

Rivals of Christianity 4 Secularism

Secularism is the religion against religion. Secularism (from the Latin *saeculum* meaning age, race or generation) is the culture that believes only in this age or world. There is no other life or other world or other determiner of earthly things. The secular world is the godless world. Everything is explained in terms of present, sensory, material existence. In particular, it is an attack on the Christian worldview and the control of the Church. In the history of Western Civilisation, the Church (principally the Roman Catholic Church, but with Protestant copies) has had strong ideological control over the culture. It can be argued that Western (European) civilisation grew out of the matrix of the Church. However, with the development of the printing press (Gutenberg 1455AD) the Church's control over learning was dissipated. The rival to Biblical (and Ecclesiastical) learning was Classical learning (Greek and Latin) which supplied a ready (mythical) alternative to Biblical themes and explanations. This alternative was called Classical Humanism and was the basis of the Renaissance (or Re-birth) of Man-centred learning and Man-instigated significance. This revived interest in Classical antiquity commenced in Florence about 1450 and was a distinct cultural (particularly artistic) influence for the next 100 years. Following the Renaissance was the Reformation, which was the reaction from within the Church to the ecclesiastical and political control of the Roman Catholic Church. Following the Reformation and the religious wars of the 1600's anti-God theory became much more virulent and aggressive. This aggression took the ideological form of the European Enlightenment of the 1700's. This has formed the base of the modern secular outlook. Associated with the Enlightenment (or Endarkenment: it depends on who is writing the history!) was the rise of modern science. Modern science (and its offshoot of technology) has been very successful and beneficial in analysing and changing our human predicament. Whether science, of itself, implies a denial of God is another question. However, it can be so used. The modern educated mindset is said to be 'enlightened' or sceptical of religious themes. To obtain a modern education is to be trained in religious scepticism and the ridicule of religious attitudes, in particular the ridicule of Christendom. Associated with science (or scientism: belief in science - science as religion) is a reductionism whereby all explanation of human events is reduced to mechanisms of matter and the conceivable manipulations of the laboratory. This is specifically a denial and a repudiation of any spirit explanation. To introduce spirit is supposed to be a denial of the rule of Nature.

Two Types of Religion

I suggest that there are basically two types of religion: Father God religion and Mother Earth religion. A religion is a system of beliefs that govern our behaviour. The religion may or may not refer to or require a god. This implies that religion is an attitude to life based on a system of beliefs about the nature of reality. A Father God religion is over against the Mother Earth religion. The Mother Earth religion is usually associated with Nature and is usually an affirmation of natural processes. I believe that, Biblically, Christianity is a Father God religion. God stands over against Nature rather than being a part of it or an expression of it. However, currently Mother Earth religion dominates the culture which greatly influences non-Biblical (or

liberal) Christianity. I want to compare these two approaches to religion.

The Comparison between Father God Religion (FGR) and Mother Earth Religion (MER)

- 1) FGR is supernatural. There is something beyond the natural. MER is Natural. Nothing is beyond nature. There may be concepts of a god but these are strictly within (or projections of) natural processes.
- 2) FGR uses authority and hierarchy. MER uses control and equality.
- 3) FGR tends to be male dominated and sin oriented. MER tends to be female dominated and acceptance oriented.
- 4) FGR requires submission and conformity. MER requires freedom (moral self-determination), self-expression and affirmation.
- 5) FGR promotes superimposed values correcting one from outside. MER promotes inherent values and self-correction.
- 6) For FGR Nature is a creature made by and dependent on God. For MER Nature is everything and the womb of all.
- 7) For FGR Nature is temporary and finite (created). For MER Nature is eternal and infinite (uncreated).
- 8) FGR has a moral base of freedom and accountability before God for one's actions (Judgement). MER has a moral base determined by the system and laws of Nature (Determinism).
- 9) FGR says we are morally responsible to God. MER says morality is based upon survival and purely natural processes. There is no accountability outside the system, for nothing exists outside the system of Nature.
- 10) FGR has pre-determination by God alone (Predestination). MER has destiny by Nature and the outworking of individual, chance events in the context of natural processes.
- 11) For FGR science is a tool for greater knowledge about the Creation. For MER science is a faith keeping one within the system of Nature (scientism).
- 12) For FGR sin is disobeying God. For MER sin (if you insist on using the term) is just being unnatural or ignorant. (Question: if nature is everything how can one be unnatural?)
- 13) For FGR sin is the human problem and the obstacle to be dealt with. For MER the human problem is ignorance which is removed by education and enlightened social processes.
- 14) FGR maintains absolute moral values. MER insists that values are relative to your social context (relativism). Values have no reality beyond social usefulness (utility).
- 15) FGR says that Man's spirit transcends Nature. MER says the Man is a part of Nature. If you insist on using the word 'spirit' then if Man has a spirit then it is part of the spirit of Nature.
- 16) FGR requires a spirit realm (heaven, throne, angels, demons) beyond nature and natural process. MER requires no spirit realm. 'Spirit' can be only a manner of speaking.
- 17) FGR maintains that the creation is static and complete (Gen 2:1, Acts 15:18, Heb 4:3). MER sees Nature as eternal, self-existent and evolving in terms of its own devices.
- 18) For FGR experience is always finite and able to be appraised (judged). For MER experience can be infinite and ineffable (the personal mysticism of my journey).
- 19) FGR promotes personal sacrifice (commandment based). MER promotes personal gratification (need based).
- 20) FGR is outside-command oriented. One does one's duty. MER is inside-need oriented. One does what suits one's interests.
- 21) FGR teaches eternal life. MER asserts natural (this) life only.
- 22) FGR speaks of heaven and earth. MER speaks of earth only.

