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April 8, 2008: Hallowed Secularism and the Dalai Lama

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4/8/2008--Holly Morris writes in the New York Times Book Review that she is confused about why Pico Iyer—the well-known travel writer—would write an account of the Dalai Lama [The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama]. She writes, “Iyer has long wondered ‘how globalism could acquire depths, an inwardness that would sustain it more than mere goods or data could’. And ‘if our new way of living were to offer any real sustenance’, he posits, ‘it would have to be invisible, in the realm of what underlies acceleration and multinationals.’” (“Searching for the Dalai Lama” 4/6/2008). Readers of this blog will not find Iyer’s concern at all confusing. Morris thinks Iyer is just curious. But you and I know what is bothering Iyer. He is looking for what Peter Berger calls the “signals of transcendence” in ordinary human life. That is Iyer’s understanding of the “invisible.” The question is, how can we have that when our traditional sources of religion are exhausted? Human beings cannot live lives of simple materialism. We need what is referred to as the spiritual realm and a social meaningfulness expressed in history. But the dogmas of Our Religions, including those of Buddhism by the way, are not credible to many of us. The Dalai Lama is a kind of non-dogmatic transcendence, walking around. Jesus was like that too. That is why a secular world holds on to the Dalai Lama, looking to him and his example, for deepened living. Unfortunately, this love-affair with the Dalai Lama is only a romanticism. For secularism to work ultimately as a sustainable way of life, many sources of depth must be found. And ways of life to practice deepened living. The earnest and disciplined effort to do that, is Hallowed Secularism.