Swimming Against a Mighty Tide

September 29, 2009 By Paul Dalton

I have a bit of a bee in my bonnet this morning. The New York Times had the following sentence in an article on the Pope's European tour: ''The Pope came to this decidedly skeptical nation (The Czech Republic) as part of a Continentwide mission to urge the nonbelieving out of their collective apathy".

To be a non-believer or skeptic in a world dominated by faith is not to be apathetic. It takes a courage of convictions to embrace reason in the face of world where to question a person's faith is akin to calling their Mother a bad name.

A recent poll, widely reported in the media, found that atheists and non-believers are considered

amoral and wicked. The study asked the question, “This group does not at all agree with my vision of American society,” about every major religious group and ethnic group, as well as recent immigrants and of course of atheists.

Atheists won the most reviled award.

Why is it that it is verboten to question virtually any aspect of someone’s faith, but is fine to criticize the lack of faith? I am used to being out of the mainstream and I don’t need the warm embrace afforded to the in-groups of the world. You can have your stories, I’ll take mine. But if you are a so-called ’person of faith’ ask yourself why so many of your compatriots think I am wicked and amoral for opting out of your hegemony.

The good works of churches and other faith-based institutions in combating the AIDS epidemic is commonly reported, and rightly so. What about the great works of the non-believers? Every survey of scientists finds the vast majority are atheists. That means the pills that keep us alive, the lab tests that monitor our health, the studies that detail the dizzying complexities of our pandemic, not to mention the vaccines and cures that are being worked on- those are all the works of the reason-based community, of the non-believers.

We are a mostly-quiet and growing minority. We are far from apathetic. Every non-believer faces a moment, or more likely moments when we actively choose to reject what we have been told, and embrace what we have learned. To do so takes bravery- we know our lack of faith is fair fodder for dismissiveness and hostility.

We swim against a mighty tide, and do so at our own peril. We are not apathetic. We are, each of us in some way activists.

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