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Intellectual or Religious? Kristof Requires a Choice

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Each side of this divide has a hard time understanding the other. These worldviews are incompatible, and few persons on either side look very carefully at the real thought processes of their counterparts.

Secularists start with a basic commitment to a naturalistic universe. Humans are thus an evolved species who must find some way to organize themselves into meaningful units, limit their behavior, direct their energies, and pass the world on to the next generation. Marriage and the family unit were developed by human social evolution over time, and are therefore negotiable. Morality is a product of human experience, and will thus change over time. Human beings are autonomous individuals who have a right to define themselves and determine their own destiny. Limitations on individual freedom must be very few, and authorities are necessary evils that must always be questioned.

Christians, on the other hand, are committed to a supernatural worldview, which starts with the purposeful creation of the universe by God. Human beings are a special creation of God, made in His own image, and are granted important privileges, responsibilities, and gifts which are to be used to God's glory. Morality is determined by the divine Lawgiver, who has addressed His human creatures with His Word and command. God created institutions such as marriage for our good, and the institutions are not negotiable or to be subjected to human social engineering. Human beings are granted rare freedoms by God, but among these is no freedom to determine our own destiny or existence. We are limited in the exercise of our freedoms by God's intention and command. God, the ultimate Authority, has also instituted human authorities for our common good. Morality is not merely a human product, but the revelation of God. Truth never changes, and morality is not relative.

These two worldviews represent two different conceptions of basic reality, much less opposing sides in the abortion debate. Conflict over individual issues is not the cause, but the evidence, of this divide.

Liberal and conservative Christianity represent two different responses to this great conflict. The rise of the modern world and the secular worldview prompted some Christians to find some way of accommodating the secularist worldview. Liberal theology is one massive attempt to erase the chasm between the naturalistic and supernaturalistic worldviews. In the end, Christianity redefined without any of its essential teachings intact. Doctrines like the Virgin Birth, miracles, revelation, creation, and the resurrection are first "redefined" and then discarded. All that is left is a vague non-historical "spirituality." And this is virtually all that is left in liberal Protestantism.

Nicholas Kristof accidentally offers evidence of this in his column in last Friday's issue of The New York Times. [see Kristof's column] "My grandfather was fairly typical of his generation. A devout and active Presbyterian elder, he nonetheless believed firmly in evolution and regarded the Virgin Birth as a pious legend." This is Nicholas Kristof's kind of Christian: One who takes the doctrine of his church as "pious legend," but nonetheless serves as a "devout" Presbyterian elder.

The most important of the historic Presbyterian creeds is the Westminster Confession, which states that Jesus Christ was “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary.” Any room for doubt, there? Let’s face it: Kristof’s “devout” grandfather served as an elder in his church while denying a major doctrine of the faith. Kristof does not understand why evangelical Christians will not play along, and follow his grandfather’s example.

Worse still, Kristof complains that “the great intellectual traditions of Catholic and Protestant churches alike are withering, leaving the scholarly and religious worlds increasingly antagonistic.” He opposes scholarly and religious with no embarrassment. He identifies “the great intellectual traditions” of Christianity with those who deny the faith and teach heresy. Liberal theologians like Hans Kung are his heroes, and conservative Christians just must be anti-intellectual, since no thoughtful person could believe something like the Virgin Birth of Christ.

Kristof is scared to death. He reports that “Americans are three times as likely to believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus (83 percent) as in evolution (28 percent).” Alert the media! Call in Hans Kung! To the barricades! Wake up and smell the coffee.

“I do think we’re in the middle of another Great Awakening,” writes Kristof, and this will mean “a growing polarization within our society.” He’s probably right about that. Quite unintentionally, Nicholas Kristof had revealed the real nature of the challenge evangelical Christians “and all those committed to classical Christianity” now face.

The price required to be considered “intellectual” in Kristof’s world is the denial of truths revealed in the Bible. To hold these truths as the faith of the church is simply unthinkable in the modern world, he assures. Just ask his grandfather.

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