



The Enlightenment



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On Religious Cults, Secularism and Politics

A few weeks ago my doorbell rang, and when I answered, two attractive young ladies were standing in my doorway. I immediately thought they might be Jehovah's Witnesses, but it turned out they were Mormon missionaries engaged in their required two year crusade to bring as many people as possible into the Mormon fold. I told them I was a humanist and as one might expect, they had no idea whatsoever what a humanist was. So I explained to them that humanists do not believe in supernatural phenomena, but do believe in principles of rational thought, scientific inquiry, responsibility, ethics, compassion, fairness and equality (or something like that). I added that humanists believe in complete separation of church and state and also believe that secular societies trump religious ones.

I also mentioned I had been visited by two male Mormon missionaries when I lived in England in the mid 1960s, and that they had left me a copy of *The Book of Mormon*. I said I had read enough of it to conclude that it was a contrived fake and that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, was a scheming polygamist imposter who founded a cult. They took this in their stride, no doubt they had heard all this before, and proceeded to relate how they fervently believe in the Mormon teachings and in the story of Joseph Smith finding the gold plates on which *The Book of Mormon* was supposedly inscribed. These were apparently intelligent well-educated girls, but it was obvious that Mormon beliefs, as well as traditional Christian beliefs, were firmly ingrained in their minds and they were not about to give them up, just as I was not about to become a Mormon.

I asked if they had heard of the evangelical Baptist pastor Robert Jeffress of Dallas Texas, who proclaimed in October of 2011, that Mormons are not Christians and that they are members of a cult. He was speaking in support of Texas Governor Rick Perry, an evangelical candidate for the Republican Party Presidential nomination. Perry, at the time, was opposing Mitt Romney, who is a Mormon, and therefore not a real Christian according to Jeffress. The girls knew all about Jeffress and refuted him by stating that Mormonism is definitely a legitimate branch of Christianity, and with over 14 million members, is certainly not a cult. I had to agree.

But after they left I got to thinking. Although mainstream Mormonism can hardly be called a cult today, surely it began as a cult. And what about Christianity? Did it also begin as a cult? Looking into these questions, I found a striking similarity to the founding of Christianity and Mormonism, and my findings are conveyed in this special edition of the *Enlightenment*. Also included is an article on secular societies and another on religion and politics.

The Evolution of Mormonism

Today Mormonism is a well-established religion with over 14 million members worldwide, based in Salt Lake City, Utah. But can it really be classified as a cult? A cult is defined as: “a minority religious group holding beliefs regarded as unorthodox or spurious.” When thinking of cults, it is former disastrous groups such as Jim Jones’ Peoples Temple Agricultural Project in Guyana, David Koresh’s Branch Dividians in Waco Texas, or Heaven’s Gate’s people traveling to a UFO following Comet Hale-Bopp, that may come to mind. Then there are present day cults including Warren Jeffs’ Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) and Winston Blackmore’s colony in Bountiful B.C., both of which are polygamist offshoots of Mormonism. No, mainstream Mormonism can hardly be categorized as a cult today, but in examining the early history of the movement, there is little doubt that *it started out as a cult*. The story of its beginnings goes like this:

In the early 1800s, northern New York State was known for its fiery religious revivals. Joseph Smith (1805-1844) was one of dozens of charismatic preachers who “heard the voice of angels outside their window at night.” Smith claims the angel Moroni directed him to a nearby hill where he unearthed a stash of gold plates on which was supposedly written a book. Miraculously, Smith was somehow inspired to translate the contents of the plates into English and dictate the details to an accomplice. He then arranged for publication of a 500 plus page volume that came to be entitled *The Book of Mormon*. This book chronicles the following story.

