

Monastic Scribe 106 – July 10, 2026

IS RELIGION DEAD?

Recently I read a column by David Brooks, political commentator of Atlantic Magazine. He is Jewish by up-bringing but has found great admiration for Jesus Christ and his teachings. In this particular writing, when asked what is the greatest problem in America right now, he stated that it was the loss of a common moral consensus.

Religion has been part of most world cultures throughout history but started decreasing in the west in the nineteenth century. We have gone through a period of secularization and some say we are in a time of post-secularization now. People are often against any public religion or are just unaware of its existence at all. But there are some differences. I will offer my own opinion on what I have observed, read and experienced.

For a while we heard a lot about being “spiritual but not religious”. This could mean almost anything. Some individuals have found a real spiritual part of themselves, open, attentive, seeking. But for many this has been an excuse for deifying what they like. It is rather ego-centered. It does not necessarily include service and care of the poor, oppressed, immigrants and strangers. These people also lack a sense of community.

There has also been a good deal written about those who are “religious but not spiritual”. Some people are sincere in practicing attendance at religious service out of a sense that it is good for them. Others may do so out of obligation, or fear of hellfire. The main characteristic is that there is often no interior life, no personal relationship with the divine, no active concern for the common good of the community, especially those beyond one’s own circle of nation, peoples, poor or needy people. They may be good people but religion has not been a source of transformation for them, a way to get beyond the ego into a wider world.

My guess is that many of these religious people are those who have given up on their church and don’t feel the need of a religious community. I realize this is a generalization. Some people leave church because the minister does not maintain a spiritual way with the flock of attendees. Churches and synagogues stand out when they engage the people in life-living ways. But, still, it is more than one’s

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individual likes and tastes that bring us together, just like in a family. And a religious faith that is also spiritual necessitates some private prayer and ritual.

My mother came from a practicing Catholic family. Her education never went past commercial high school. But her religion was real to her and not just a mandatory practice. Her prayer book was full of cards of prayers for many different people and needs and she said them every day. I know she had a card for me and prayed for me daily. She could be critical of the priests, their sermons and how they treated people. I am not sure how common this might be today. Part of her faith and the religion of many immigrant people and their children was an integral part of being part of a particular ethnic group. Inner cities such as New York and Boston were crowded with churches that were the center of a vibrant social, as well as religious life. The breakdown of such inner cities and the development of suburban living, automobiles, television and technology all contributed to the breakdown of community and religious adhesion.

Today it takes a more personal effort to remain religious and develop a spiritual life. A relationship to the divine, “the higher power” and some form of communication with that power is important. It requires some thought and reading to get beyond the superficial coverage of religion in the secular press. It requires some form of service, of caring for others, not just your family, but people in need.

There is in our American tradition a form of evangelical fundamentalism. One simply proclaims one’s faith with little requirement. Or there is the holding on to some tenets of faith without any deep commitment. Some followers of the MAGA form of Christianity and followers of Charlie Kirk’s Turning Point are very selective in what they believe. Patriotism seems to replace the scriptures or, at least, a very selective embrace of the Bible. Women, Blacks, Hispanics, Jews, immigrants are all second class citizens. Along with the return of antisemitism there is some anti-Catholicism in reaction to Popes Francis and Leo.

Religion and religious values are important in a democracy. In his Presidential farewell address George Washington said that religion was essential for values in a democracy. The holding on to values that surpass individual success and possessions make us a people that are united and care for each other. We are not a Christian nation nor have we ever been such. But Christianity, as well as

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Judaism, Islam and other religions all contribute to the common good of our society. I need to deepen my own religious and spiritual life while I respect that of others. You can send your own comments to me at:

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.