. Oh China, if you cut yourself off from God's life-giving flow, but at the same time refuse McArthur's bayonet, you'll never even look like a Singapore, which is small enough to be cradled in the lap of President Lee Kuan-yeu. One day you will tremble in terror, your grieving tears washing your spirit, until you cry out to God in confession!

The Word and Morality - Lao Zi's Argument

What the Chinese people have lost is their conscience. Conscience is even more powerful than morality. It is the absolute voice of God, whereas morality is relative and is part of human knowledge.

The campaign to build a spiritual civilization promoted by the Chinese Communist Party during the 1980s was a code of moral knowledge, not faith. Therefore, it had no potency. Likewise, the calls to study the servant-hearted Lei Feng and compassionate cadre Jiao Yulu have fallen on deaf ears because the faith of communism has been forsaken. Communism came to bankruptcy because it was only head knowledge.

If moral knowledge and education were able to change people's hearts, God would not be necessary. If under the conditions of an autocracy, morality is an important element in the strength of its machinery, then we can say unreservedly that the conscience is an indispensable component of the road to democracy and freedom.

As they face the nation's spiritual crisis, the Chinese Communist Party's leaders are at their wits' end as to what should be done. They do not see the power of faith, nor are they able to see the authority of the soul

or the true source of conscience.

Conscience is an important element in the authority of the soul. It originates in God and its influence is felt through many dimensions. Only conscience yields to God and transcends all.

When you are controlled by your conscience, there is no outside force, no temptation, no criticism - not even the criticism of another's conscience - that can master you. Your conscience is responsible directly to God. If you are one who has a relationship with God, you have this greatest freedom and authority.

There is no way to truly describe conscience. In attempting to do so it becomes mere human judgment. This is dangerous. When conscience is described, it is no longer conscience; it is mere human morality, which lacks power. Therefore it is best to simply conclude that whoever has God within their heart has conscience.

In this aspect, Chinese Daoism and Christianity have some similarity. Lao Zi separated the Chinese characters for morality (daode) into two words, dao and de. Dao (the Word) was taken as a matter of faith, an ineffable eternity, whereas de, the concept for morality, was believed to be a sort of knowledge that depends on self-cultivation and self-study. Lao Zi stated that "people strive for morality (de) when the Word (dao) is forsaken; when morality fails, they pursue benevolence (ren); and when benevolence begins to deteriorate, they pursue social righteousness (yi); and when social righteousness languishes, rites (li) are suggested." The person who has the Word then, necessarily has morality as well. There is no need for self-cultivation. Similarly, Confucius commented, "A person can do as one pleases as long as he does not neglect propriety." When people have to be restrained by special rites and laws, this is equal to the saying, "When faith and credibility are weak, chaos will reign".

Christianity's declaration of "justification by faith" has a similar meaning because "the Word (dao) was God. He was with God in the beginning." Those who believe in God are spiritually joined with God -- "God is spirit". Naturally then, the fruits of the Spirit flow from one's life -- "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22, 23)

In Chinese history, the Word was hidden and morality was therefore of no use. Since there was no faith in God, people had to resort to controlling people -- how miserable.

The only way to reshape the spirit of the Chinese nation is to cultivate belief in God and truly acquire the Way (dao) through Jesus Christ, because He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Only in the Spirit of Christ can we avoid the old methods of lifting up the exemplary man and attempting self-cultivated morality.

Humanity - Two Faces

The loss and gain of true humanness has nothing to do with wealth, degrees earned, or status. It is an issue of the authority of the soul.

In 1987, I was in Beijing. It was a year of peace and good harvest. One evening when I was on the public bus, I saw a line of vendors standing along the road as the bus passed over Fufang bridge. A group of very large foreigners faced them, leaning over as if they were thinking about buying something. Not far from the scene was a video camera taping the whole event. Shamelessly stretching out their hands, almost as if they were kneeling before these visitors, these diminutive vendors pushed out in front of the

group of foreigners as if they feared lagging behind. My heart was seared with the faces of my fellow countrymen. Their faces carried the same mix of expressions: shrewd but anesthetized, greedy but genuine, seeming to cry but seeming to laugh. The bus drove along; my heart was filled with silent weeping. Those faces, those expressions including both shame and sadness, have remained deeply etched in my heart.

In 1967, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, I was in my first year of junior high school. It was a lean year. One day, students from the entire commune met at our village to denounce a priest and a nun. From morning until evening, we all took turns stepping up on the platform, screaming at them and trying to force these two elderly people to confess that God did not exist. They remained silent. Their bodies looked quite frail, but there was a peaceful and gentle loving expression on their faces. As we shouted ourselves hoarse, hollering until we were exhausted, they simply looked at us with loving smiles, seeming to say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Those loving faces, those kind smiles !K have also remained etched in my heart until this day.

When a person's life foundation is constructed with the outside world as its basis, whether material or spiritual, the soul is easily swallowed by greed, pride, jealousy, and deceit. Most important, the soul loses the independent authority of heaven. These people may appear strong and consider themselves supreme, but their true humanness is small and weak.

However, when life is lived connected with God, the soul blossoms with love, righteousness, a clean conscience and freedom. This sort of person may appear soft as water, but their true humanness is filled with glory.

Freedom - Homosexuality in the United States

Returning to the United States !K that nation has already begun to turn its back on God. All of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness which were considered by the early founders as given by God, have come to be taken for granted by this generation of Americans. Those qualities of life such as human rights, democracy, and prosperity, which were believed by the American forefathers to be God-given, are enjoyed today without any sense of appreciation to God.

Not long ago there was a TV debate about allowing homosexuals to serve in the military forces. Those in favor argued on the grounds of personal freedom and privacy. Those opposed, however, had little to say in response because they also advocated the same values of personal freedom and privacy. Contemporary Americans believe that personal freedom and privacy are primary and self-evident. If this is the case, homosexuality is beyond question. Those opposed to homosexuality in the military are reduced to claiming the military as a special profession, the present ordering of the law and health concerns becoming the basis of their reasoning. Their arguments sound very empty.

Yes, liberty is a right humans should enjoy, but this right is given by God. As a good gift, it exists within the framework of God's righteousness and love. If liberty turns away from God, however, it quickly becomes depravity. Dostoevsky said it well, "If God did not exist, everything would be permissible."

Indeed, if personal freedom and the right of privacy are taken as the, pretext, an individual or for that matter a group of people, can do anything at all to speed their own dissipation. In this way the human conscience will gradually but certainly degenerate. And the law of morality will cease to exist. Considering the direction this kind of "liberty" is taking America, I wonder what will be America's final destination.

I once told an American professor that it is quite fascinating that while Chinese have no individual freedom, they know that individual freedom cannot be separated from collective freedom. One's personal life is intertwined with public life. If the American people could realize this one point, they would discover that having a life of faith and obedience to God's righteousness and love is the greatest freedom an individual can have.

Faith is unbending. Losing faith results in walking in darkness. The reality is that even though one may lose his faith, God does not cease to exist. His righteousness and love continue to be glorified.

Therefore, freedom without faith has to pay a price in righteousness. Without God's righteousness and love, free Americans will speed increasingly to their demise, until the day of final collapse.

As the cry for "freedom" seems to be breaking out across the world, its own "hometown" is gradually forsaking its giver, God. As this continues, "freedom" will soon be forced to face its final enemy, freedom itself!

On the one hand, there is China crying for God; on the other, an America which continues to stray from God. When I pray, I often think of the Bible verse, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

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