

Private Religious Faith – and Its Consequences

This article was originally written in response to one published in the parish magazine of my local church, concerned with the public or private nature of Christian faith. In it, the author argued that secularism (as promoted by the militant atheists) cannot be “neutral”.

The growth of aggressive atheism and secularism, in our society, is a phenomenon which it is absolutely right for clergy to draw our attention to, and the Church to struggle vigorously against. The understanding of Christian faith as a private experience, and not a public concern, is something which has been developing for a century or more, and now takes the form – certainly in America – of powerful, ever-litigious bodies (supposedly concerned with “liberty”), attempting to ban all instances of religious faith, ethics, and values, from having any influence in what they call “the public square” (ie. government, education, law, the media, etc).

Indeed, “The secularist agenda is not neutral”; its aim is to establish - through law, government and the media - a society based firmly on materialism. What do I mean by that? I don’t mean a world where everyone lives for wealth, possessions and immediate pleasures (though this is the inevitable by-product), but rather, one determined by the idea that humans, and all life, exist merely as the accidental outcome of chance, un-directed processes, and that this present life is the totality of existence.

Materialism has immediate appeal, to many, in that it promises to insulate them from any eventual consequences of their actions, and the prospect that they could in any way be ultimately answerable to something “bigger” than themselves. It requires that all ethical constraints need to be re-made in the light of purely-this-worldly considerations. The end result (if not the actual intention of the materialists themselves) is what Pope John Paul II rightly called the “Culture of Death”.

It has been said – and not just by religious believers – that the root cause of society’s ills is the fact that there is no longer any fundamental valuing of human life *for itself*. Thus, environmental extremists go unchallenged when they state, quite brazenly, that the sickness that is causing the death of the planet is the unfortunate, unnecessary, existence of humans; and meanwhile the international abortion industry receives burgeoning inter-governmental promotion, calls for the introduction of euthanasia daily grow, and eugenics threatens to re-emerge.

Preventing the use of prayers at the beginning of council meetings may seem unconnected with the devaluing of human life, and its secularist promoters probably have no such hidden agenda; but it is hard not to see such incidents as a small part of a much greater tide, whose flowing into ever-more areas of public life is ultimately a threat to people everywhere – for it is individual, ordinary people who ultimately suffer from resulting social experimentation.

The Christian faith, and the Church, stand for totally different values (and cease to be authentically the Lord’s voice when they do otherwise). Rejection of the purely-this-worldly so often lies at the heart of the Bible readings and prayers we hear week by week. Isn’t it about time we all took seriously the command to “fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world, and the Devil” – as the *Book of Common Prayer* puts it?