

Mightier Than The Sword (Part Eleven)

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In last week's commentary, I mentioned Jeremy's Bentham's Utilitarianism Theory. I said to you that he constructed his reasoning on the basis of his observations that most people acted like his utilitarian theory suggested.

But that is circular reasoning at its most obvious and is why so many sane philosophers immediately disparaged his teaching. Bentham assumed that what people do is what they ought to do. The Bible teaches almost the polar opposite of his assumption. Did Adam and Eve sin because they did what they were supposed to do as God instructed them? Or did they sin because they did what they wanted to do?

Bentham's thoughts were about as twisted as one can get. This may explain why the theory was so popular among those alive at the time Bentham was writing who had likewise rejected God. Bentham failed to consider that the majority of people may be ignorant of God and His word and already morally wrong, and that was why they were doing what they were doing. What he encouraged them to do through his twisted program was to intensify their vile practices. He added sin to what was already sin. This is what results when people reject God and His word.

It gives us an insight into why Paul wrote,

Romans 1:28-29 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,

I mentioned to you in an earlier commentary that the thoughts of any given philosopher seem to fall on the ears of people in certain professions

completely unrelated to what the philosopher was thinking about as he penned his ideas. Thomas Aquinas' writings found a home in the minds and therefore practices of university level teachers and then found their way down the ladder to lower levels of teaching. Today they are even down in elementary school levels.

Rousseau's ranting found its home in the minds of those intent on increasing their own civil authority, as did the writings of John Stuart Mill, Bentham's disciple. Bentham opened the door of public immorality and his support of homosexuality stepped right through it. Mill widened the door considerably and added to support for homosexuality the foundations for modern day feminism. If you wonder where feminists ideas came from, you can look to John Stuart Mill.

All of these men are deemed "great" by the mass of modern day academics as university level programs gradually became more humanistic in their approach to subjects they termed "scientific." The result was the general level of moral and ethical behavior moved ever lower.

Meanwhile, even though it was not the true religion God gave mankind to live by, religion in America since its founding had been taken seriously as a responsibility, and was even fervently and sincerely practiced by the general public as the 19th century began.

But American religion was about to receive a jolt though during the lifetime of John Stuart Mill. However, it didn't receive this jolt from the utilitarianism-trained, English-born Mill. Rather, it was by an American—actually by a pair of Americans. The most prominent of these two was born three years before Mill in 1803 and outlived him by 12 years on the other end of life. That man was Ralph Waldo Emerson. The secondary figure was Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson was born into a family deeply involved in Unitarianism. They did not found the sect but bought into it with almost unbridled fervency. Unitarianism did not begin in America but was transported here. And Boston, the location of Harvard, became the hotbed of its activity. That is of course the area the Emerson family lived in.

It is interesting to note how often Harvard appears to be either the birthplace of or the hot bed of “progressive” thinking regarding religion. Ralph Waldo Emerson matriculated in Harvard beginning at age 14. By the time he began at Harvard in 1817, it had dropped virtually all connections with any of the major Christian sects that would even begin to consider it as a seminary. But before he entered Harvard, he spent a great deal of time with an aunt who introduced him to Hinduism and Neoplatonism. That ought to give you a bit of a heads-up regarding his thinking.

He wrote what I am going to give you while still a teenager. It very clearly shows the drift of this thinking even then. Listen carefully to this:

Who is he that shall control me? Why may not I act and speak and write and think with entire freedom? What am I to the Universe, or, the Universe, what is it to me? Who hath forged the chains of wrong and right, of opinion and custom? And must I wear them?

Emerson is declaring his complete freedom from God and any laws professed to be His. He is openly declaring, as we shall find, that he is god. He is declaring his faith in himself. If there is any one person who might be called the founder of the distinctive American religion, it is Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The religion he is given credit for firmly establishing is transcendentalism. He didn't found it but he did build it. I am sure he is not the first intellectual who thought of its concepts but he proclaimed it in writing more fervently and convincingly than any before him.

By the time he really got his career going, he had completely rejected any semblance of both Unitarianism and Christianity. He already had had a great deal of impact upon popular writers like Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Robert Frost.

The central issue in this religion call transcendentalism is pantheism. I think you can catch the term *-theism*, indicating pertaining to God. The prefix *pan-*

is what is called a combining form. "Pan" indicates "all." "Pan-American" thus literally means, "all American." That term indicates all America nations are included.

"Panthéism" thus literally means, "all god." Pantheism thus means, as applied to transcendentalism, that all the universe is god. Not that God created the universe, but the universe *is* god and that every part of the universe is a manifestation of god, including humans.

There is an element of truth in that conclusion. David agrees, saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament is His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). But David did not say the universe is god. He said God created the universe; therefore, the universe cannot be God.

In transcendentalism, every human is an extension of god. There is a tiny element of truth in that as well. Did not Jesus say to the Jews in John 10:35, "You are gods"? He did not mean it the same way as Emerson did, though. Did He mean that those Jews, even in their vile, sinning state, were "god-transcendent," meaning, "Of the highest order?" More to come.