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March 13, 2008: More on Progressive Religion

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Title: More on Progressive Religion

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3/13/2008--I had no idea of all the reaction that writing about progressive religion would cause. My blog post of Friday, 3/7, on that subject attracted the attention of a well-informed and established blog by Mystical Seeker (<http://mysticalseeker.blogspot.com/>). He was critical of my view of progressive religion as a failure and he denied the necessary centrality of a literal resurrection, for example, to Christian faith.

He and I, and others, had some back and forth on this and related issues. As you would expect, some people suggested that there were limits on how far one could go reinterpreting the Christian message and yet remain a Christian.

On Saturday, March 8, this exchange was picked up by Thurman Hart on his Xpatriated Texan blog of faith and politics. (<http://xpatriatedtexan.com/blog/2008/03/08/is-progressive-faith-any-different-from-enlightened-belief#respond>). I found these comments also well-informed and worth pondering, although I cannot figure out how to respond by comment on his blog. On Monday, Hart posted another entry, this time concerning the critical responses to Mystical Seeker's Sunday blog--responses that seemed aimed to ride progressive reinterpretation of scripture right out of town.

Meanwhile, Mystical Seeker, whose name I don't know, had an exchange with me on Monday night. I wrote on the blog:

"The question related to whether one is still a Christian became so problematic for me that I felt I had to leave Judaism. But...this did not lead me away from the biblical tradition and into a vague spirituality or simple atheism. Can one be a biblical non-believer? I think so. Hence Hallowed Secularism. This position may be closer to the young, who have never learned the Christian or Jewish practice and story."

Mystical Seeker responded: "I can see where people who were not brought up as Jews or Christians may be less likely to be drawn to any kind of progressive form of faith, and may not see the point of getting involved in internecine squabbles over what constitutes "legitimate" Judaism or Christianity. I can thus see where your concept of Hallowed Secularism might have a better appeal for people in those circumstances. My own attraction to progressive Christianity has a lot to do with my Christian upbringing--I find myself drawn to Christian traditions and am engaged in an effort to try to make it somehow work, although to be honest it has not always been a completely satisfying exercise. If I had not been brought up as a Christian, my story might have turned out quite differently."

I am left with the strong impression that leaving Judaism was, for me, a necessary but painful step. One must pray and worship with a full heart and a total commitment. Constant reinterpretation is not conducive to such whole-heartedness. So, I had to leave even if others feel they can stay in their traditions.

But then where is the Hallowed Secularist? There is no such community. There is no such ritual. There really isn't any such movement. Hallowed Secularism right now is a form of exile. But this exile is necessary because pretending to be a Jew while denying most of what almost all Jews have believed feels like bad faith. And, if something new in religion for a secular future is really needed, it is probably something more radical than a mere reinterpretation of our previous traditions.