

God, Secularism and Sanity

BEYOND CULTURE WARS BY MICHAEL S. HORTON

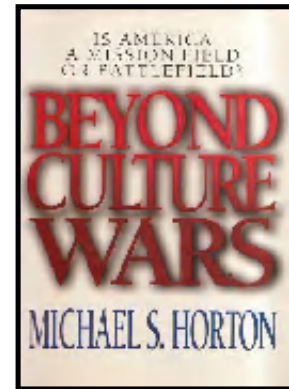
Secularism is described as a *condition* of contemporary life resulting from the secularization of society. Horton tells that it is the product of two movements:

- **The Enlightenment:** which denied or repudiated the supernatural (miracles, salvation, revelation...) leaving on room for naturalism (laws of nature, moral improvement, progress, reason...)
- **Post-modernity:** as a reaction to the modernity and rationalism by emphasizing experience over reason and the inner realities of the soul over the external realities of the objective world.

He adds:

Both are very secular movements, and yet Christians have often surrendered, usually unwittingly, to this process...in the name of “relevance”...

To understand these two movements in further detail – and the influence that each (or both) has had in secularism, is to perhaps read further (of course) but to also consider a solution or remedy.



In simple terms, Michael suggests that the remedy is “**a recovery of the vision of God.**” He then outlays a brief of this chapter and coming chapters – to explain both secularism and his recommended remedy. He explains:

With this chapter, we turn from the criticisms of the “culture wars” approach to a positive strategy for reformation and revival, based on the Lord’s Prayer.

The following chapters will gather our thoughts around each of the petitions (of the Lord’s Prayer)...

Mr. Horton explains that the history of Christianity has vacillated between a God of distinction or distance (called “transcendence”) and a God of nearness (which is called “immanence”). For the one, the believer might worship God and holy and honored; and for the other, might ask of God on the basis that God is near – and keep his promises to hear the prayers of the righteous.

The problem with the first is that God is untouchable; therefore, we are forever distance from Him; whereas the problem with the other is that we might lose that reverence and honor in the mistake of trying the fashion God into our own concept or ideal. The second can become a form self-fulfillment where the motivation or purpose became self-centered rather than God-centered.

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Michael continues with by describing what he calls the “human problem” or hedonistic paradox:

By running after self-fulfillment, we only find emptiness. **It is only by dying to self that we really begin to live** and it only by having our eyes raised toward heaven, by God’s grace, we begin to know true joy.

The trappings of self-fulfillment cannot be overemphasized. History bears out the “paradox” in *God’s people* and, with that, the grace that afforded repentance and restoration. Recall that in Exodus for example that the Hebrews wondered both spiritually and physically in a cycle of varying honor and reverence of God.

Michael points out that the Hebrew’s worship of pagan images was an attempt to “manifest” God – since God was not visible or tangible in form, other than the miracles and symbols. **Idolatry can occur anytime “the created” attempts to create the Creator;** or in other words, when humankind forgets his position before God. Michael asks the question:

Are our services God-centered or man-centered?

Do they train us (our services) to raise our eyes to heaven, or do they perpetuate our tendency to focus on earthly things like success, pleasure, and self-fulfillment?

Returning to the New Testament and writings of Paul, Michael reminds the reader that “Paul warned a church” of dwelling or worshiping the *things of this world*. In the second book of Timothy (chapter 3), Paul speaks of *The Last Days*, when people *will be lovers of themselves*; from *The Message*:

There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They’ll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they’re animals. Stay clear of these people.

Michael asks again:

Have we lost the radical impact of Paul’s announcement here?

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In view of the questions, Michael expresses the concern: “I worry about the extent to which the church has participated in the triumph of modernity” – to suggest that the church is captivated in the modern day with all those “trappings”. In the vein of “losing the vision” of God, the churches “are too concerned with organizational – as opposed to spiritual – issues.

In the “trappings” lies Christianity as the “moral answer” to our society or culture. Should Christianity be showcased – or ostensibly valued – as the basis of morality, or should Christianity pursue “theological confession” as a testimony of Christ? In answering this question, Mr. Horton turns to a philosopher Nietzsche; who believed that the “search for a Christian morality without a theology would destroy” both the church and the society. **Perhaps theology must be the first and foremost...**

In light of this possibility – that theology must come first – Michael states:
Any true reformation or revival in the church or in society today must begin not with a campaign for traditional values, but with a campaign for the knowledge, worship, praise, fear, and service of God.