Around about 600 BCE, at the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord commanded another prophet named Lehi to leave Jerusalem with a small band, proceed to the seacoast and build a ship. In this ship Lehi’s family and a few others sailed to the west coast of South America. After landing safely, the band grew and prospered. As they moved northward, the story of their happenings and travels were recorded on brass plates. (Later the plates were described as being made of gold). The book is written in chapter and verse very similar to the Bible. Each book is named after the authors who wrote their story on an expanding number of plates. The authors had names like Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, Mormon, Mosiah, Alma, Heleman, Ether and finally Moroni. The dates of all the events are listed in footnotes and the last date entered is 421 CE, the supposed date of the death of Moroni. Fast forward to the early 1800s when Moroni supposedly appears as an angel and tells Joseph Smith where to find the plates.

Surely this incredible tale will immediately suggest to any logical thinker that all of this is fiction, and indeed it is not difficult to scrutinize the details in the book and conclude without much fear of contradiction, that it is nothing more than a fantasy. Consider the following:

1. In the sixth century BCE, it would have been impossible for a small group of inexperienced people to build a ship capable of sailing, laden with supplies, on an ocean voyage lasting several months.
2. In the sixth century BCE, it would have been impossible to find a sea captain capable of navigating over huge distances in uncharted waters to an unknown land, in an era when the earth was thought to be flat.
3. After the ship supposedly arrived at the “promised land,” they found “beasts in the forests of every kind, both cow and ox, and the ass, and the horse, and the goat and all manner of wild animals.” In reality, none of the domestic animals described were present in the western hemisphere until imported after the time of Columbus, two thousand years later.

4. Many of the phrases and even whole chapters are lifted directly from the King James Version of the Bible. For instance the phrase, "and it came to pass," occurs over and over again and at least fifteen chapters from the book of Isaiah are repeated word for word.
5. Passages supposedly written long before the beginning of the Common Era, describe the birth, crucifixion and the atonement powers of Jesus Christ.
6. There is no archeological evidence that the people described in the Book of Mormon ever existed in South or North America. Clearly the *Book of Mormon* is a not so clever fabrication using the King James Version of the Bible as crib notes.

So much for *The Book of Mormon*. Now on to the shenanigans of Joseph Smith. After publishing *The Book of Mormon* in 1830, Smith organized the Church of Christ, saying he was chosen by God to restore the early Christian church. Church members were called Latter Day Saints or Mormons. He attempted to establish churches in Kirkland, Ohio and in Missouri. Settlers in Missouri, fearing the rapid growth of Mormon communities, fought and defeated them in 1838. Smith was imprisoned, but escaped and then set up a Mormon community at Nauvoo Illinois. There he was criticized for the practice of polygamy and eventually put on trial. While awaiting trial he was murdered in 1844.

After Smith's death there was a power struggle before Brigham Young was chosen President in 1847. He had been leading his group westward and they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in August 1847. He almost immediately organized the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He founded Salt Lake City and served as the first Governor of Utah Territory. He formed the precursors of the University of Utah and Brigham Young University. He died in 1877. Several presidents succeeding Brigham Young refused to outlaw polygamy, but after disputes with the U.S. Government, polygamous marriages officially ceased in 1896 when Utah became a State. Eventually, members practicing polygamy were excommunicated from the mainline church.

The Mormon Church, an unorthodox branch of the Christian faith, grew rapidly in the 20th century and today there are over 14 million members, 134 Temples, 28,660 congregations in 176 nations and over 52,000 missionaries. Modern Mormons are family oriented and practise strong moral and ethical values. They abstain from tobacco, alcohol, coffee and tea. They often have large families. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir is world renown. I one attended a Sunday service in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. The choir began with the Gloria from Mozart's 12th Mass and I was blown away. It was a truly transcending experience that brought tears to my eyes. Yes, despite questionable beginnings and some unorthodox beliefs, Mormonism does have some good qualities.

I believe the brief foregoing account demonstrates how a relatively small cult-like movement, based partly on a contrived text of questionable merit, can develop into a full-scale world wide religion in less than 200 years, albeit one with certain idiosyncrasies. Now I want to compare the evolution of Mormonism with the evolution of Christianity, which followed a similar pattern, and after 2000 years boasts over two billion members and adherents. The similarities are striking.

