

Lamentable Abuses of Religion

Have you noticed the vilification of secular humanists by some candidates in the current Republican presidential campaign? This must be taken seriously. There are many on the religious right who harbor deep resentment against those who profess to be without religious convictions, especially when they happen to be among the intellectual or cultural elite.

If the self-proclaimed Christian critics of secular humanism exhibited even the slightest bit of Christian charity and compassion, I might have some sympathy for them. As it is, they tend to espouse a political and moral agenda that is so self-righteous, and so at odds with basic Christian values, that it is only too easy to dismiss them as arrogant, hypocritical hucksters of the most odious variety.

Perhaps worst of all, they give Christianity a terribly bad name. They represent some of the very worst of religion. They may not engage in physical assassination, as do some of the radical Islamists they also hold in contempt, but they readily engage in character assassination based on lies, half-truths, and xenophobic bigotry. They have no excuse.

Even so, they are right to regard secular humanism as a kind of threat. Most secular humanists may be really fine folks, but when the chips are down, as they will be in times to come, I hope secular humanists will not be calling the shots.

It's a principle derived from physics that nature abhors a vacuum. The problem with secular humanism is that, when pressed to the limits, it proves to be vacuous. It lacks the resources to answer the basic questions of life, its meaning and purpose, its limits and possibilities, its sacredness and its abominations. Secular humanism leaves a vacuum, exposing us to the dreadful abyss, where no eternal verities or divine solicitude can rescue us. And to fill the void, as ultimately we must, we are bound to become subject to the will to power and self-interest.

G. K. Chesterton once noted that the problem when people cease to believe in God is not that they then believe in nothing, but that they then believe in anything. The "anything" they then believe in often proves as horrendous as fanatical religious ideology.

The positively monstrous distortions of Christianity we are now seeing on the religious right must be met, not with rejection of religion, but with much more authentic, humble, and gracious expressions of religious faith, whether Christian, Islamic, Jewish, or otherwise.

Copyright 2016 by Byron C. Bangert