

“I perceive that you are very religious”

How would you describe our world today? Our nation? Our community? Would you say that it is religious, or not? There may be different answers to this question, depending on how one defines religion.

Many people equate “religion” with the worship of some divine being. Christians, for example, worship the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Muslims worship Allah. Jews claim to worship the God of Abraham and Moses. Hindus worship Brahmin, Sheva, and Vishnu. Native Americans worship the “Great Spirit.”

But religions can also be of the non-theistic variety. Buddhism, for example, is more of a path that people follow to reach Nirvana or Enlightenment. It is based on teachings from Siddhartha Gautama, the “Buddha.” There is no Supreme Being in Buddhism that stands as a moral judge over creation. But like theistic religions, Buddhists have sacred texts, spiritual leaders or teachers, taboos, mandates, rituals, and an end goal.

Even ideologies like Communism and Marxism can be considered religions. Their sacred texts include the Communist Manifesto and the writings of Karl Marx. They have gurus or “spiritual” guides, such as Saul Alinsky. They hold to certain tenets or beliefs, such as the belief that there are two classes of people in society, oppressors and the oppressed.

Secular Humanism is another modern example of a non-theistic religion. Secular humanists believe that man is the center of all things. Their sacred text is the Humanist Manifesto. Secular Humanism rejects any notion of a divine Being that rules over all. It sees earthly authority as supreme, which might explain why there is a push towards one world government.

Most of what secular humanists believe, teach, and confess is the polar opposite of Christianity. Modern science is their dogmatics. Health is their matter of ultimate concern. Their “prophets” and “preachers” are government endorsed scientists. Their sacramental rituals include abortion (the sacrifice of human life as opposed to the life-giving flesh and blood of Christ) and, more recently, government mandated injections. Their end goal (eschatology) is building a secular “heaven” here on earth that is free of all suffering.

If you are one of those who equates religion with the worship of a supernatural deity, then you might conclude that our world is not very religious. After all, it is true that there has been a steady decline in the number of those who identify with some organization religion in our country. But hopefully you are beginning to see something that St. Paul did when he observed the religious devotion of the Greeks in Athens. In his sermon at the Areopagus in Acts 17, he declared, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.”

Their religion was false, of course, just as all other religions except for Christianity. But there is plenty of religious fervor and devotion to go around these days. Take, for example, the recent remarks of the Governor of New York delivered at a church:

“We are not through this pandemic. I wished we were, but I prayed a lot to God during this time. And you know what? God did answer our prayers. He made the smartest men and women, the scientists, the doctors, the researchers, he made them come up with a vaccine. That is from God to us. And we must say, “Thank you, God. Thank you.” And I wear my vaccinated necklace all the time to say “I’m vaccinated.” All of you. Yes, I know you’re vaccinated. You’re the smart ones. But, you know, there’s people out there who aren’t listening to God and what God wants. You know this. You know who they are. I need you to be my apostles. I need you to go out and talk about it and say: “We owe this to each other.” We love each other. Jesus taught us to love one another. And how do you show that love but to care about each other enough to say, “Please get vaccinated, because I love you. I want you to live.” I want our kids to be safe when they’re in schools. I want you to be safe when you go to a doctor’s office or a hospital and are treated by somebody. You don’t want to get the virus from them. You’re already sick, or you wouldn’t be there.”

Regardless of your opinion on the mRNA injections (and I realize there are many), aren’t these words rather telling? When a governor tells people gathered in a church that they need to be her “apostles” to “preach” this message of love (i.e., get vaccinated), that is religious rhetoric. As I have said in previous articles, I will not tell someone what they should or should not do with regard to the vaccine or any other coronavirus mitigation efforts. That is your personal decision. But as Christians, shouldn’t we be just a little bit alarmed by this kind of language? How does she know that this is God’s answer to our prayers? There have been plenty of adverse effects from the mRNA injections (Guillain-Barre Syndrome, myocarditis, anaphylaxis, paralysis, and death, to name a few). Are those who have suffered as a result of these vaccines experiencing God’s answer to prayer?

The point of sharing this with you is not to burden anyone’s conscience regarding your health decisions. That is being done enough already by people like Governor Hochul and even President Biden, who are not shy about their belief that those who forgo the government approved injections are not smart and are actually a threat to the population. The point, rather, is to show you that there is a new religion at work in our world today and its adherents are many.

All of this comes down to the question that Martin Luther asked in his Large Catechism: What does it mean to have a god? His answer:

“A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. ³ If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God [Hebrews 11:6]. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god.¹”

¹ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., [*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*](#) (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 359.

Whatever you set your heart on, whatever you put your trust in, whatever you look to for refuge in all distress—that is your god. To whom, or to what are we looking for refuge in all distress today? In whom or what are we putting our trust? Is it the true God, or a false one? This is the question that each of us must answer for ourselves, especially in this time of great spiritual unrest and confusion.

God gives us earthly authorities for our good. That is a Biblical and true statement. But God has also given us our reason and all our senses. We should not listen to those who would pit faith against reason. Nor should we listen to those who irresponsibly speak of love as if there is only one possible way to show love to our neighbors. Our faith and trust should be in God above all things—even above earthly rulers.

And yes, love your neighbor as yourself, according to your calling. Love would compel us to show compassion to those who are sick and suffering, whether vaccinated or not, not to cast them aside or treat them as though they were a threat to us or to others.

As baptized children of God, we know the end game. We know who the victors will be. Our eternal future is already sealed and promised by the Lord. Christ carried our infirmities and sorrows. He died so that we would live in Him. This is where our hope lies. It certainly does not lie in this world, which is passing away. Let us continue to pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus!”

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