But before moving on, I want to comment briefly on the other more modern cults mentioned above in the first paragraph. Most began with charismatic leaders, some claiming to be prophets, while condoning the practice of polygamy. They had many wives, some as young as twelve, and they sired many children. Was this a means of insuring the growth of the cult or is there a more sinister reason? Did these imposters simply form the cult in order to enjoy the services, both sexual and otherwise, of many women? And is this how they were able to attract other males into their movements? These leaders were all phony charlatans, so what other

inducements could have caused them to form their groups, other than having a free lunch. Is it really too cynical to suggest that it was the strong sex drive of these males that was the main motivator? I suspect that the answer is yes, not only in the modern sects, but also in the case of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young as well. If this hypothesis of a built in harem is correct, no wonder these sects are so weird and despised by society in general.

I thank the Mormon missionaries for prompting me to reread the Book of Mormon and reexamine the formation and early history of Mormonism. It reminded me just how ridiculous this religion is, having been founded through the deceptive use of a fictitious fabricated story about gold plates, by a charlatan who was able to convince gullible people to believe he was a latter day prophet and that polygamy was an acceptable life style in the eyes of God. The crucial and incredible point here is that today over fourteen million people believe at least some of these teachings and among them is a man who wants to be president of the United States.

Did Early Christianity Begin as a Cult?

Since it is clear that Mormonism began as a cult, and in a period of two hundred years grew into a religion with fourteen million members, did Christianity, that today boasts two billion members, also begin as a cult? Let's take a look. According to stories in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament, about two thousand years ago a baby was born to a virgin and placed in a manger in Bethlehem to the accompaniment of shepherds and wise men. This baby grew up to be known as the Messiah, son of God, with the power to supposedly forgive sins and guarantee an afterlife in an idyllic heaven. As if this was not all, he promised to return in the near future and establish God's Kingdom on earth. For about one year, he and twelve followers toured the countryside preaching confusing messages of love and compassion, reportedly performing miracles and often criticizing the Jewish authorities of the day.

While the Jewish people believed in the existence of their supernatural God Yahweh, they did not accept the supernatural claims of Jesus of Nazareth whom they considered to be fully human, and not the Messiah or son of God. In fact, according to Luke 4:28-29, the first time Jesus preached in a synagogue, his message was so outlandish the Jews wanted to throw him off a cliff. Thus it would seem very clear that the Jews considered the Jesus movement to be a cult, and they wanted him crucified because his message was so unorthodox and also perhaps, because they considered him to be a threat.

The crucifixion of Jesus should have been the end of the Jesus cult, but this did not happen. Somehow rumours began to circulate that Jesus rose bodily from the grave and ascended into heaven. Then a small group led by Jesus' brother James and a few of the disciples, carried on trying to convert fellow Jews to their views. (There was no Christianity at this point). Then a man named Saul (later known as Paul) had a vision claiming that Jesus appeared to him and told him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was very successful at this task and he was able to establish a number of churches in the eastern Mediterranean area. After the Roman Emperor Constantine decreed Christianity to be the official religion of the Empire in the early fourth century CE, the Roman Catholic Church became firmly established and the rest is history.

My purpose in reciting the above brief account of the evolution of Christianity is to demonstrate the parallels between the Christian evolution and the evolution of Mormonism. Both started out as a cult, both had a scripture with far-fetched stories, both founders were murdered, and both sects were successfully propagated by new leaders; Christianity by the apostle Paul and

Mormonism by Brigham Young. Both movements were successful in attracting members and adherents by the millions. Both have built great architectural monuments to the “Glory of God.” How could this have happened? What have been the attractions?

In the case of Christianity, Catholics were told that the only way to heaven was to be a faithful Catholic by adhering to all of the sacraments. Then the Protestants were told that the only pathway to heaven was through “faith” by believing in Jesus and that he died in order to atone for their sins. These are strong inducements if you are a devout believer in supernatural phenomena, but there are other attractions as well. For many, their church provides a sense of community, for some the rituals provide comfort, while others look to their church to provide moral and ethical teachings for their children. Also, many get satisfaction from outreach work.

