

Should America Have a Muslim President?

Republican presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson was asked, "Should a president's faith matter?" He replied, "Well, I guess it depends on what that faith is. If it's inconsistent with the values and principles of America, then of course it should matter."

The questioner then asked, "So do you believe that Islam is consistent with the Constitution?" Carson replied, "No, I don't, I do not. ... I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation. I absolutely would not agree with that."

A firestorm erupted. Several presidential candidates quickly quoted Article VI of the Constitution, "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." But Carson did not state that a Muslim is disqualified for office. Rather, he stated that he considered Islamic law (Sharia) and the Constitution to be incompatible.

Is this true?

To paraphrase Carson, the answer depends on the kind of Sharia in question. There are five "schools" of Sharia, ranging from *Hanbali* (the most fundamental, embraced in Saudi Arabia and by the Taliban) to *Hanafi* (the most liberal, dominant in Turkey).

In addition, Sharia can be related to governance in three ways:

One: a completely secular Muslim nation (Turkey, for example).

Two: a dual legal system where the government is secular but

Muslims can bring family and financial disputes to Sharia courts. A similar approach is practiced in America with regard to the Amish and Orthodox Jews.

Three: a “government under God,” where Islam is the official religion and Sharia is the source of all laws (as in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates).

The theoretical compatibility of Sharia with the U.S. Constitution depends on the approach to Sharia one takes. (For more on this issue, please see my *Is Islam Compatible With American Democracy?*) My purpose today is neither to agree with Carson nor to criticize him. Rather, it is to consider the backlash his comments provoked.

This is not a practical question, as no one is discussing an actual Muslim presidential candidate. Nor are Carson’s supporters and detractors engaged in an academic discussion of constitutional and Islamic jurisprudence.

It seems to me that some on both sides are motivated by fear. Some are afraid of encroaching Islamic influence on our country and culture. Others are afraid of encroaching evangelical influence on our politics and society.

However, “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7). Jesus warned us, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

There has never been and will never be a perfect government. Imperfect people make imperfect laws, which they enforce imperfectly. When we fear for the future of our society, let us turn to the one whose kingdom will endure 10,000 millennia after the last earthly nation has fallen. Let us speak his truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and live for His eternal glory. And let us remember that we are in His hand, always (John 10:29).

Yesterday was a significant day for me personally for two reasons. The first is that my mother died on Sept. 28, 2008. She stepped from death into life, from our fallen planet into God's perfect paradise. Her homegoing reminds me that earth is not my home.

The second is that my spiritual mentor, C.S. Lewis, came to Christian faith on Sept. 28, 1931. No one knew then the global significance of his conversion, least of all Lewis. But millions of people around the world have been touched by his reasoned faith. His conversion reminds me that God will use today's obedience for eternal purpose.