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Christian Values Cannot Save Anyone



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A recent letter to columnist Carolyn Hax of *The Washington Post* seemed straightforward enough. “I am a stay-at-home mother of four who has tried to raise my family under the same strong Christian values that I grew up with,” the woman writes. “Therefore I was shocked when my oldest daughter, ‘Emily,’ suddenly announced she had ‘given up believing in God’ and decided to ‘come out’ as an atheist.”

The idea of a 16-year-old atheist in the house would be enough to alarm any Christian parent, and rightly so. The thought that a secular advice columnist for *The Washington Post* might be the source of help seems very odd, but desperation can surely lead a parent to seek help almost anywhere.



You usually get what you expect from an advice columnist like this — therapeutic counsel based in a secular worldview and a deep commitment to personal autonomy. Carolyn Hax responds to this mother with an admonition to respect the integrity of her daughter’s declaration of non-belief. She adds, “Parents can and should teach their beliefs and values, but when a would-be disciple stops believing, it’s not a ‘decision’ or ‘choice’ to ‘reject’ church or family or tradition or virtue or whatever else has hitched a cultural ride with faith.”

That is patent nonsense, of course. Declarations of adolescent unbelief often are exactly what Hax argues they are not: rejections of “church or family or tradition or virtue.” Hax does offer some legitimate insights, suggesting that honesty is to be preferred to dishonesty

and that such adolescent statements are often indications of a phase of intellectual questioning or just trying on a personality for style.

Hax then tells this distraught mother that she “didn’t throw out what my childhood, including my church, taught me; I still apply what I believe in. I just apply it to a secular life.” In other words, Hax asserts that she maintains many of the values she learned as a child in church, and simply applies these values now to a secular life.

“How can I help my daughter see that she is making a serious mistake with her life if she chooses to reject her God and her faith?,” the mother asks. Hax tells the mother to accept the daughter’s atheism and get over her “disappointment that she isn’t turning out just as you envisioned.”

What else would you expect a secular columnist who operates from a secular worldview to say?

The real problem does not lie with Carolyn Hax’s answer, however, but with the mother’s question. The problem appears at the onset, when the mother states that she has “tried to raise my family under the same strong Christian values that I grew up with.”

Christian values are the problem. Hell will be filled with people who were avidly committed to Christian values. Christian values cannot save anyone and never will. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a Christian value, and a comfortability with Christian values can blind sinners to their need for the gospel.

This one sentence may not accurately communicate this mother’s understanding, but it appears to be perfectly consistent with the larger context of her question and the source of the advice she sought.

Parents who raise their children with nothing more than Christian values should not be surprised when their children abandon those values. If the child or young person does not have a firm commitment to Christ and to the truth of the Christian faith, values will have no binding authority, and we should not expect that they would. Most of our neighbors have some commitment to Christian values, but what they desperately need is salvation from their sins. This does not come by Christian values, no matter how fervently held. Salvation comes only by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Human beings are natural-born moralists, and moralism is the most potent of all the false gospels. The language of “values” is the language of moralism and cultural Protestantism — what the Germans called *Kulturprotestantismus*. This is the religion that produces cultural Christians, and cultural Christianity soon dissipates into atheism, agnosticism, and other forms of non-belief. Cultural Christianity is the great denomination of moralism, and far too

many church folk fail to recognize that their own religion is only cultural Christianity — not the genuine Christian faith.

The language of values is all that remains when the substance of belief disappears. Tragically, many churches seem to perpetuate their existence by values, long after they abandon the faith.

We should not pray for Christian morality to disappear or for Christian values to evaporate. We should not pray to live in Sodom or in Vanity Fair. But a culture marked even by Christian values is in desperate need of evangelism, and that evangelism requires the knowledge that Christian values and the gospel of Jesus Christ are not the same thing.

I pray that this young woman and her mother find common hope and confidence in the salvation that comes only through Christ — not by Christian values. Otherwise, we are facing far more than a young woman “making a serious mistake with her life.” We are talking about what matters for eternity. Christian values cannot save anyone.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/

Carolyn Hax, “[Daughter’s Turnabout on Religion Shakes Mother’s Faith](#),” *The Washington Post*, Friday, September 7, 2012.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/daughters-turnabout-on-religion-shakes-mothers-faith/2012/09/04/1e6ead68-f3a9-11e1-a612-3cfc842a6d89_story.html

I discussed this matter on Monday’s edition of *The Briefing*. [Listen here](#):
<http://www.albertmohler.com/2012/09/10/the-briefing-09-10-12/>

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