Although many cults, especially modern ones, are short lived, some, including Christianity and Mormonism, do survive and develop into full-scale religions. And they can have a great influence, both good and bad, in the societies in which they practise their beliefs, creeds and dogmas. But in our modern era, there are many who are skeptical of the supernatural aspects of these religions, and believe it is time to move on to something better. In contrast, religious authorities will point out that despite some shortcomings, Christianity proclaims a message of love, compassion, forgiveness and peace, so how can one quarrel with that?

Well it can be argued that despite promoting a life style of moral and ethical living, Christianity has failed in one crucial way. It has not convinced a significant number of its members and adherents to obey three of its commandments, namely, You shall not murder, You shall not steal and You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. To get specific, rather than prevent wars, Christians have been fighting each other right up until the mid twentieth century. It now seems abundantly clear that something better than traditional Christianity, that was founded on the supposed existence of supernatural phenomena, is now required. But what can it be? Well, there is now enough evidence to suggest that prosperous secular societies with low-income inequality are what to aim for. Under these conditions, religiosity and belief in the supernatural tend to wane on their own. There is no need for any group to spend money proclaiming there is no god, god’s relevance gradually disappears.

The Advantages of Secular Societies

It is well known that many western European countries have become less religious and more secular in the last fifty or so years, and it is also well known that the trend to secularization has been much slower in the United States. In his recent book *Civilization*, Niall Ferguson attempts to explain why this is so. In this book Ferguson sets out to document the reasons why after about 1500 CE, the “West” moved ahead of the “Rest.” He lists six phenomena or reasons why this came about. They are: competition, science, property, medicine, consumption and work. By work he means the Protestant work ethic, a term coined by the German professor Max Weber. While other religions associated holiness with the renunciation of worldly things, the Protestants saw industry and thrift as expressions of a new kind of hard working godliness. While others “worked to live,” Protestants “lived to work.” Ferguson rightly notes that it was the Protestant countries in the west that were the first to advance and prosper, England, Holland, Prussia, Saxony and Scotland, as opposed to the Catholic countries of France, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

So how does Ferguson explain the current difference in religiosity between Europe and America? He cites competition. He notes that many European countries have a state religion:

the Anglican Church in England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the Lutheran Church in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. In all of these countries, churches have become almost irrelevant except when used for christenings, confirmations, weddings and funerals. Contrast this with the United States where there are umpteen religious denominations evangelically competing with each other for members. Ferguson claims this active promotion by TV evangelists and others helps to keep church membership at a much higher level than in most other western countries. This may indeed be a significant factor, but Ferguson is missing another important reason for the higher level of religiosity in the United States. This reason is the lack of social safety nets and high-income inequality in the United States, compared with other western countries. The following account gives a picture of what life is like in successful secular societies.

In the Scandinavian countries there is an archetype of democratic socialism that seems to work. These secular societies provide their citizens with a good education, as well as social safety nets that avoid anxieties if families experience setbacks. Scandinavians seem to know how to maintain strong economies, while providing citizens with the means to be able to pay taxes in order to supply essential social services. Income inequality is low and, people seem to be satisfied with living modestly by avoiding purchasing things they do not need. And take note, surveys show that citizens in these secular countries with a minimum of religiosity are among the happiest people in the world.

A common thread that stands out in secular societies is low-income disparity. In a book entitled *The Spirit Level*, authors Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett display numerous graphs comparing income inequality in developed countries by analyzing various factors including poverty, mental health, physical health, obesity, educational performance, teenage births, life expectancy, violence, imprisonment, community life, social relations, social mobility and trust. Almost without exception, the secular countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland are at the low-income inequality end of the trend line in regard to the life style characteristics listed above. The United States with a high degree of religiosity is nearly always at the high-income inequality end of the trend line. (Countries including Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are usually nearer to the favourable, rather than the unfavourable section of the graph).

Another common thread is that all four of these democratic countries appear to have found the right balance in regard to socialism. They have managed their economies in such a way as to provide sufficient capital to afford government sponsored social safety nets, and the citizens are willing to pay the taxes necessary to deliver these safety nets.

