

THE SECULAR FACE OF HUMANISM

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The word humanism is often preceded by the term secular. In order to understand secular humanism, the word “secular” needs to be understood. The word comes from the Latin *saeculum* which means time, or age. Secular is that which pertains to this world, temporal, related to, or connected with worldly things.

To designate an individual as a secularist means that “he is completely time-bound, totally a child of his age, a creature of history with no vision of eternity. Unable to see anything in the perspective of eternity, he cannot believe God exists or acts in human affairs. Moral standards, for example, tend to be merely those commonly accepted by the society in which he lives, and he believes that everything changes, so that there are no enduring or permanent values.”²

The basis of secularism is the autonomy (that is, the self-rule) of the individual. “Autonomy asserts the essential non-religiousness of all structures of life. The age of the world is to be understood completely on its own basis. Nothing unconditional is encountered through culture or through human reason. If religion emerges, it is only the glorification of one of the facets of life - of reason, of the vitalities, of aesthetics, or of the state. Thus secularism centers on the world and seeks to make life meaningful completely apart from God, from the source of life, or from anything unconditional.”³

In secularism, a person’s reasoning becomes the supreme standard by which that person is guided. Having faith in one’s own reason, one believes in one’s inevitable progress. An individual thinks science sufficient to guide him or her toward all truth. Human beings also think themselves self-sufficient, independent, and at the center of all things because they are the final species in the evolutionary process.⁴

The Alliance Of Secularism To Humanism

Philosophically, secularism has much in common with humanism. Both reject the existence, relevancy and sovereignty of God. Both reject all concepts regarding the existence of other world-beings such as demons or angels because these creatures are not of this world and their existence cannot be scientifically verified. Both secularism and humanism reject the notion that human beings have souls or spirits, that they must some day give an account of their earthly

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²James Hitchcock, *What Is Secular Humanism? Why Humanism Became Secular and How It Is Changing Our World*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1982), 10-11.

³Jerald C. Brauer, “Secularism,” *A Handbook of Christian Theology: Definition Essays on Concepts and Movements Of Thought In Contemporary Protestantism*, ed. by Marvin Halverson and Arthur A. Cohen, (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company. 1958), 340.

⁴For discussion of these ideas, see John W. Whitehead, *The End Of Man*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1986), 39-47.

conduct to a supernatural being, and that after this life is over, all people will spend eternity in either heaven or hell.

Moreover, since both secularists and humanists deny the reality of human life beyond this present earthly existence, then both must also reject the validity of divine revelation and divine moral codes for human conduct. Secularists and humanists think that people are deluded who believe in the existence of God and the divine inspiration of the Bible. They think such beliefs are harmful because such beliefs give rise to false hopes and hinder realistic coping with typical circumstances of life.

Since secularists and humanists believe that people and their circumstances are in no way related to a Supreme Being, then reason is, for secularists and humanists, all that is available for people to use in finding solutions to human problems. The use of divine revelation to find answers to life's problems is considered foolish by secularists and humanists.

The Christian, on the other hand, believes that it is the secularists and humanists who are being foolish. To the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul wrote "let no one deceive you. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:18-19). Paul had previously asked, "Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20).

The Nature Of A Secular Society

Since secularists know nothing of the majesty and transcendence of a sovereign God who rules over the universe, then, for them, a society which becomes secular, for all practical purposes, attaches little, if any, importance to religion. Through reason and proper techniques, the human mind is considered capable of understanding and controlling all it encounters. When problems arise, they are then considered solvable without appeal to religious ideals or values. Moreover, in a secular society, the religious consciousness of individuals is greatly diminished. The sense of a Transcendent Being is lacking. Religion then becomes extremely limited to a very narrow sphere of life.

It is now common practice to use the word secular to designate things considered not spiritual or sacred, things considered not devoted to sacred or religious use, or things considered dissociated from religious teachings or principles. However, this practice of distinguishing between what is considered to be secular from what is considered to be sacred is a comparatively modern social phenomenon, unknown in ancient human history. The practice originated with the advance of industrialization and modern technology and was aided considerably by influences from the Enlightenment. The term secularization originally designated the removal of land from ecclesiastical control in sixteenth-century Germany.⁵ In time, the term secular came to be applied to other things also separated from religion. In our culture, nearly all things may now be distinguished by categorizing them incorrectly as either religious or secular.

⁵C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, Michael R. Weed, *The Worldly Church: A Call For Biblical Renewal*, (Abilene, TX: The ACU Press, 1988), 21, n. 1, citing Peter Berger, *Secularity, West and East, This World*, (Winter, 1983): 49-62.

The modern concept of the secular implies that there are some areas of human life and activity that may legitimately be separated from religion. These areas are now generally presumed to include civil governments, politics, education, industry, science, medicine, journalism, business, transportation, commerce, entertainment, law, economics, ethics, foreign affairs, environmental issues, etc. As the process of secularization continues more and more areas of life will come to be considered secular while the realm of the religious or sacred will become much more restricted.

