

CONFRONTING SECULARISM

By

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Recent polls indicate that about 98% of the population of our country believe in a “supreme being.” Over half the people have some church affiliation, or at least claim some church preference.

Even so, for all practical purposes, the Christian is daily confronted with a secular attitude and lifestyle wherever he goes. Some sociologists claim that we are entering a “post-secular” age, that our society is becoming more conscious of moral and religious values. The political influence of the Moral Majority gave hope, at least for a short time, that a great revival was taking place. But when we look at the drastic rise in crime, sexual freedom, child abuse, drunkenness, drug use, suicide, pornography and homicide, it is apparent that we still live in a secular world.

By secular we simply mean that which pertains to the world or the spirit of the world in contrast to that which is in keeping with the spirit of God and His purpose. Being religious and belonging to the moral majority does not necessarily mean that a person is Christian and seeks the purpose of God in all of life.

The Romans in the time of Paul were also religious. They worshipped the Emperor, burned incense and poured out libations in his name throughout the land. Their festival days were highlighted with religious symbols and ceremonies as they celebrated with games in the large amphitheatres in major cities. (Compare the World Series, Super Bowls, and the Indy 500). They also killed the Christians with zeal, because they insisted that Christ was actually Lord and was to be obeyed in all facets of life.

Secular religion is popular. It is devotion to success, happiness, wealth, health and the good life. People die for these things. While they may fight for freedom, when that freedom is attained it turns out that they were not fighting for the right to serve Christ and obey Him without restraint, but for the right to live as they please, the right to NOT obey God. This is secularism, to live without God.

For over a thousand years the western world was known as Christian. From about 400 Ad until the reformation in the 16th century, almost everyone believed in Christ, at least to the extent of the revelation they had of the gospel. While there was gross error and corruption in the Roman Catholic Church it still dominated the Western World with a form of religion. This dominance with the Reformation sparked a struggle for freedom of thought. The so-called “enlightenment” followed, which produced the French Revolution. This was followed by Darwinism, Marxism, atheism, materialism and permissivism, and the western world was secularized.

RESULTS OF SECULARISM. According to Scripture God makes distinctions among people, between the righteous and the wicked. He gives greater abilities to some than to others. He gives the power to get wealth to some and withholds it from others. There are differing degrees of rewards and punishments. But secularism would erase distinctions in the name of equality. It says that we must take a poll and get a consensus, which becomes the statue of limitations.

Secularism has given birth to the twin gods of scientism and materialism. In the world of science the only recognized knowledge is that approved by the scientists. God, Christ, Prayer, morals and judgment are not scientific facts, therefore have no place in the realm of knowledge. If there is no knowledge but scientific knowledge, there is no basis for moral values. Without revelation from God you cannot settle moral issues with a “Thou shall...” or Thou shall not....”

Goals become materialistic. For millions there is no success or happiness without the possession of a great amount of material things. Things dominate our lives. There are never enough; we must attain more and more! Priority time with families is sacrificed, children are neglected, people are used and manipulated, rest and meditation are shunned, all in the mad scramble to make money, to succeed, to get ahead and to feel secure.

Secularism embraces hedonism, the philosophy that says pleasure is the highest goal. If God does not govern life then each individual does what is desirable in his own eyes. It becomes “Nobody’s business but my own.” Sins which at one time would have branded a person as extremely wicked are not practiced by people who continue to be acceptable in ordinary society. This shows how secularized the whole community has become. One university co-ed said that a girl was made to feel disgraced if discovered to be a virgin.

Secularism reduces life to this world only. There is no judgment nor hope of eternal life. It removes the purpose of man’s creation and existence.

RESPONSE TO SECULARISM. How shall we face secularism when it is the general “way of life” of those all around us? The common response is to accommodate to it. Like the ancient Romans, Western man has found a way to keep his religious connections and forms and at the same time pursue the goals of secularism. He attends church but actually pursues the temporal goals of the world: wealth, security and happiness. These things are not wrong in themselves, but they fall short of the Christian goal and stand in its way. One cannot reach the higher goal of godliness if his aim is on the lower goal of the temporal world. So John advises, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (I John 2:15).

Jesus commanded His disciples to “seek first” that which He offers, not merely to ask His blessing and help as we pursue our own purposes and goals. The Christian, therefore, must reject secularism, not adapt himself to it.

To do this we do not have to make a study of secularism and understand all the possibilities which it affords (As in the book “Future Shock.”) What we need to do is to study the words of our Lord who has a clear understanding of the pressure of a secular society upon His disciples.

Immediately after choosing the twelve, (Matthew 10) Jesus gave instructions to them on how to confront the world (secularism). He warned that they were being sent out as “sheep in the midst of wolves.” The things they would preach — sin, judgment, salvation by Christ’s death, repentance, obedience — would be diametrically opposed to the secular view and would arouse the world’s hate and persecution. (If you think that applied only to the first century, then you should think again. The same truth is still opposed by the world.)

Bt, in spite of all this, Christ’s first command was to “Fear not.” Fear is an ally of the devil. How many times have we gone along with the crowds, or with a friend to take

the secular line simply because we feared being considered different? Quit being afraid, Jesus said. God is concerned with the sparrows, and we are much more valuable to him than many sparrows.

Then, in three statements, Jesus summed up the means by which His disciples must confront secularism (Matt. 10:37–39). “He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Vs. 37). Love for family is good and natural for the person seeking godliness. But love for Christ must be greater. To violate the spirit of Christ’s commandments out of love for a family member betrays the fact that we haven’t loved Christ enough. If we love Him more than family, then we will be able to love Him more than the world and all the riches and pleasures it can offer.

“He that does not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me” (Vs. 38). Some think that being Christian means everything going smoothly — no suffering, no enemies, no sacrifices to make. Certain television evangelist (?) promise health and wealth to all who have faith and respond to his appeals. But that’s secularism. It is the spirit of the world that says life’s goal is happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction with temporal things. The Bible never enjoins us to seek happiness, but to seek godliness, and that demands a price.

We are in an alien world which cannot ever give the perfect and eternal life that God created us for. It is a world without a future, for it is already under sentence and its day of judgment is set (Acts 17:31). Therefore it tries in every conceivable way to simulate joy, beauty and happiness in ways that violate God’s laws. The Christian is set in the opposite direction, and must struggle against the mainstream, not only to follow Christ, but to be a witness to all those going the opposite direction. It is the price he pays for going the right direction in a wrong-directed society. To follow Jesus is to confront secularism at every step. We must willingly bear whatever it costs.

“He that finds his life shall lose it; and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it” (Vs. 39). Secularism says, “This is the life. Get into the swing of things and get your share. Learn how to get ahead, how to succeed, how to get what you want and live on easy street. Look out for number one with a view to your own security.”

But Christ says that to seek this kind of life is to be a loser, for this life lasts only a short time. The real life is yet to come when Christ returns and gives immortality to all His disciples. Compared to that, this life is only a vapor, a fleeting moment. Don’t be afraid that you are going to miss out on anything the secular world has to offer. The riches of life are in God’s hand.

We are to be related to the secular world as was Christ. He ministered to its needs, but did not seek its false goals. In the face of its demanding pressures He lived to please the Father. In the midst of its confusing darkness He presented the light of truth. He willingly gave up the mortal life, that He might take it up again in immortality. Christians are to do the same. **“He that loses his life for my sake shall find it.”**

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