And another factor of great importance is spending on the military. Scandinavian countries have relatively small militaries. These countries do not engage in preemptive wars, their activities are mostly related to peacekeeping. Low defense spending helps greatly as a means of being able to pay for the social safety nets. Contrast this with the United States, the country that set out to police the world. U.S. defense spending is gargantuan, thereby leaving little for social safety nets or for compensating citizens who have experienced devastation from hurricanes, tornados or earthquakes. And as already mentioned above, a lack of safety nets leads to more religiosity and higher income inequality, making it difficult for a truly secular society to materialize.

An excellent understanding of what it is like to live in a thriving secular society can be obtained from sociologist Phil Zuckerman's book *Society Without God*. Zuckerman spent fourteen months

living in Denmark and Sweden and the results of his research after interviewing 150 Danes and Swedes are summarized below:

Zuckerman found that, “society without God is not only possible, but can be quite civil and pleasant. And contrary to the claims of certain outspoken, conservative Christians who regularly argue that a society without God would be hell on earth: rampant with immorality, full of evil, and teeming with depravity, in reality Denmark and Sweden are remarkably strong, safe, healthy, moral and prosperous societies.” He goes on to say, “It is crucial for people to know that it is actually quite possible for a society to lose its religious beliefs and still be well-functioning, successful, and fully capable of constructing and obeying sound laws and establishing and following rational systems of morality and ethics. Worship of God can wane, prayer can be given up, and the Bible can go unstudied, yet people can treat one another decently, schools and hospitals can still run smoothly, crime can remain minimal, babies and old people can receive all the care and attention they need, economies can flourish, pollution can be kept to a minimum and children can be loved in warm homes--without God being a central component of everyday life.”

Phil Zuckerman acknowledges that a much-attenuated cultural Lutheranism continues in Denmark and Sweden. Most Danes and Swedes still pay the church tax (though they can easily opt out) have church weddings, and baptize their children even though they rarely darken the door of a church. Most Danes and Swedes regard themselves as Christians, though like Thomas Jefferson, they regard this simply as being a good and moral person and pay no attention to traditional creeds. “Benign indifference” is the term Zuckerman uses for the Scandinavian approach to religion, and he emphasizes that this indifference is neither hostility nor plain atheism; religion is simply a non-topic.

It is important to note, as Zuckerman points out, that a low incidence of factors such as homicide rates, levels of violent crime, levels of disrespect for human rights, political instability, levels of distrust among citizens etc, leads to a high degree of security and benign indifference. Denmark and Sweden rank third and seventh on the 2007 Global Peace Index. (Norway ranks first). A low degree of security generally typifies societies that tend to be more religious. For example, the United States ranks ninety-sixth on the aforementioned index.

An obvious conclusion to be drawn from Zuckerman’s revealing book is that traditional religion fades in a society, not as a result of aggressive atheist activity, but as a result of a society achieving a high level of personal security. The United States, according to Phil Zuckerman, would do well to emulate the Scandinavians.

While Zuckerman confined his research to Denmark and Sweden, I believe his findings can be extrapolated to Norway and Finland as well. The conclusion must be that secular societies with low-income inequality are more likely to provide the “good life” for their citizens than those with a high degree of income inequality and a high level of religiosity. But which comes first? This is really a no-brainer. Obviously you will not reduce religiosity, leading to a secular society, without first establishing a large prosperous middle class and low-income inequality. The protests on Wall Street and elsewhere are letting world leaders know that things are “out of whack” as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It is abundantly clear that secular societies such as exist in Scandinavia, are far superior to the mess existing in the U.S. today. But how did this disparity come about?

A Tale of Two Societies- Scandinavian and American.