The idea of the secular, as contrasted to things sacred or holy, however, is **NOT** a biblical concept. The practice of contrasting secular things to holy things **NEVER** appears in the Bible. It is true that in scripture things temporal are contrasted to eternal things (Mark 10:30; 2 Corinthians 4:18), things fleshly are contrasted to spiritual things (Romans 8:1-9; Galatians 3:3; 4:29; 5:16-26), and things evil are contrasted to good things (John 5:29; Romans 7:19-21; 13:3-4; 16:19; I Corinthians 15:33; I Peter 3:11). However, in scripture, things which are contrasted to holy things are said to be profane, not secular (Leviticus 21:6; 22:2, 32; Malachi 2:11).

Secularists often argue that religious people should confine their religion to matters of worship and attending to the spiritual needs of individuals in their private lives. Since they think religion is a private matter, they contend that religion should have nothing to do with public life. Hence, preachers and other religious leaders are not generally welcomed in those areas of life most people now consider secular. The Bible, however, knows no area of life that should be separated from religious principles. The Bible declares, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17).

The Secularization Of America

Secularization of the entire culture in the United States has not yet been fully accomplished, but the process is well underway, and accelerating rapidly. "Superficially . . . the United States manifest a high degree of religious activity. And yet, on this evidence, no one is prepared to suggest that America is other than a secularized country. By all sorts of other indicators it may be argued that the United States is a country in which instrumental values, rational procedures and technical methods have gone furthest, and the country in which the sense of the sacred, the sense of the sanctity of life, and deep religiosity are most conspicuously absent. The travelers of the past who commented on the apparent extensiveness of Church membership, rarely omitted to say that they found religion in America to be very superficial. Sociologists generally hold that the dominant values of American society are not religious."⁶

Although we Americans generally claim to be a very religious people, our practices do not seem to be consistent with our claims. When people were asked, shortly after World War II, "would you say your religious beliefs have any effect on your ideas of politics and business?", a majority of the same Americans who had testified that they regarded religion as something very important answered that their religious beliefs had no real effect on their ideas or conduct in these decisive areas of everyday life; specifically, 54 percent said no, 39 percent said yes, and 7 percent refused to reply or didn't know. This disconcerting confession of the irrelevance of

⁶Same source, 22, n. 6, as quoted from Bryan Wilson, *Religion In Secular Society: A Sociological Comment*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 112.

religion to business and politics was attributed by those who appraised the results of the survey as pointing to a calamitous divorce between the private and public realms in the religious thinking of Americans.”⁷ Since that finding, the secularization process has greatly accelerated. The last forty years have been a time of unprecedented growth in the secularization of America.

Factors Producing Secularization In America

In the last two hundred years, many factors have contributed to the secularization of this nation. The rapid advance of scientific technology along with the industrial revolution has produced a strong this-worldly outlook.⁸ Population mobility, created by World Wars, especially World War II, has hastened the secularization process.⁹ Prosperity after World War II has made most Americans think of themselves as independent from and without need for God.¹⁰ While these and other forces have contributed to the secularization process, three things especially have contributed to its acceleration within the last forty years – mass media, public education and judicial activism.

Mass Media

Of these three, mass media may well have been the most significant. Rock music, especially under the influence of Elvis Presley, was the catalyst that heralded the immoral revolution in American values. If rock-n-roll music was the catalyst, then television was the chief disseminator of secular ideals. The influence of television in secularizing America would probably be almost impossible to over estimate. “When providing viewers with fictional images of what life is like, television rarely adverts to the fact that, for a great majority of Americans, religious belief is an integral part of their lives. Religiously motivated characters [on TV] are likely to be neurotics for whom religion is a form of sickness. Rarely are sympathetic characters presented whose lives are strengthened by prayer . . . ”¹¹

The bias of television producers against the Christian religion is not just simply to avoid a proper portrayal of Christianity. Rather, “the censorship against Christians by network television is so complete that not one continuing series set in a modern-day setting has a single person who is identified as a Christian! In fact, when Christians are depicted in programs with modern-day settings, they nearly always are stereotyped as being hypocrites, liars, cheats, frauds, unfaithful in their marriage vows, etc.”¹²

⁷Will Herberg, *Protestant - Catholic - Jew: An Essay In American Religious Sociology*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., Anchor Books, 1960), 73, citing Barnett, “God and The American People,” *Ladies Home Journal*, (November, 1948), 234-237.

⁸John Dillenberger and Claude Welch. *Protestant Christianity Interpreted Through Its Development*, (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1954), 162.

⁹Stephen Neill, ed. *Twentieth Century Christianity: A Survey of Modern Religious Trends By Leading Churchmen*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc. Dolphin Books, 1963), 203.

¹⁰James Hitchcock, *What Is Secular Humanism?* 56-59.

¹¹Same source, 96.

¹²Donald E. Wildmon, *The Home Invaders*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 14.

Newspapers also now distort reality. They tend to give headlines and opening paragraphs of news articles to secularize while they relegate religious viewpoints in minimal space towards the end of articles. In general, mass media tends to focus on religion primarily when it generates controversy and can be understood in secular terms.

