

RESPONSE TO ED ERICSON

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Let me begin with a recollection - the time is the early 1940's and I was approaching the age of 17. I was in high school in Barbados, which is my home and where my family for generations has been at home. At high school in Barbados, approaching 17, at that time I had been confirmed as a member of the Anglican church. But among my grandfather's books I found the writings of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh, and reading them, I found that I could no longer accept the evidences for Christianity that I had been raised on.

Now, Scripture was taught in high school - it was called, not religion, but Scripture - and I took what was then a bold step of stating that I no longer wanted to do Scripture as one of the mandatory courses at high school. My father took this very well; he has succeeded over 88 years of his life in concealing whether he has or does not have any religious faith. But he was willing to write for me a letter of one paragraph simply saying to the headmaster that on conscientious grounds, John will no longer be doing scripture at school. The headmaster put up no resistance, looked puzzled at this unusual request, but told me the classroom I would go to while the rest of the class was doing Scripture. I went there to find there were two other people present, colleagues of mine, and it turned out one was a Jew and the other was a Roman Catholic.

Because Barbados was overwhelmingly Protestant, it was possible in a very homogeneous situation of that sort, to mandate religion of a certain sort, and to get away with an exception clause which in all fairness was honored without any attempt at counter-persuasion. So, in that sort of social situation, the kind of church-state relationship that existed - an offshoot from the British type of state-church - was possible.

In some small places like Switzerland with a tradition of this kind, you can also make laws by referendum. But when I migrated in the early 70s to the United States of America, I realized the vastness, the plurality of this nation of ours. I like the word that I think Ed Ericson must have invented, the "severality" of our nation. In this situation it makes sense to have the kind of constitution and the kind of democracy that our founding fathers, in their wisdom, sought to institute. It is with gratitude to Ed Ericson that I stand here tonight, as I am myself just over the last year a new citizen of the United States of America, and I'm a historically oriented person, so that I am particularly grateful to a person like Ed Ericson who likes to delve back into history and to see the roots that are producing the fruits of today. And so all honor to Ed for teasing out into the open for us, these two species of democracy, and helping us to understand how they are to be defined and how they are interacting in our thinking and in our political life .

So, with him, I applaud the creation of a Constitution and the structures that gave us the kind of representative government that we have today, that we might achieve best for all peoples, and safeguard democracy from the mob attack of which he spoke.

It was different in Britain. In 1944 they mandated that religion had to be taught in high schools. Perhaps that is why even today theological discussion, as against news of religion, theological discussion can still hit the headlines in Britain. At the moment, as you might have seen recently in the *Wall Street Journal*, they are debating whether the lightning bolt that struck Yorkminster and destroyed part of its roof, was due to God being angry that recently David Jenkins was consecrated as Bishop of Durham in Yorkminster; the David Jenkins who declared he does not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus and cannot accept the physical resurrection of Jesus, and yet was made a bishop of the Anglican church. Those opposed to this idea think the lightning bolt demonstrates that God is upset by this.

Others argue that it was the offshoot of a farmer praying for rain, and that the direction of the cloud was somehow sent wrong. While David Jenkins himself, with true scientific method, simply said it was a chance of nature that the lightning discharged in that particular place. Why the lightning conductor didn't work, and why the smoke alarms didn't work, is still to be determined. So there might have been human intervention.

This kind of thing is still common in Britain, but *we* have a different tradition. I think our Constitution and our representative government reflects the plurality of views that we espouse here in the United States. Basically, therefore, I wholeheartedly agree with Ed's thesis. There are only a couple of questions that I would ask, perhaps warnings, that in making a case along a certain line, he may perhaps have overstepped that line in a direction with which I wouldn't agree.

For example, I think that Ed gives too strong a polarity between the general will and articulated representative government. There may be no such thing as a general will, but there is a populace, and I would hate the day to come when our representative government forgot that real people out there have to be listened to. The general population, my attorney, and my doctor and my hairdresser and the people I work with, the people who serve me and whom I serve in society, these are the people of the democracy. Somehow their voice needs to be heard, even if it is a plurality of voices, and we must be careful not to load the representatives with so much authority that they forget where they get that authority.

I would perhaps also not make so much of a stress as Ed does on reason. Susan Langer in her *Philosophy in a New Key*, makes a plea for the recognition of emotion as having forms and structures that can be educated and disciplined, and perhaps we need to ask after what is a Humanist sensibility as much as to ask after what are Humanist concepts because we are all more moved by emotion than we are by reason. Since Freud, it is very difficult to be a pure rationalist. In fact, scratch a rationalist with a Freudian probe and you find an emotionalist. The one person whom I know who most identifies himself as a rationalist is one of the most highly emotional people, with whom it is almost impossible to reason.

My third query to Ed Ericson's thesis would be this: What is the goal

down the road? We know that in communism they say, "Let there be a dictatorship of the proletariat until the time when the proletariat gets to the point where they can take over and govern." But that's gone on for half a century and it looks like, left to the dictatorship, it will go one for another half a century. Is the goal down the road that we will always have a cadre of experts to run the show; or are we going to educate the people and trust that educated judgment which is different from mob rule. So, I would suggest that we have to be careful how we say representative government is something that stands apart from the general will. We need perhaps to educate the general will to the point where the public can more and more participate in their government.

And we need, therefore, to learn how to educate that public and how to educate them in values that we think important. These are the issues that will be raised tomorrow and on Sunday.

My one pitch in closing is that as Humanists, when we seek to talk of education and education in values, we do not simply be found opposing and talk entirely of separation. I would like us to be found among the pioneers of a new ecumenical ethical education. If we say the churches are failing, then we cannot expect the churches to give the moral education to youth. Then who's going to do it if we say it can't be done in our schools because that's the church's concern? If there's nowhere else for me to get moral education "out there", am I not to have my children, and am I not myself, to learn it in the schools?

So I think we need to recognize that we are not divisible people who walk now in an atmosphere of religion and now in an atmosphere on secularity. We are indivisible people who, for certain purposes, may have to be treated as religious and for other purposes be treated as secular. I would like us to see something happening that allows us to match those who say we need family values, we believe in that too - how are we going to get that across? I think there's a lot of re-thinking needed because if Humanism is a religion, then on our present arguments we can't teach it in the schools. Then we ask what is that religion - it is modern scientific teaching of evolution and biology. Then we cut ourselves off from being able to teach these things in school. If we say that Humanism is *not* a religion, then we are faced with asking ourselves a lot of new questions about church and state, and education and state, and so on. So if we are not going to be a religion, we've got to stop defining ourselves simply in opposition to religion, and define ourselves in terms of something positive that we have to say to society.

Therefore, I would tend to be with those who not only say we must mark the separation of powers, but we've also got to enter a new era of learning the accomodation of those powers to one another.