

THE STATE OF THE UNION



By: Dick Jones

Secular Humanism:

According to Professor James Hitchcock, who writes in his book, *What is Secular Humanism?* the adjective *secular* “comes from the Latin *saeculum*, which means *time* or *age*.” To refer to a person as *secular* “means that he is completely timebound, totally a child of his age, a creature of history, with no vision of eternity.” Humanism is a man-centered worldview, which insists that man is his own measure, autonomous, and essentially good unless tainted by negative factors such as poverty or poor education. It is inherently relativistic and tends toward subjectivism in order to find meaning.

Our system of government — a representative democracy that rests on the Rule of Law (this is known as a Republic) — presupposes a moral consensus that has a transcendent basis. This has been in large part since colonial times, the Judeo-Christian worldview, which transcends cultural and societal pressures because it rests on general revelation (laws of nature and nature’s God) and special revelation (Scripture — especially the Ten Commandments). The Founding Fathers were aware that our system of government was likely to succeed only as long as this moral consensus existed. In retrospect, we understand that the unique philosophical and ideological circumstances that allowed the establishment of the early American Republic were largely due to the Northern European Reformation and the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment, which was more compatible with the Christian worldview than its philosophical cousin, the French Enlightenment. Presbyterian minister and early president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), John Witherspoon, was a mentor and teacher to many influential men during the time

of the Revolution, including James Madison, who is often thought of as the Father of our Constitution. Madison is a good example of a brilliant man raised and educated within the framework of orthodox Calvinism, but who apparently fell away from a vital evangelical faith as an adult. Notwithstanding his apostasy, he continued to view life largely through a Judeo-Christian worldview or ideological lens. Witherspoon was the only ordained minister who signed the Declaration of Independence and, through his Calvinism and Scottish Common Sense Realism, he directly and indirectly impacted the early Republic for decades.

The challenge (perhaps insurmountable) that we face today is the fact that we have lost any meaningful moral consensus in our culture as Christians have retreated into pietism and apathy. This means that there is no transcendent basis upon which law might be based, hence all law has become increasingly sociological and arbitrary. Secular humanism cannot provide the transcendent basis necessary for a representative democracy to function as the Founding Fathers intended and, in fact, it tends toward what many of the Fathers feared — a mobocracy ruled by demagogues who take advantage of the uncertainty and moral chaos.

It is unfortunate that so many well-meaning Christians (David Barton is one example) believe it necessary to claim that all the Founding Fathers were Christians. They fail to grasp the power of one's worldview to shape and influence one's actions. While many of the Founding Fathers were undoubtedly Christian, some very prominent men were either Deists or Unitarian, though they continued to view life largely through a Judeo-Christian worldview. Two examples are Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson was quite clear in his private correspondence that he was a Unitarian. Franklin's Deism is evident in his autobiography.

The Declaration of Independence bears witness of Jefferson's belief in God, though certainly not in conformity to Scripture. Four references to God found in the Declaration are:

- (1) *“laws of nature and Nature's God”*
- (2) *all men “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights”*
- (3) *an appeal to “the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions”*
- (4) *“a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence”*

(The last two were biblical references to the God of history standing in judgment over the world.)

Benjamin Franklin serves as perhaps the best example of a man who operated largely out of a Judeo-Christian worldview, but who was very clear about his reservations regarding orthodox Christianity. He wrote in his autobiography:

“I never was without some religious principle. I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world and governed it by his Providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing of good to men; that our souls are immortal; and that all crimes will be punished, and virtue rewarded either here or hereafter. These I esteemed the essentials of every religion; and, being found in all the religions we have in our country, I respected them all, though to differing degrees...”

Notice what is missing: the belief in the Deity of Christ, the necessity of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, justification by faith alone, salvation by grace, the belief in the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, and any real sense of the possibility of a personal relationship with God.

