

I am not making the absurd suggestion that religion, apart from other cultural, ethnic, economic, political, or strategic elements is the only or the key factor: societies are complex. But I am saying that it is equally absurd to examine a political order *without* attending to the role of religion. We need to deal consistently with religion as an important independent factor, and analyses which ignore religious dynamics should be inherently suspect.

In the field of human rights, we must elevate concern for religious freedom. This is not a parochial matter: it is historically the first freedom in the growth of human rights and it is the very first freedom in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Such freedom may at times have more to do with the growth of democracy than might a direct focus on political activity itself.

A human rights/religious freedom policy is extremely difficult, of course. While all human rights pressures make realists nervous, religion carries the additional burdens of touching on very deep seated commitments, of facing confused domestic claims about "separation of church and state" and fears overseas that the U.S. is an imperial "Christian" power. But for anyone concerned with freedom and democracy this is no reason to neglect the matter