



The Bad Christian and the Good Secularist

“If not for my faith, I would be barely human.” That was the answer English writer Evelyn Waugh gave when asked, as all Christians will be at some point, how he could call himself a Christian given his behavior. Often rhetorical, the question is sometimes a ploy used to gain leverage and discredit the target by painting him as a hypocrite or to discredit the faith through guilt by association. Yet it can also be sincere, and it is then, especially, that it warrants a response.



The first thing to note about those who honestly ask the question is that they must think very highly of Christianity; if they didn't, they'd merely assume you were acting wholly in accordance with your faith. This is the only thing that would explain — again, when the question is sincere — the *higher* standard to which they hold Christians. Others may exhibit the frailties and character flaws plaguing man, but they never hear “Such licentious behavior! How can you lay claim to hedonism?!” or, upon a loss of temper, “You call yourself a communist?!” Yet this raises a question: If Christianity provides this superior model for life, why don't these secularists embrace it?

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Don't ask me why I'm a terrible Christian. Maybe I'm just a lost soul. Virtues are caught more than taught; actions speak louder than words.

Walk the walk and show me how it's done.

Otherwise, you're simply a Monday-night quarterback condemning the players when your only accomplishment is creating a buttock-shaped impression in upholstery.

Yet certain secularists may honestly find many Christians lacking. One reason for this is simple:

Christians are lacking.

The second reason, which I'll address right now, has to do with something called mirroring.

When secularists take the measure of Christians and find them wanting, they generally don't apply the yardstick of Christianity. They often, in fact, don't even know what it is. If they did, they would recognize that their glass house is hardly an edifice from which to hurl holy stones; these secular critics, after all, are generally people of libertine morality and loose mouths, and their creed may not extend far beyond “If it feels good, do it.” What they are applying in their judgment are *their* values. Their statement “You're not a good Christian” is, logically translated, “You're not a good secularist.”

When considering this, note that secularists don't trouble much over most of the Seven Deadly Sins; they usually can't even name them (and lust and envy are in style). Rather, what earns their reprobation is some sub-category of wrath, which they may identify as “hate,” “intolerance” (incorrectly understood) or as merely a fit of pique or perturbation. And being that serene water of life is the image they have of the holy man, who they'd never thus describe but might rather call “enlightened”; just think of *Kung*



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Fu's Kwai Chang Caine.

Yet this is a secular ideal forged on a good dose of Hollywood entertainment and eastern mysticism. Jesus wept, forgave, healed, resurrected and rendered parables of divine perspicacity. But He also called people hypocrites, “a den of vipers,” said to the apostle Peter “Get behind me, Satan!” and turned over the tables in the temple. It should be emphasized that He who Christianity tells us was, paradoxically, fully God and fully man was *fully* man. Jesus was not some eastern TV monk with a bare head and bare personality; He experienced a range of human emotions, each one in the right moment and measure.

As for those merely fully human, it is entirely common to mirror, to ascribe your own values and understanding of matters to others. This is why modern films may portray Jesus as if He were a flower child, just as, at the spectrum's other end, movies about Adolf Hitler often portray him as a gruff, raving lunatic. Lost on these secular artists is that Hitler was known for personal charm, and Jesus could chastise. The Devil doesn't appear with a pitchfork and horns and the holy don't always sport visible halos; the demagogue tells you what you want to hear, the deific what you need to know. But it is a sad fact of man's nature that people are more tolerant of clever lies than harshly spoken truths.

The point? It seldom occurs to these secularists that God's dictates may be far different from their values (mostly because they don't believe in God). In fact, were they close to such understanding, they wouldn't even call their values “values.” God does not have values — He prescribes virtues.

Yet where the secularists are right is in that Christians do not thoroughly follow that prescription. This is not, however, an indictment of either faith or followers. Secularists' criticism of Christians always amounts to, in so many words, “You're really a bunch of sinners!” This is rather comical considering that Christianity teaches we're all a bunch of sinners, with its holy book telling us “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Eastern mysticism may concern “finding the god in you”; Christianity is about accepting that you're not God.

Delving deeper, Christians “may” not walk their walk as well as secularists walk theirs. But to condemn the Christian for this is much like saying that the man who never stumbles when playing the toddler's game of putting geometrically shaped pegs in the appropriate holes is superior to the professional golfer who sometimes stumbles on the course. And to condemn Christianity for its adherents' deficiencies would be like saying that ideal golf swing production is not an ideal because no one can ever and always live up to it.

What would indict Christianity?

If people *could* live up to it.

Then it could not be the Truth.

For how could someone ever conform to perfection?

So ironically, if you can truly live up to your faith, it's not a faith worth living up to. Thus is the Christian a bit like the devoted golfer: He strives for the ideal of never making a mistake while knowing he can never achieve it.

In contrast, secularists are, in a sense, still playing with their pegs and holes of values. Although it certainly appears that they at least match Christians in failure to live up to what they profess, even if they didn't, would it be anything about which to boast?

The issue is that their values pegs and holes really are *theirs*. That is to say, someone who believes in



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Absolute Truth (God's will) will use it as his yardstick when seeking an answer to a moral question. But what if someone is an atheist (or simply [a relativistic person of "faith"](#)) and doesn't believe in anything outside of and above man that determines right and wrong, doesn't believe in Truth? He will then take Protagoras' view that "man is the measure of all things," and it then follows that there is no "morality" — only man's preferences for behavior. This should inform as to what his yardstick for behavior will be.

"Reason" is not the answer because reason is not *an* answer; it is a method by which answers can be found. Thus, if there is no Moral Truth, there are no answers to be found in the arena of conduct and hence no reason for reason. So blind to Truth and having obviated the reason that could discern it, the average secularist has only one logical yardstick to use: emotion. "If it feels good, do it" — everything then boils down to occultist Aleister Crowley's maxim "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

Why is this relevant here? Because the average secularist will often have values that, being emotion-born, are simply a reflection of himself, of his likes and dislikes, passions and prejudices. So how, then, could consistency in application of preferences be a legitimate source of pride? How could you be out of conformity with yourself? A yardstick never fails at being three feet long.

In reality, secularists still do manage contradiction. But why shouldn't they? In a relativistic universe, consistency is no better than hypocrisy, a lie no worse than Truth. And even when hearts are in the right place, being governed by feelings can't yield consistency because emotion changes with the wind. Secularists would be their own measuring stick, one that can always judge them sinless because they are always the length they are — whatever that happens to be at the moment.

Of course, there are secularists who may, in absolute terms, be better people than a given Christian. But this just returns us to Evelyn Waugh's sage admission. What are the person's moral proclivities? We wouldn't dismiss ideal golf instruction because an untalented, all-thumbs duffer who received it wasn't as good as a natural who got the Devil's guidance. And a wise person respects those who make the most of their relatively limited potential, moral or otherwise, more than one blessed with the most ethereal talents but who buries them in the ground. "To whom much is given, much will be expected." Perhaps that "bad Christian" is just a far worse person with a far better faith. And if you can't thank God, perhaps you should thank your lucky stars for it. It could be the reason why he just yelled at you and didn't put you in a gulag, burn you in a pyre or chop your head off.

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