In spite of what is missing, Franklin's presuppositions (core beliefs) provided a transcendent basis from which the early American Republic could take root. His Deism, or perhaps Unitarianism, was sufficiently tied to both general revelation and special revelation that the Rule of Law made sense to him. This is not the case in the Secular Humanism of our day. In 1933 the Humanist Manifesto asserted that (1) the universe was self-existing, hence no Creator (2) the nature of the universe made supernatural guarantees of human values meaningless (relativism) (3) the end of man's life is fulfillment in the here and now only (4) man is sufficient in and of himself to realize his dreams. John Dewey, the father of 20th century public education, was an original signer. Forty years later the second Humanist Manifesto went even farther, asserting: (1) that traditional dogmatic authoritarian religions that place revelation or creed above human need or experience do a disservice to the human species (2) that we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species (3) that all moral values derive their source from human experience — ethics is autonomous and situational (4) and that the right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized.

Recall as well that it was Benjamin Franklin who called for prayer during the Constitutional Convention. George Washington was probably a Christian, though much that he wrote sounded more like Franklin and Jefferson's understanding of God and faith. In his well-known Farewell Address, he said,

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are an indispensable support. In vain would the man claim the tribute of Patriot, who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, the firmest props of the duties of man and citizens...and let us with caution

indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.”

In his first inaugural address in 1789, he said, “The propitious smile of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and refuses what heaven itself has ordained.”

Some key differences between the secular humanism of our day and Benjamin Franklin’s worldview:

<i>Franklin’s Worldview</i>		<i>The Humanists’ Worldview</i>
1. <i>existence of God a given</i>	vs.	<i>either atheism, agnosticism, pantheism, or an irrational leap to gain meaning in life.</i>
2. <i>God governs Creation and gives it order</i>	vs.	<i>cosmic disorder, chaos, or mere chance</i>
3. <i>serve God by doing good to man</i>	vs.	<i>doing good to man for self-gratification</i>
4. <i>man has an immortal soul</i>	vs.	<i>man may have an immortal soul, but not as a distinct individual with a distinct eternal destiny</i>
5. <i>eternal reckoning according to works</i>	vs.	<i>no rewards or punishments by divine judge</i>

Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, et al, were operating out of a Judeo-Christian worldview (more particularly Christian). The Founding Fathers did not simply come up with the idea of forming a representative democracy with the Rule of Law. The early American Republic was the result of a confluence of historical circumstances, philosophical presuppositions, religious convictions, and a cultural legacy that originated centuries before. When contemporary political leaders of either major political party speak of transplanting democracy to peoples without the historic and religious heritage early Americans enjoyed, they are demonstrating an abysmal ignorance of our Western cultural heritage. When political

leaders work to undermine and circumvent the transcendent basis which made our Republic possible (biblical Christianity), they are working toward our destruction. Certainly they have no right to “claim the tribute of Patriot” as George Washington said in his Farewell Address.

We ought not to be surprised when people embracing a worldview of secular humanism support and promote pro-death policies such as abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, fetus harvesting for use in stem cell research, or homosexual marriage. These sorts of practices are the logical consequences of their worldview. However, we should be surprised when professing Christians, pastors, and other religious and political leaders who profess to be Christian and who ought to know better do the same. Churches must exercise their responsibility to disciple their people and administer biblical discipline when political leaders who are church members act and promote anti-Christian behavior in the public square. Political candidates and office holders who name the name of Christ must be held accountable for their political positions. It is a fact that one’s political positions often reveal one’s spiritual condition.

We face challenges in our day that will result in catastrophic consequences to America if Christians fail to act on their convictions. Some measures each of us can take that may make a difference and allow us to regain ground we have lost during the last 140 years are:

(1) Know your history. Today hardly anyone knows or cares about American history. Anyone who takes the time to inform himself will always have the upper hand in discussions or debates regarding political issues.

(2) Know the fundamentals of your faith and have some idea about the current state of the Church and some historic background, at least since the Reformation.

(3) Support your church.

(4) Become politically involved to the extent you are able. You can vote, send a contribution to a candidate, attend local and county political meetings (hardly anyone does, so most can be involved to the extent they want); write letters and emails to political leaders and newspapers.

(5) Offer scholarships to Christian youngsters who are serious about their faith — not only college students but K-12 as well.

(6) Participate in social and civic organizations, work and support them and, as you have opportunities, let people know where you stand and why you believe what you believe.

(7) PRAY as though the future safety and prosperity of your children and grandchildren depend on the answers you receive — because it truly does!

Finally, Christians must recognize and affirm that there is no true king but Jesus, and no true sovereign but Christ.