

“Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”

A disturbing (but not surprising) article, written by Rod Dreher, appeared in the Aug. 6, 2017 issue of **Tampa Bay Times**. It was entitled, “Trump can’t save American Christianity.” Frankly, I didn’t know anyone ever thought that “Trump” could “Save American Christianity!” However, the writer of said article referred to the fact that some of “Trump’s” most ardent supporters are “evangelicals and other conservative Christians.” His point of emphasis was that, even though they support President Trump, this in the long run will not save their cause.

For the record, I agree with the author’s negative affirmation: “Trump Can’t Save American Christianity!” Nor can any other President, regardless of party affiliation. What disturbs me is the fact that I believe the evidence overwhelmingly substantiates the author’s main point of emphasis, it being that “Christianity is declining in the United States.” He further stated that: *“Americans are falling away from the church in unprecedented numbers. According to a 2014 Pew study more than one in three millennials refuse to identify with a religious tradition — a far higher number than among older Americans. Most of these young adults are likely to stay away from church as they age. This generational shift is a watershed. America is now on the same path of religious decline pioneered by Europe and Canada.”*

The author went on to say that *“the faith American Christians profess is, from a moral and theological perspective, shockingly thin.”* He further mentioned a sociologist at Notre Dame, who has long studied this phenomenon, who has concluded that *“Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’ has displaced authentic Christianity as the true religion of American Christians.”* He further stated that *“in M.T.D., the highest goal of the religious life is being happy and feeling good about oneself. It’s the perfect religion for a self-centered, consumerist culture. But it is not Christianity.”*

For the record, I have a much more narrow view of what constitutes genuine “Christianity” than the writer of the article cited. Biblical speaking, “Christianity” can only include that of which **Christ** was the Author, Builder, and Founder. Even as *“God is not the author of confusion,”* I Cor. 14:33, Jesus Christ is not the founder of thousands of different and differing denominations! It is very sad that **man** has built thousands of denominations, wearing a multiplicity of human names, following many contrasting church manuals, creeds, confessionals, etc., and then has lumped all of this under the broad label of “Christianity!” Sadly, “American Christianity” does not harmonize with the “Christianity” of which Jesus is the Founder, and which is clearly described upon the pages of the New Testament.

However, that having been said, I recognize that there are millions of sincere, Bible believing Americans, whose manner of life and positive influence generally far exceeds that of a greatly increasing number of atheistic, Bible-ridiculing populace who have embraced this thing called **“Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”** Sadly, and especially among “millennials,” it seems that *“the highest goal of the religious life is being happy and feeling good about oneself,”* regardless of how ungodly and depraved their lives may be! Perhaps contrary to the thinking of some, I am not quite as old as Methuselah, but I do remember when most people took it for granted that people in general believed in God, they believed the Bible to be the word of God, and were not ashamed to label some relationships and certain forms of conduct as being “sinful,” and even “intolerable!”

Consequently, as the writer of the aforementioned article stated, “Americans are falling away from the church in unprecedented numbers.” And, for Bible-believing Christians who

sincerely try to be “soul winners for Jesus,” this situation is very, very troubling. Of course, this is no excuse for not trying to reach others with the gospel, but it does help explain the rejection they so often experience.

We ask, what has brought about the mindset which prompts one to automatically disregard anything the Bible says which contradicts their personal desires? There are many factors at work; we will name some of them.

1. The Devil is busy! He is our “*adversary*,” and he “*walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*,” I Peter 5:8. He is “*a liar and the father of it*,” John 8:44, and he utilizes many “*devices*,” 2 Cor. 2:11, in pursuing his nefarious schemes.

2. Modern Denominationalism! This may sound surprising at first, but let us remember that Jesus prayed that all who believe on Him through the apostles’ “*word*” might be one, so that “*the world may believe*” that He was sent by God, John 17:20-21. But looking at this point further, think of the countless preachers, who claim to believe the Bible, but who have repeatedly affirmed that “it doesn’t make any difference what you believe so long as you are honest and sincere.” This kind of teaching helps pave the way for people eventually denying both the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible.

3. The American Family! According to the Bible, marriage is for keeps, it being for the life of the parties who formed the marriage union, Matt. 19:6, and Parents are commanded to “bring..up” their children “*in the training and admonition of the Lord*,” Eph. 6:4. But, alas! Divorce is common place, and children are often left to fend for themselves. Is it any wonder that they often find themselves in the wrong crowd?

4. Public Education! It is a fact that Secular Humanism is the philosophy that influences so much of the curriculum in the modern class room. If one is a secular humanist, we automatically know three things about him: (1) He does not believe in God; (2) He believes he owes his very existence to Evolution; (3) He believes his conduct should be regulated by “situation ethics.” It reminds me of the immoral, apostate condition of the children of Israel during the time of the judges, a time when “*there was no king in Israel*,” when “*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*,” Judges 17:6; 21:25.

5. Multiculturalism. This philosophy places humans at the center of reality, and thus affirms that “all perspectives and worldviews are equally valid,” and that “we cannot make judgments regarding right and wrong along biblical principles.” Of course, this is a flat contradiction of such scriptures as John 17:17 wherein we learn that God’s “*word is truth*,” and 2 John 9 which states that “*whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God*.”

6. Relativism. This philosophy is very similar to that of Multiculturalism. It is “the philosophical doctrine that all criteria of judgment are relative to the individuals and situations involved.” This means that value judgments have no universal validity, and this leads to Moral Relativism, “the philosophical notion that right and wrong are not absolute values, but are personalized according to the individual and his or her circumstances.”

Conclusion: In 2 Tim. 3:1, an inspired apostle affirmed that “*in the last days perilous times will come*,” and in the verses immediately following he mentioned some of the conditions which would characterize those “*perilous times*.” Of course, from the biblical perspective, the “*last days*” pertain to the Christian dispensation, which is now in existence, and in which God speaks to us “*by His Son*,” Heb. 1:1-2, Who speaks to us through the New Covenant, of which He

is “*the mediator*,” Heb. 9:15-17. But as it relates directly to our nation, this century, and to the time in which we live, it is a fact that these times are especially “*perilous*” as it pertains to the general state of unbelief and complete indifference which characterizes so many, especially modern “millennials.” Throughout the nation, God-fearing people bemoan the fact that “we are losing our young people.” Of course, things tend to go in cycles, which (based upon many factors) may reverse and go in the opposite direction. But one thing is certain: Christians need to sit up and take notice! This is not a time for being squeamish about what we believe. It is not a time when we can refuse to stand up and be counted for what is right. A good farmer, when previous weather conditions have been adversarial, does not sit back and bemoan his bad luck; he works all the more diligently and plants more seed, knowing that he will succeed if he doesn’t quit. So it should be with us! Instead of becoming discouraged, and complaining, let us count our many blessings, faithfully serve God both “*in season and out of season*,” and sow the seed of the kingdom. By so doing, God will be pleased, the church will grow, and souls will be saved — including **your own!**

—B. Witherington