

The Pilgrim's Pathway

**The Bible, the Church, and the World:
A Third Way (11)**

**The Second Way:
Klineanism/Religious Secularism (vi)**

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The logical outcome

With this article we conclude our evaluation of the position advocated by Darryl Hart in his book *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State*. Our first criticism was that Hart's proposal reduces Christian spirituality and identity in the world. Then followed our second disagreement, namely, that Hart's solution restricts Christ's sovereignty in the world. In this article, we evaluate the dual ethic and morality that are the fruit of Hart's proposal for Christian living in the world. Incidentally, by "ethic" we mean human reflection on good and evil in terms of God's norms, and by "morality" we mean the actions, good or evil, that people commit or omit.

Earlier we noted that Hart's solution for the problem of mixing religion and politics is to separate them. He calls us to live as "hyphenated Christians": as Canadian-Christians in Canada, American-Christians in America, Korean-Christians in Korea, and the like. We live in two realms, the sacred and the profane or secular, each with its own laws and values. The political and the spiritual are two, the intellectual and the spiritual are two, the economic and the spiritual are two, and so on. Moreover, Christ's sovereign rule, according to Hart, is reduced in the era between his ascension and his return—the Bible governs the church, and Christians have no biblical warrant for pursuing and advancing according to *Christian* principles any form of *Christian* political action or educational endeavor or economic perspective. To do any of these things *in the name of Christ* is to compromise the Christian faith and to join together what God has allegedly separated.

Both of these reductions lead necessarily and logically to a third flaw in Hart's proposal. This defect involves Hart's inevitable commitment to a dual ethic and a twofold morality—one

for Christians, the other for unbelievers; one for living in the church, the other for living in the world; one derived from Scripture, the other derived from nature or reason.

To assert that this is Hart's commitment is not speculation or guesswork on our part. He leaves us with no doubt whatsoever concerning this outcome, when he holds forth the prophet Daniel living in Babylon as the best example of how Christians ought to live in the world today (please note carefully the italicized phrases in the following):

“This Daniel, the assimilated and devout prophet, may be the best model for American Christians wanting to know how to participate meaningfully in public life. Just as he lived a hyphenated life, so Christians—exiles and strangers, as the New Testament refers to them—may also be called to live lives in which they negotiate *competing sets of loyalties and responsibilities*. Christ himself appears to have been pointing in the direction of this hyphenated existence when he told his disciples to render some things to Caesar and some things to God. *The split duties* inherent in Christ's teaching, some belonging to Christians as citizens and others to them as church members, run directly counter to the current quest for individual wholeness that fuels the politics of identity and invites Christians to enter the public square as believers rather than as religious citizens. But Christ's instruction, along with Christianity's historic distinction between the realms of church and state, suggests that the politics of integration are not necessary for followers of Christ. Because Christians are pilgrims and exiles in this world, and long for their true spiritual home, a hyphenated existence is essential to Christian identity. In addition to his teaching about God and Caesar, Christ also told his disciples to live in the world but not to become part of it. On two significant counts, then, Christians have genuine grounds for accepting that life on earth will require negotiating *dual sets of duties*” (p. 256; italics added).

Competing sets of responsibilities—split duties—dual sets of duties. All of these point to what we are calling a *dual ethic* and a *twofold morality*. The norms, values, and virtues appropriate and applicable to living in the church as Christians are not appropriate and applicable to living in the world.

(17) ***Both Christian and universal***

The challenge posed by Hart's position can be explained this way. He and his friends imply that Christian moral arguments are by definition sectarian rather than universal moral arguments. At most, for these innovators, Christian morality is *group* morality that is unique to, and limited to, the church.

By contrast, we wish to defend the claim that because Scripture as God's Word lays claim to *all our living as done before the face of God*, Christian ethics (reflection on good and evil in terms of the principles of God's Word) and Christian morality (which embodies a believer's comprehensive conduct and full identity shaped by and governed by God's Word) are the most human response to God that is possible. We accept no contradiction, and therefore no separation, between what some are inclined to call a narrow Christian ethic and a broad public morality, between an ethic based on special revelation and an ethic based on general revelation. It is our conviction that whatever is “natural” in human morality could not function well apart from the energetic activity in history of the Word of God made known in Scripture. The principles that ought to govern all of human living are revealed in Scripture, and these principles are designed and intended to have universal authority.