Public Education

Less noticeable than mass media to the general public, but still extremely significant, has been a public education system that, since World War II, has been effectively divorced from religion. “From age five to age eighteen American children spend a majority of their waking hours, nine months of the year, in classrooms. Many then choose to continue their education into college and graduate school. To a considerable extent the entire function of education has been taken from the family and given to the schools. If, during that considerable time, children and young people hear no mention of God, no suggestion that religion may have something important to say about the state of the universe, if they sense that teachers go to elaborate lengths to avoid religious subjects in the classroom, they inevitably draw certain conclusions - that religion is not true or relevant, possibly that it is something not altogether wholesome.”¹³ “The public schools have been a major force in the creation of a secularized society, because they have instilled in generations of students the impression that religion is a purely private matter which has no place in public life.”¹⁴

Educational leaders are now becoming more intensive in their campaigns to remove God from the minds of our nation’s children. For example, Dr. Chester Pierce, Professor of Education in the Faculty of Medicine and Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, declared that “every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill, because he comes to school with certain allegiances toward our founding fathers, our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural Being, toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity. Its up to you teachers to make all these sick children well by creating the international children of the future.”¹⁵

While these sentiments are not typical of most current public school administrators and teachers, they are consistent with the growing demands of secularism. Religious historical events have been censored out of school textbooks.¹⁶ Prayer has been legally removed from school classrooms, and, in many instances, also from baccalaureate and commencement ceremonies. School facilities are available for volunteer student groups interested in the promotion of chess and numerous other extra-curricular activities, but not for religious Bible study or prayer groups.

¹³James Hitchcock, *Disentangling The Secular Humanism Debate, Whose Values? The Battle For Morality In Pluralistic America*, ed. by Carl Horn, (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1985), 27-28.

¹⁴Same source, 28.

¹⁵Gary DeMar, *Something Greater Is Here: Christian Reconstruction In Biblical Perspective*, (Atlanta: American Vision Press, 1988), 27.

¹⁶Paul C. Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence Of Bias In Our Childrens Textbooks*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1986).

The Ten Commandments cannot be posted on class-room walls. Christian symbols are no longer allowed in classrooms, and Christmas carols are often excluded from seasonal functions.¹⁷

¹⁷For a concise presentation of judicial decisions leading to these consequences, and for an analysis of their impact on the family, read John W. Whitehouse, "Judicial Schizophrenia," Chapter 7 of *The Stealing Of America*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983), 73-81.

Judicial Activism

The rapid secularization of public education in years has been accomplished in large part by the secularization of law through judicial activism. Although all laws are necessarily based upon religious presuppositions, the courts have wrongly presumed that they can be neutral toward religion. Yet, in spite of their presumed neutrality, they have determined that legal statutes must be secular. The court's insistence on secular purposes of laws creates unexpected alterations in many areas of life. Whenever laws are based on presuppositions of secularism rather than of Christianity, then the very nature of laws are themselves changed. Secularism is now the primary philosophical perspective of the judiciary. Not only the courts, but also many other agencies of the state impose secularism on all citizens.

The Fruits Of Secularism

Whereas Christians have sought to impose Christian values through persuasion and conversion, secularists seek to impose their ideology through legal organs of the state. Secularism preaches against religious dogmatism, but it dogmatically imposes its own religion. Secularism produces totalitarianism in civil governments. Through secularism, the civil government presumes to be god. As such, it insists upon regulating and controlling churches, families, and every other facet of human life.

Secularism's intolerance of Christianity is now demonstrated through increasing litigation between churches and the state. Laws and bureaucratic regulations are intimidating and restricting churches through zoning ordinances, licensing of church ministries such as day care programs, schools and orphanages, as well as through restrictions regarding church involvement in political issues.

More significant than this, however, is the fact that secularism is destroying the authority and responsibility of the family. Parents no longer have legal authority over an unmarried minor daughter's decision for an abortion. Because the court considers that minors have a legal right to privacy, contraceptives may be dispensed freely to certain minors. They can be counseled by pro-abortion groups in their public schools and can often obtain an abortion without parental consent or knowledge.

The authority of the family is also challenged by the state in the areas of education and welfare. Many professed Christians are now finding themselves unable to educate their own children as they wish outside the public educational system without interference by state authorities. Moreover, when Christian parents discipline their children by spanking them, they may be accused of child abuse and have their children taken from them by a state agency.

The process of secularization has now spanned four centuries. While Christianity has had great influence during this period, especially in the lives of common people, the intellectual community has, by various degrees, gradually demoted Christianity from the pinnacle of esteem it once held. Secularism has contributed significantly to the removal of Christian theology as the queen of the sciences to being set aside by science, but protected; to now being considered

superstitious, and even deviant, and therefore unworthy of preservation in the human scheme of things.

Christians in America are now beginning to experience in small doses mild forms of persecution. The intensity of Christian persecution is growing, however. Unless something halts the growth of secularism within the near future, persecution of Christians in the western world may become physically abusive and violent.