

“Atheism Has No Future”

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Mark 9:14-29*

An atheist was walking through the woods.

“What majestic Trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!” He said to himself. As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to look. He saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charge toward him.

He ran as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the bear was closing in on him. He looked over his shoulder again and the bear was even closer. He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw that the bear was right on top of him, reaching for him with his left paw and raising his right paw to strike him.

At an instant the Atheist cried out, “Oh my God!”

Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest went silent. As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky. “You deny my existence for all these years, teach others I don’t exist and even credit creation to cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?”

The atheist looked directly into the light, “It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps you could make the BEAR a Christian?”

“Very well,” said the voice.

The light went out. The sounds of the forest resumed. And the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed his head and spoke: “Lord bless this food, which I am about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen.”

Our atheist friend was about to, according to his belief, or lack thereof; end his future.

In these few moments this morning, I want you to hear and to separate two worldviews of momentous proportion. They possess great power in how one will live one’s life. The choice will determine roads taken, studies embarked upon, and relationships fathomed.

Radical secularists are championing the popular bestseller atheist books of the day, highlighting the “evils” of religion, disdaining all the pathology running rampant within the faith and among the faithful. Their adolescent screeds, semi-half truths and mostly half-baked philosophical diatribes make for popular consumption, but not much more.

The heavy hitting Atheism, of which these members are derivatives – is primarily the 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, modern and post modern remains with us. For him and others “God is Dead” – encompasses all reality! Atheism, may sugar coat its materialism, its there is nothing beyond, it’s only the here

and now, let's make the most of it! But, there is no future in atheism! There is no purpose! There is no meaning! There is no morality! There is no truth! (Apart from the present – construed as defined by the particular power group.)

So when I say Atheism has no future – what I mean is that this way of seeing the world – doesn't have a necessary drive to push into the future, for all one has is the now.

When one speaks of history – one is only recounting past events with no higher meaning or purpose. It is all without direction – without purpose. There is great similarity with today's atheism and antiquity's paganism. Paganism saw history in nature with its cycles and repetitions – all meaningless.

But, something wondrous happened! The pagan mythos was displaced by Christian. “Christianity's immense epic creation and salvation became for ancient men and women the one true story of the world, the conceptual shape of reality necessarily changed for them as well.” (p. 201), declares theologian David Bentley Hart.

You see – all of life changed!

Atheism has no future! There is no constraining vision for the generations of little atheists to follow. There are no master stories. There are no meta visions. There are no enduring truths. There are no absolute morals. There are no transcendent values!

My friends, my concern here is not individual atheism, for of course there are many good atheists. It is the radical secularists, i.e. cultural atheism, that I at least want to broach. Make no mistake about it – there is a definite disjunction between atheism and theism, not only individually, but culturally.

Professor John F. Haught summarizes this very well:

From a Christian theological point of view, however, the main point of the Bible is not morality anyway, but that we should never lose trust that our lives, human history, and the universe itself are part of a momentously meaningful drama of liberation and the promise of ultimate fulfillment. Furthermore, the sense that our lives have a meaning, and that life is worth living in a spirit of trust, provides an energy and direction to moral aspiration that it would otherwise lack. According to the cumulative religious wisdom of our species, without a basic trust that the whole of being, including the universe itself, has a meaning, our ethical juices will eventually dry up for lack of nourishment. Yet the new atheism is doing everything it can to convince us that the universe is pointless and that in the end our lives are destined for nothingness as well – not the most favorable setting for the flourishing of our capacity for goodness.

It will make a profound difference if our society believes that the universe is pointless – meaningless. Pagan thought once reigned. The Christian alternative has blessed our world greatly and continues to do so. We live in a created, meaningful purposeful world! History has purpose!

Theologian and Priest Fr. Richard John Neuhaus died earlier this year. His last book was recently published, titled American Babylon, Notes of a Christian Exile. A first rate mind, a devoted Christian and one not to shrink from controversy. One of his chapters is titled “Can An Atheist Be a Good Citizen?” As is the whole book, the chapter is erudite, learned and logical. Fr. Neuhaus makes the case that the formative ideas of our nation were explicitly taken from the Judeo-Christian conceptions of human nature, historical purpose and moral judgment. Among others he quoted George Washington on the necessity of religion to maintain national morality. Looking to the future – via transcendent values.

I give you Fr. Neuhaus' intriguing answer, as an entre for further thought...

In such a nation, an atheist can be a citizen, but he cannot be a good citizen. A good citizen does more than abide by the laws. A good citizen is able to give an account, a morally compelling account, of the regime of which he is part – and to do so in continuity with the constituting moment and subsequent history of that regime. He is able to justify its defense against its enemies, and to convincingly recommend its virtues to citizens of the next generation so that they, in turn, can transmit the order of government to citizens yet unborn. This regime of liberal democracy, of republican self-governance, is not self-evidently good and just. An account must be given. Reasons must be given. They must be reasons that draw authority from that which is higher than ourselves, from that which transcends us, from that to which we are precedently, ultimately, obliged.

My interest here is the transmission to citizens (humans) yet unborn...

What values?

What morals?

What meaning?

What purpose?

What authority higher than ourselves, that transcends that obliges. Atheism has no future! Are we the only measure of all things? If so it ends at each individual closing.

Mark 9 is rich in many ways. Here is a young boy possessed, in need of deliverance. The disciples can't handle the situation. The father brings his suffering son to Jesus. Jesus looks over them. "O faithless generation...bring him to me" At one point the father says to Jesus... "...but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father cried out, "I believe, help my unbelief!" The boy is delivered through prayer!

I thought of this text, in reference to Atheism has no Future. Atheism offers nothing. You know that. I'm not sure that the people who toy with it, really get it. It's magnitude, the emptiness, the abyss, the dread.

There are those pushing for a faithless generation. But, the stirring continues. We can't help it. After all, we are children of God. So we whimper up to Jesus "If you can do anything to help..." and Jesus comes back, if you can! "Search you own heart for possibilities!"

I love the father's so human response –

I believe, help my unbelief!

I believe that's our generations' cry today!

That my friends is why there will never be more than a handful of atheists! God bless them! But, let's not allow such radical secularism to pontificate from on high as to how to speak on the public square. That's another matter.

I believe, help my unbelief!

I trust you've chosen your path, firm it up and share it with others – through Christ a Great Future!

Amen.