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Is Separation of Faith and State an American Ideal?

By Freddy Davis

No doubt you have seen the headlines about Atheist groups attacking every expression of the Christian faith in the public square they can find. They attack local state and federal governments, school boards and individual schools, the military, and on and on. A couple of stories illustrate the point.

A high school band is under threat of a lawsuit because they wore T-shirts with the word "Salvation" on them. Never mind that the word was the name of a piece of music they were playing. The rub was that the word "salvation" had too close a connection to the Christian faith (even though it is used in other ways, as well).

And, of course, every year we see schools being attacked because they have a Christmas song in their "Winter Concert" lineup. It happens every year and I'm sure we will see it happen again this year. I remember several years back when my son was in elementary school and was on the program to play "What Child is This" on his violin. Someone complained and the school authorities listed the song on the program as "Greensleeves."

The Arguments for Separation of Church and State

One of the main organizations working to eliminate any vestige of the Christian faith from the culture is an Atheist organization called Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). They use two basic arguments as pretexts to promote their beliefs.

The first one is promotion of "separation of church and state." The only problem is, there is no such thing in American law. The term itself was a phrase taken from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Connecticut Baptists in the Danberry Baptist Association. Far from promoting FFRF's belief, Jefferson wrote this letter in 1802 pushing back against the idea of the state imposing itself on the church. There never was even a thought that the influence of the Christian faith should be expunged from government policymaking.

The other pretext FFRF uses to promote its belief is to assert that the establishment clause of the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits any expression of Christian ideas in the public square. Again, they have totally and blatantly misconstrued the idea. The establishment clause has an entirely different meaning. The situation in England, which the founders were pushing back against in that day, included a state church which the people of the country were forced to support. The founders didn't like that, so they put this clause in the 1st Amendment which prohibited the federal government from establishing a state church. NONE of the situations FFRF is attacking involve any attempt to establish a state church. Their entire argument is simply based on a false premise.

The Fallacy of Secularism

What FFRF and other like-minded groups say they want is a "secular" approach to governing. What they mean by this is that they want government to be run without any faith or religious influence whatsoever. There is only one problem with this approach – there is no such thing as a system which does not rely on a faith foundation. While the "secularists" try to assert

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that their approach is totally faith neutral, their belief is, in fact, as much a faith position as is any other religious belief. They believe that their "secular" approach which leaves mention of God out of everything public is the only way to accomplish what the Constitution says. They believe their approach is based on science while "religion" is based on faith. What they are really advocating is a "separation of faith and state" using beliefs which are themselves a faith system.

Why "Secularism" is a Religious System

If you speak to secularists to point out that their approach is based on a religious point of view, most of them would be totally flabbergasted. They honestly believe that setting aside "God/religion" from the public square is a completely religiously neutral position. The truth, though, is entirely different. Their "secularism" is a religious point of view.

In order for something to be neutral in the way they conceive it, a point of view cannot have a faith foundation. It must be based strictly on objective, experimentally verifiable facts. The problem is, an atheistic point of view is not based on facts. It is belief system based on a set of philosophical presuppositions.

Let's look for a moment at the philosophy of the Atheists. In order for their point of view to be true, there are several things that must not only be true, but verifiable using experimental science.

1. Everything which makes up the material universe must have a natural origin. The problem is, there is no science able to demonstrate that to be true. It is simply assumed to be true because a supernatural reality is dismissed out of hand based on their philosophical beliefs.

2. Life must have a natural origin. Again, there is no science to demonstrate this is even possible. It is assumed to be true not because of science, but because the possibility of the existence of God is dismissed out of hand based on their philosophical beliefs.

3. The variety of life forms which exist on earth must be accounted for using natural means. Once again, there is no experimental science able to show this to be true. In spite of the various theories and speculations that have been put forth, scientists do not know of any natural biological process which allows individual life forms to expand beyond certain limits. The belief in naturalistic evolution is purely based on philosophical presuppositions, not science.

4. Consciousness must have a natural origin. The same problem exists here as with all the others. The speculation as to the origin of consciousness is based on philosophical presuppositions, not on science.

As can be seen, the "secular/atheist" position is not based on observable facts. It is an expression of faith. It is, essentially, a religious point of view. As such, the attempt to purge expressions of the Christian faith from the public square is not an attempt to get religion out of public life. Rather, it is an attempt to replace one faith foundation with an entirely different one.

What to Do

As Christians, we do not need to simply sit back and allow this attempt at cultural transformation to move forward unopposed. It is okay, even right, for us to stand up against FFRF and its companion organizations. But we must do it in a particular way. We must do it by exposing the false premise of its assumptions, then fill in the gap with the truth of the gospel. FFRF's endeavor is an evangelistic effort. They are trying to spread the gospel of Secular Humanism, and their method is to clear the playing field of any op-

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posing points of view. We simply can't allow ourselves to be cleared. We must stand strong with a clear voice, expose their false beliefs, and share the truth.

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