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Title: The Sources of Depth in Hallowed Secularism: Religion in History

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8/9/2007--Pope Benedict sets forth the necessarily social thrust of Christianity in his book *Jesus* when he describes what he calls the foundational text behind Jesus' statement, "I am the true vine."^[1] In Isaiah, the owner sings a love song concerning his vineyard. He did all he could for the vineyard, expecting good grapes, but instead, sour grapes grew. Then, the prophet adds, so there is no mistake and all understand:

For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel,
and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed;
for righteousness, but behold a cry.^[2]

And then the Pope adds, absolutely forcing us to see the political where we would prefer to see "religion," "God gave them the way of justice in the Torah, he loved them, he did everything for them, and they have answered him with unjust action and a regime of injustice."^[3]

The first lesson, then, for secularism is that God acts in our collective history. God creates the potential for just societies and men instead institute injustice. When they do that, as Isaiah prophesies, God responds.

We secularists are now put to the test. Fine, there is no God. The question is then put in terms of history. Is there a shape to history or is there not? Is the cry of the orphan forgotten or not? Can a regime of brutality and injustice endure forever?

The secularist who says, history means nothing--a tale told by an idiot--is leading us and himself into nothingness. But not only is such a person depressing and nihilistic, his seeing is wrong or at least dubious.

Do you imagine that the rejection of human slavery is temporary? Or the liberation of women something less than inevitable? No. These are absolute judgments of history. Once these injustices are seen, there is no going back.

I am not speaking of overall progress, not in this century. But the hand of God is on the scale of history, tilting it at each moment in a direction. Against slavery here. For the liberation of women there. Promoting democracy across the globe. And if it isn't God doing these things, and you and I know it is not, it certainly acts in some ways like God.

There is a direct implication of historical direction. If history has a shape, in certain ways and to a certain extent, then man is not free. And this is of particular importance to Pope Benedict. The Pope links the song in Isaiah to the parable in Mark of the tenants of the vineyard.[4] The prophets in the parable, like Isaiah, are the servants sent to collect the rent. Israel, now the tenants rather than the vine, reject the prophets and persecute them. So the owner sends his beloved son. But the tenants kill the son, thinking now they will be free of the owner.

Pope Benedict says this is message of the age of secularism. God is dead and man is free. Man is God. But look where our freedom is getting us.

If history has a shape then that shape is binding. Human beings must conform to it or suffer the consequences. There are costs for injustice. The empire falls.

[1] Jn 15:1.

[2] Is. 5: 7.

[3] Jesus, at 255.

[4] Mk. 12:1-12.
