

Yankee Steve's Almanac

for the Week of December 16, 2008

Utopianism and Religion

Every generation thinks that the one that preceded it was a little stupid. Or if it wasn't stupid its leaders were not well informed. This generation is no different except that it does that with more gusto.

Most of the time those who are thought of as learned will fix the lack of progress up to this point on religion. If it were not for religion, we are told, we would be much further along by now. Therefore if we are to make substantial strides in the future we will need to do away with religion.

But what in their opinion is religion? In most cases they have a simple enough answer. Religion is a substitute for scientific learning. It is a carry over from cave man days. Before science came religion was used to explain events taking place in the cosmos. Thunder and lightning in the heavens was Zeus venting.

We are told that instead of looking away to some unseen deity we should fall back on ourselves, and that this is in our best interests. As a matter of fact this is what we must do for all we have is ourselves. Anything else is a delusion. There are no deities, no powers, and no creator. What we see is all that there is; there is nothing else.

No one should think that this is a new idea. Listen to the sophist Protagoras [490-420 B.C.] "Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are not that they are not, and of the things that are that they are."

We should not miss the real point here. In place of God we should bow before progress. This has become the new deity. Who knows what this god will do for us? We need this deity because the old one has not really helped us. We still get sick and we still die. So maybe this new deity will cure all of our diseases or even put an end to death. Ours will become a perfect world so that without God and religion we will have fashioned an Eden for ourselves, a utopia unlike anything before it.

All we have to do to attain this dream is do away with whatever hinders progress, especially religion. When the guillotine falls on religion humankind will take a giant step forward. When atheism finally triumphs man will come into his own.

Religion speaks in response to all this and makes inquiry.

What benefit is it to me to live in a world without disease and death, if in that same world I feel empty, or I am not chaste, or not at peace within myself? Isn't it true that science cannot make

men good? And what will happen to me, I mean the real me, if I am afflicted? What will I do when science cannot save me from the greatest of all afflictions - hopelessness and despair?

Am I a body only, a collection of atoms that at death will be returned to the cosmos? Or is there within each of us a *human spirit* that can be up and alive and inspiring to others while the body is down and approaching an expected end?

Religion, like science, admits that there is misery everywhere and that men of good will should try and improve our world. But unlike science, religion can do something for the human spirit, for the real me. It is at the door of the human spirit that science must stop. It can go no further. To that door religion has the key.

Thanks be to God that a host of individuals can be brought forward who have smiled through adversity and pain because they realized that the human spirit, no matter what the situation, can make contact with the Divine Spirit. The mathematical genius Blaise Pascal argues this case as well as anyone.

Grant me the favor, Lord, to reform my corrupt reason and to conform my sentiments to thine. Let me esteem myself happy in affliction and in the impotence of acting externally, purify my sentiments so that they may no longer be repugnant to thine; and let me thus find thee within myself, since I cannot seek thee without because of my weakness. For, Lord, thy kingdom is within thy faithful; and I shall find it within myself, if I find there thy Spirit and thy sentiments. *Thoughts, Letters and Minor Works*

What a buoyant soul! Just let the modern day utopians try to equal that.