Like the rest of Europe, Scandinavians once had their share mythology featuring pagan gods and goddesses. Names like Thor, Odin and the Valkyries come to mind. Unlike the rest of Europe, Catholicism did not reach the Scandinavian area until about 1000 CE and after that, paganism slowly faded away. Not long after Luther began the Protestant Reformation in 1517, the Scandinavian countries adopted Lutheranism as their state religion and Catholicism was suppressed. For almost six hundred years, citizens in Scandinavia have willingly paid a church tax to support the state religions, but in more recent times paying the tax is usually optional. Also in recent times, church attendance has fallen drastically with as low as 2% of the population attending church services on a regular basis. People have just gradually lost interest in religion, except for marking life's passages including baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals. Thus today's secular society described in the preceding section is now a reality, and I believe is model for the rest of the world to follow. This, however, is not to claim that Scandinavian societies are utopian, they have problems like everyone else. Probably their biggest concern at the moment is how to integrate immigrant Muslims into their way of life.

Now on to America. From about 1600 CE onward, the early American colonies were settled predominately by Christians from the British Isles, most of whom were English. The major religion was Church of England, although there were of course the Puritans (Congregationalists) in New England. By the 1770s, thirteen colonies had been established with a population of two and a half million. An idea of the religious make up of the country at that time can be garnered from examining the religions of the fifty-five men who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The breakdown is shown in the left hand table below compared to today at right:

Religions in the United States

<u>Founding Fathers - 1776</u>			<u>In 2008</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>		<u>%</u>
Episcopalians –	28	51	Evangelical Protestants	25
Congregationalists –	12	22	Mainline Protestants	17
Presbyterians –	8	14	Black Church	6
Unitarians –	3	5	Mormon	2
Deist –	1	2	Other Protestant	<u>2</u>
Baptist –	1	2	Total Protestant	52
Quaker –	1	2	Roman Catholic	23
Roman Catholic –	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Nothing in Particular	16
Total	55	100	Atheists and Agnostics	4
			Non-Christian	<u>5</u>
			Total	100

In 1776 Benjamin Franklin was the sole Deist, and Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were two of the three Unitarians. Around 1800 Thomas Jefferson predicted that within two or three generations, two thirds of Americans would be Unitarians. The table above on the right shows how wrong he was. He failed to anticipate the religious revival phenomena of the 1800s or the advent of TV evangelists and mega-churches in the late 1900s. The founding fathers were determined that the new country would be a republic rather than a monarchy, and that there would be no State religion. There would be a complete separation of church and state and citizens would be free to adopt any religion of their choice or non at all. As Niall Ferguson has

suggested, this freedom has allowed competition between denominations, and those who are the best promoters have been the most successful. In 1776, almost one hundred percent of citizens would have regarded themselves as mainline Protestants. As the right hand table above indicates, this category has dwindled to only seventeen percent while evangelical Protestants now represent one quarter of Americans. The next largest group is Roman Catholic at twenty-three percent. This is not surprising due to immigration from European Catholic countries and due to the influx of Hispanics from Mexico and elsewhere. Somewhat encouraging is the fact that atheists, agnostics and nothing in particular, make up a fifth of the population and this section is growing, albeit rather slowly.

Thus we have the dichotomy between secular Scandinavia where most citizens believe in Darwinian evolution, and the religious United States where deplorably, about forty-five percent of citizen still believe in creationism. And most importantly, the Scandinavian countries are prosperous economically, while the U.S. is in an economic mess. We need only look at the current Republican Party leadership contest to illustrate one reason why the mess exists.

The Senseless Contest to Select a Republican Presidential Candidate

To use a well-worn cliché, the founding fathers would turn over in their graves if they knew about what has happened to American politics. Congress is no longer a democratic institution representing the will of the people. It is an oligarchy controlled by big business through campaign contributions and lobbying. Corporate and personal greed is rampant and led to the 2008 financial collapse, causing many middle class Americans to lose their homes. In his recent book *Death of the Liberal Class*, author Chris Hedges lists, "rampant greed and corruption, the folly of war, the complicity of institutions in protecting the elite, and the abuses of capitalism," as principle cause of the declining middle class. So how do the Republican presidential candidates propose to correct these problems? All they talk about is their questionable ability to find ways to create jobs and how Barak Obama must be defeated at all costs in the next election.

Lets take a look at the two front running candidates, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum. Do they really have the intelligence and skill that is necessary to run the biggest economy with the biggest military in the world? Can they reverse the existing decline and bring back a prosperous middle class? I seriously doubt it!

