

Round Table Discussion 6 - Religion in a Secular World

Religion in a Secular World

How can we get to the basics of what faiths really believe?

- How much do we need to know about the details of each others' faiths?
- Is it important to know the histories and stories?
- Or is it enough to share teachings on compassion, responsibility etc?

How can we separate truth from opinions, hearsay and tradition?

- Do we need to separate them?
- Can they be separated?

How important is individual knowledge, understanding and experience?

- Can shared experiences, and experiences we have in common, bring us together, whether we have a faith or not?
- Or are we somehow 'different' if we have a faith?

Can the world safely 'judge the faith by its followers'?

- Does our attitude change the more we meet people of other faiths?

Does it matter whether faiths and religions survive?

- Could we have a successful secular society with no religion at all?
- Or where religion was an entirely personal, internal affair?

Do we have the confidence in our faith to say who we are rather than who we are not?

- how do we get to that point?

Imagine ...

'Imagine there's no countries - it isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for - and no religion too
Imagine all the people - living life in peace... '

(John Lennon)

Is this something to strive for?

Atheist Bus poster campaign ...

**THERE'S PROBABLY
NO GOD
NOW STOP WORRYING
AND ENJOY YOUR LIFE**

So does belief in God mean life can't be enjoyable?
Is life with a belief a constant worry?

The Fate of Religion

If religion withers in a secular society — and such a fate is entirely possible — the blame cannot be laid directly at the feet of secularism and secularization. They can only be held accountable for creating the conditions for the actual cause: people's disinterest in religion. In a secular society, escape from domination by religion and religious leaders is possible. No one is beholden to any religious organization or religious values unless they specifically choose to be. If enough people choose not to be associated with religion, then religious organizations will decline due to decreases in income and membership.

Religious leaders are surely justified in lamenting such a possibility, but by opposing secularism and secularization, they make two errors. First, they place responsibility for such a predicament in the wrong place. Instead of attacking secularism for allowing people the chance to ignore religion, they should instead take a closer look at why they might be worth ignoring.

Second, any attempt to attack secularism essentially admits that they are unable to maintain people's interest and support on a purely individual, private, and voluntary basis. This may indeed be true, but it is a devastating thing to acknowledge — yet religious leaders who attack secularism don't seem to understand what it means. For some reason, they fail to realize that publicly supported and/or enforced religion is ultimately worthless. If they really believe that that is the only way that religion can survive, then they admit that religion itself is worthless — and that validates the secularist position that religion simply isn't necessary for the public good.

(Austin Cline)

The importance of debate

It is understood that we seek the truth in common and that truth will reveal itself in rational debate, albeit slowly and sometimes painfully, and with many setbacks.

One need fear the absence of truth only with the exclusion of debate. This does not mean that truth will issue from every debate; rather, it conforms with the fact that no one debate ends all debates on an issue, and that truth is more likely to come out in public debate than in a political climate where debate is discouraged.

The trend in our country and elsewhere to consign religious communities to the private realm is, in fact, a drift toward intolerance, despite claims to the contrary.

Religious communities must continue to speak and act in the public realm and to propose policies for the common good.

Non-religious persons and groups have that same freedom. The outcomes of public debate ought to depend on the rationality with which the various sides argue their case.

(Michael Smith)

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in the Round Tables ...

The debate needs to continue. In addition to the conference in February, a forum is being proposed to do just this. Please let us know what you think!