



This Religion column is a regular feature written for the Gallup Independent by Gallup area residents, representing different faith communities, who share their ideas about bringing a spiritual perspective into our daily lives and community issues. For information about contributing a guest column, contact Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola at The Independent: (505) 863-6811 ext. 218 or lizreligion01@yahoo.com.

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“All of Life is Religion”

The *Gallup Independent* is to be commended for opening its “Religion” page to some local voices. This routine will bring to light the reality that religion is the driving, motivating force of life. It truly is, even for those who do not recognize it.

Religion is such a dominant part of life that it really ought not be confined to the Saturday religion page. Religion, or to use my preferred synonym “worldview,” is behind virtually every story in the paper. Some folks worship political power, others bow their knee to money, and for some, sports is their god.

Religion, best understood, should not be confined to some weekly ritual, though such practices are often a vital part of religion. Religion is really about the meaning of life and humanity’s place in the universe. It addresses questions like: “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” “What is the purpose of my life?” “What happens when life is over?” Religion or worldview is a comprehensive framework of one’s basic belief about these things and how they hold together.

For all the good Thomas Jefferson did, he was badly blinded on this point. He was convicted that his own Enlightenment morality and religion was “broadminded.” It was based on “reason,” but orthodox Christians and other people of faith were parochial, dogmatic and sectarian. It was OK to be religious, but you ought keep it private. Don’t let it interfere with your life! Jefferson, like all the rest of us, had a worldview, a place to stand.

The world has been badly served by the notion that you can separate religion from the rest of life. I do believe we can and should separate church and state, but can never separate faith from how we live out our lives in the public square. It is simply impossible to neatly separate the sacred and the secular. My faith influences my view of the possible war in Iraq, poverty, education. It shapes my understanding of stewardship of the creation. My faith permeates all of life.

I recall a few years back when living in the state of Washington, I was asked by the County Executive to serve on the “Natural Heritage Task Force.” At the first meeting, the chair asked us to introduce ourselves and indicate why we were willing to participate. When it came to my turn, I wondered if I dared tell the truth. I suspected the group could handle it, so after a couple lighted-hearted comments, I said, “I believe ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’ and we are called to be stewards of the creation, so I hope I can do my small part.” Well—if you want to make a room go strangely quiet, just say



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something “sacred” in a supposed “secular” setting. But the beauty of it was that thereafter every person used the term “stewardship” to describe their motivation. It was a great task force—we did some important work to preserve God’s creation, and became friends in the process.

Of course, the Native American community never got confused by the Enlightenment. They have always known that spirituality could not be separated from life. From the early morning casting of corn pollen to the evening religious ceremonies, life was to be lived before the deities. We might disagree on the character of the deities, but not on the inevitable integration of faith and life.

My wife Colleen and I caught a wonderful glimpse of this integration a couple Sundays ago while visiting “The Door.” Pastor Payne gave a vigorous, biblical challenge to his flock about their money management. He taught them that everything belongs to God, including our finances. What was really impressive was how that congregation got on their knees and prayed that they would learn to live and act that way during the weeks to come. Indeed, wholesome religion includes all of life!

It is that same conviction that has prompted my 30+ years of work in Christian education. Issues of wisdom and truth, knowledge and values are ultimately religious. Sadly, most folks do not realize that no matter where their kids go to school, they are “gettin’ religion.” There is no such thing as a neutral, non-religious school. Every teacher, every class, every lesson has underlying values, an underlying worldview, and the kids are in a process of deciding to whom or what they will bow their knee. It is just that in America, some of these “religious” schools get subsidized with tax money and others don’t.

Well, that is the topic of a future column, or two!

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