As already mentioned, Mitt Romney is a Mormon, supposedly believing in the ridiculous story of the founding of Mormonism and in all the questionable Mormon doctrines. Any person of reasonable intelligence can easily see that Mormonism is a fraud and should not be taken seriously. Therefore, I don't think Romney really has the ability to solve the exceedingly tough problems that lay ahead. He certainly will not create a trend toward a more secular society, nor take much action to improve social safety nets and income inequality. He will also advocate maintaining a large military the country cannot afford. The Republican Party must know that a quarter of Americans will not vote for a Mormon, so why are they endorsing him as a candidate? This seems almost suicidal. If Romney should become the Republican Presidential candidate, Barak Obama should have little difficulty defeating him.

Rich Santorum, on the other hand, is a Roman Catholic and supports the Church's stand on birth control, abortion and on not recognizing the rights of gays and lesbians to marry. God is very much at the center of his platform. He refers to God a lot in his speeches. Now one must question the intelligence of a man who seems to firmly believe in all the Catholic doctrines

including the inane belief in an infallible pope, and that the only way to the supernatural divine is through a priest. Now there is nothing wrong with a liberal Catholic President, who keeps his religious views out of his politics, but surely there is no place in the Presidency for a naïve man like Santorum who wears his religion on his sleeve. Again Barak Obama should have little difficulty defeating Santorum should he become the final Republican candidate.

The fact that religion has come to play such a significant role in American politics, and that the list of Republican Presidential candidate is made up of men who exude mediocrity, is a damning indication of how desperate things are in that country. If any of these men were elected, America's decline will continue. They just cannot seem to find a candidate of strong character, high intelligence, with a desire to work for the benefit of all Americans, not just the wealthy elite one percent. If Barak Obama is elected in November, there is no guarantee that he can turn things around unless he has support from both the House and the Senate. Otherwise the Republicans will try to thwart his efforts.

What Lies Ahead?

In the final paragraph of *Death of the Liberal Class*, author Chris Hedges states, "Empathy must be our primary attribute. The indifference to the plight of others and the cult of the self is what the corporate state seeks to instill in us. That state appeals to pleasure, as well as fear, to crush compassion. We will have to continue to fight the mechanisms of that dominate culture, if for no other reason than to preserve, through small, even tiny acts, our common humanity. We will have to resist the temptation to fold in on ourselves and to ignore the injustice visited on others, especially those we do not know. As distinct and moral beings, we will endure only through these small, sometimes imperceptible acts of defiance. This defiance this capacity to say no, is what mass culture and mass propaganda seek to eradicate. As long as we are willing to defy these factors, we have a chance, if not for ourselves, then at least for those who follow. As long as we defy these forces, we remain alive. And for now this is the only victory possible." What Hedges is saying is the necessary changes must come from the bottom up. This will require an outstanding leader or leaders of the caliber of Dr. Martin King Jr., but where are they?

Another person advocating change is Sir Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group and the very active charitable organization Virgin Unite. He has recently published a book entitled *Screw Business as Usual*, in which he states, "this is a different kind of business book. It's about revolution. My message is a simple one: business as usual isn't working. In fact, business as usual is wrecking the planet. Resources are being used up; the air, the sea, the land are all heavily polluted. The poor are getting poorer. Many are dying of starvation or because they can't afford a dollar a day for medicine. But my message is not all doom and gloom. It is time to turn capitalism upside down – to shift our values from an exclusive focus on profits to also caring for people, communities and the planet. Do good, have fun and the money will come."

Yes changes are needed in the way capitalism operates, but other changes are also required. Religions that began as enigmatic cults have no place in modern politics. There needs to be a move to in the United States to a more secular society if the country is to recover from the present malaise. Unfortunately, the current senseless shenanigans in the Republican Party are greatly hindering any significant move toward secularization in the U.S. (DAH).

Comments and critiques of any *Enlightenment* articles may be sent to Editor Don Hatch at dahatch@rogers.com or phone 519-472-6167.