- 23) FGR speaks of the resurrection of the dead. MER treats death as the natural end of Man. Man merges with the natural rhythms of Nature (Extinction).
- 24) FGR speaks of a hope beyond nature (we walk by faith). MER accepts nature as the natural, visible limit of what is possible.
- 25) FGR is God centred. We come under God's provision. MER is Nature centred. We come under the provisions of Nature. There is no expectation (nor can there be any expectation) beyond what Nature can provide.
- 26) FGR says that nature is corrupt and it awaits the liberation of the sons of God (Rom 8:20-22). MER says that Nature has its own wisdom and regulation which is good in itself.
- 27) FGR is based on revelation. One is guided in one's experience. MER is based on experience. One invents one's own journey which takes on its own fascination.
- 28) In FGR one experiences correction to the correct path. In MER one creates one's own path.
- 29) In FGR the mystery is in God. God contains and controls all mystery, which means that there is ultimately no mystery that God does not fathom. In MER the mystery is in Nature which may be an impenetrable mystery even to natural processes.
- 30) FGR promotes the life of faith and the attaining of visionary goals under God. MER can only offer the ministrations of Nature. All that is possible is under the constraint of Nature.

It may be seen from the above that I claim that Biblical religion is based on the belief in a Father God who is profoundly and purposefully interested in His creation, the nature of which He will bring to His conclusion.

God and Free Enquiry

One of the main sources of secularism was the reaction to the control that the Roman Catholic Church exercised in European affairs. This meant that the Enlightenment had a distinct anti-clerical force. Established religion was seen as a way to control the masses with priestcraft and superstition. Religion was the opiate of the people. Religion has been replaced by other ideologies such as Nationalism, Marxism, Nazism, Evolution and Freudianism. I would argue that, although the Church has corrupted itself in its control over society, in a free intellectual environment, God has nothing to fear from free enquiry. In fact, free enquiry has trouble freeing itself from the shackles of materialism, the legacy of scepticism and the Establishment hostilities of the Enlightenment. I would be the first to defend the freedom to not believe in God. This is not because I agree with that position, but because I recognise that if there is no freedom not to believe, then there is no freedom to believe. Controlled or steered believing is thought police, political correctness, mind control and ultimately, totalitarian oppression. One can openly, honestly and logically locate God in learning and culture. The Christian task is to bring every thought captive to obey Christ (2Cor 10:5). Out of the conceptual data of the culture we can create structures that glorify God. Freedom is often seen as freedom from religious assumptions rather than freedom to locate one's assumptions including religious ones. Reason can glorify God. Reason is not the problem; we are limited by our assumptions.

The Secular Mindset

The mindset inherited from the Enlightenment can be described as including:

- 1) Naturalism. Nature says it all. Nature is the source, the extent and the goal of everything. That which cannot be described as natural cannot exist.
- 2) Determinism. Nature determines our extent. There is no free will: the natural world is a necessary world which is continuous, self-sufficient and unified.
- 3) Empiricism. This states that all knowledge is by sense experience. There are no innate ideas. All true knowledge is based on the senses alone. Non-sensory based knowledge is meaningless.
- 4) Materialism. All natural processes are movements of matter. There is nothing real that is supposedly supernatural.
- 5) Utilitarianism. The value of a thing is based upon its use. That thing is good which is best for me or for the greatest number. Value is based upon utility, not abstract, eternal values established by another valuer.

The Christian Response

Actually the Enlightenment is a response/reaction to Christianity. But as the dominant intellectual force of the pagan culture, secularism requires a Christian response. Christianity is always surrounded by pagan rivals. The Christian mindset includes:

- 1) God, a supernatural Being in a supernatural realm, exists and He has created whatever exists, both the heavens and the earth.
- 2) Nature, or matter, is created good but is subject to corruption and decay as a result of the judgement of God on human sin.
- 3) God provides the way of salvation from corruption by atoning for human sin by the Death of Jesus Christ (Calvary).
- 4) The way to live is the Way of Holiness before a holy God.
- 5) Our corruptible human nature can become a new creation in Christ (2Cor 5:17). God has already prepared this (Eph 2:10).
- 6) God will judge His Creation by the Man Jesus Christ whom He has appointed for this purpose, raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31).
- 7) The culture consists of strongholds, arguments, beliefs, icons, institutions that defy God. It is our Christian task to reassemble/rearrange ideas in the culture into structures that glorify and justify God (2Cor 10:3-6).