Christian and therefore truly human

Christian ethics and morality do not comport with the separations mentioned above. Moreover, as Christians we cannot talk about what is uniquely *human* without relating that to what is distinctively *divine*. In disagreement with the growing number of natural law theorists among us, we cannot separate the Commandments 5-10 from Commandments 1-4. All Ten Commandments are covered by the same Preamble, which begins, “I am the LORD, your God.” Not stealing, not committing adultery, not lying are just as much a service to God as the prohibition against serving other gods and the command to observe the sabbath. Whether we page through the Mosaic legislation with its repeated summons to live differently than the pagan nations, or through the wisdom books with their contrast between the righteous and the godless, or the Sermon on the Mount with its dictum about the broad and the narrow way (Matt. 7:13-14), or the Pauline warning not to be conformed to this world but to discern what is the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2), or the last book of the Bible with its summons to become more pure and not defiled (Rev. 22:11)—in every instance we are summoned to a walk of life that is distinct from

the behavior of those who oppose God and his commands. The Christian walk of life has a unique character, to be sure. Faith and morality are unbreakably connected, so much so that we must try to win others—who can not be persuaded by the Word—by means of a God-fearing walk of life (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

It is seriously mistaken, however, to restrict Christian morality and ethics to personal private behaviors performed apart from public (political) life. To do so is to make Christian morality a sectarian group morality after all, something that has a place in family, church, and private organizations but must be kept out of public life because that arena permits only “universal” and “rational” moral arguments. Believing in God as the Scripture reveals him requires us also to acknowledge him as Creator and Sustainer of this world. If that is so, it would be unthinkable that our reflection (ethics) and our actions (morality) would exclude God when it came to issues like the environment, the state, marriage, or the distribution of economic goods. Our conviction rests on the belief that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ. How can you exclude Christ from public life, since Christ himself commissioned his followers to make all the nations his disciples and to teach those nations to keep all that he had commanded (Matt. 28:18-20)? The gospel isn’t merely for individuals, but also for nations and for the world. So Christian ethics and morality involve the *entire* field of human conduct.

Christian morality is not a sectarian subset of all possible human moralities, alongside of Muslim morality and New Age morality. Christian morality, normed by Scripture and produced by the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christ-followers, is genuinely and fully *human* morality.

An integrated ethic and morality

Consequently, Christian morality is not something extra, something *supplemental to or alongside of* a supposedly valid autonomous morality that people think they can develop on a purely rational basis. If that were the case, Christian morality would not have value as something to be integrated with all of human living, but merely as something auxil-(18)ary to living life in the world. To be sure, a careful study of an integrated Christian morality will disclose that what is typically Christian is “beyond the ordinary”—compassion, sacrifice, self-denial, perseverance, and the like. Our Lord Jesus himself summons believers to such an extra-ordinary morality. But this extra-ordinary is merely one aspect of Christian morality; Christian morality must express its

unique character just as fully *within the ordinary actions* of living, including even our eating and drinking (1 Cor. 10:31).

Christian morality is an integrated morality that rests upon more than simply a Christian motivation. Christian motivation is important, as becomes clear, for example, in caring for and tending those who are sick and disabled. A Christian physician or nurse can be motivated by the example of Jesus. Although their work looks identical to that of their unbelieving colleagues, Christians perform their work with a different motivation than their non-Christian colleagues. But Christian ethics is interested not only in *differing* motivations that accompany outwardly *identical* actions. Careful attention to Christian norms reveals that the actions themselves are often really not identical at all. Consider again, for example, a Christian doctor or nurse. They might refuse to participate in an abortion, in euthanasia, or another expression of an unChristian lifestyle. So not only the motivation, but also the *norms with their consequences* lead to differences in conduct. Christian morality is an integrated morality, and not simply a private supplement to a morality we share in common with non-believers.

Summary

With this we conclude our evaluation of one of the most articulate academic defenses of religious secularism, by someone who claims the heritage of the Reformation as his own. We are not finished, though we have come to a pause in the argument. Look back, and you will notice that the advocates of religious secularism—whether a non-theologian lay person like Misty Irons or a trained professional academician like Darryl Hart—share this common feature: they are embarrassed about pressing the unique claims of Jesus Christ upon modern human cultural activity. The Bible is for the church, not for the world, argues Ms. Irons. In this present era of history, the sovereignty of Jesus Christ is reduced, claims Dr. Hart. And they are not alone.

We turn next to consider how a novel version of a “two-kingdom theology” combined with a defense of “natural law morality” is being promoted today among our churches to advance this ideology of religious secularism. You will want to stay tuned.

(Much of our analysis in this article is based directly on passages from *Grondslagen Christelijke Ethiek* [*Foundations of Christian Ethics*], by J. Douma [Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1999].)