THE SKEPTIC ARENA

February 1, 2016

Worshipping is a Duty and End in Itself

by Episcopalian clergyman, Richard Menees

*Does it really not matter if Christians go to church? Let me explain why I believe it does matter. While doing so I should mention that I am responding to the recent article by the Rev. William Aulenbach--who is, like me, an Episcopal priest. Others have already shared their reactions to some of Rev. Aulenbach's questionable assertions. I want to address one they did not mention: his argument that a person may be a good Christian without attending church.*

*For some years I have been adjusting to the enormous fact that the chief goal of God is to glorify God and enjoy God's self forever. Some readers might wince at this novel rendition of a familiar phrase from a historic confession of faith. If I applied this cryptic turn on the ancient line from the catechism to myself, I would be in trouble. For if I were to say, "The chief goal of Richard is to glorify myself and enjoy Richard's self forever," I would be guilty of overweening pride.*

Richard, that is exactly correct. But the same logic you apply to yourself, you refuse to apply to God. You rationalize and make excuses for His vanity. I wonder why that is?

Well Richard, the Bible is pretty clear about what will happen to you if you don't, isn't it?

*But with God it is different.*

Richard, now you are going to try to justify why you don't hold Him to the same standards as humans. Standards that He cannot rise to ... and I already explained why you are going to do this.

*God's nature is so good, so loving, so perfect,*

Richard, I thought about making a long list detailing some of God's "adventures." But you are obviously already aware of the hundreds of verses that describe your God's slaughter of helpless humans. So that list would be a waste of time. It is clear that you have rationalized God's murderous behavior in every case; probably by blaming the victims. But of all the Gods who have ever been invented by humans throughout the millennia, there is none more evil, murderous, or inhuman ... than yours.

You find slavery "good?"

You think that drowning the human race, along with innocent animals, is "loving?"

You've been to Zimbabwe. You think that looks like the work of a "perfect" God?

Of course you do. You haven't the courage to think otherwise as long as you believe that this evil, invisible monster is listening to every thought you think.

I wouldn't wish your existence on a worm.

*that worship of God is truly an end in itself.*

Richard, what does that even mean? Whatever you think it means, it sounds like you've just removed all value from human life. Which actually, is pretty much what your religion does, doesn't it?

*Therefore, all creatures, and especially human beings, have no higher calling or purpose than to glorify God.*

Richard, so the highest calling of any mouse is to glorify God?

And how would a mouse answer that call?

*We call this God-seeking and God-praising activity worship.*

Richard, I would call it morbid. As you admitted earlier, any human who displayed this behavior would be shunned, and yet you actually see this as something to be admired?

*It is our highest end and greatest opportunity. God loves it when we worship.*

Richard, that is true of all megalomaniacs.

*If we humans have no higher calling than to glorify God, the same is also true for God.*

Richard, no matter how many times I read that, it still makes no sense. Let me get this straight Richard, your parents actually paid to send you to Stanford? I wonder if it's too late for them to apply for a refund?

If a tuition refund from Stanford requires documentation, just have your parents show them this essay, and I guarantee they'll get all their money back.

*The amazing thing is that God is far more committed to expanding our worship of his divine majesty than are even the most devoted of his followers.*

Richard, you have no idea how insane you just made your God sound, do you?

*If God were not constantly and universally pointing his creatures toward himself as the greatest and most satisfying object of our affection and love, then God would by default be directing us toward some lesser end.*

Richard, even other Christians must be foaming at the mouth over your portrayal of their God. You are making Him sound worse than any human who has ever been confined to a straitjacket.

*And if God did so, God would be leading us astray. A perfect God cannot fail to exalt himself because it would be dishonest to suggest that anyone or anything else was more worthy of our praise and adoration.*

Richard, watching you perform the mental gymnastics necessary to avoid honestly evaluating your God is a sad thing to behold. You are proof that Christianity forces many of its followers to become intellectually dishonest to a degree that is almost unimaginable. Any God that would demand that its followers grovel and humiliate themselves as you have just done, does not deserve anything other than ridicule.

*Furthermore, God cannot remain passive and unmoved when people ignore, forget, reject or remain ignorant of God's desire to be worshiped by all creatures.*

Richard, how do dolphins worship Him? Is that what they are doing when they leap out of the water?

*God's loving care for us is too comprehensive for that.*

Richard, why didn't God's "comprehensive loving care" include slaves? Or children in Zimbabwe who starve to death before their first birthday?

Maybe a more accurate choice of words would have been God's "selective loving care."

But you did choose your words carefully, didn't you? You chose "comprehensive" to intentionally avoid revealing how selective and biased your God is, in His treatment of His subjects. We know this is true because God confesses to this bias many times in His autobiography.

*The opinion about church-going expressed by Rev. Aulenbach suggests that God is indifferent to whether people worship.*

Richard, Atheists are in total agreement with the reverend, although for a different reason.

*Such a claim seriously misrepresents the character of God.*

*Even the pagan Magi knew that the infant Jesus commanded their worship.*

Richard, the only kind of worship worth having is worship that has been earned ... not required.

Worship that has been earned is sincere. Forced worship under penalty of torture is the adulating worship of sycophants. The fact that you can't see this obvious truth is disturbing.

*Even the man who had been blind worshiped Jesus.*

Richard, when you can show me a grateful amputee who has had a limb restored ... then I'll be impressed.

*At the ascension of Christ, all his disciples worshiped Jesus and "stayed continually at the temple, praising God."*

Richard, that doesn't sound all that different from other funerals.

*The very nature and character of God elicits worship that is corporate and regular. Jesus, himself God,*

So Richard, how do you guys figure that your religion is monotheistic?

Add two more Gods and they could field a basketball team.

Islam - now there's a monotheistic religion.

*Jesus may have had a better understanding of how to observe the Lord's day than some Pharisees who disputed with him,*

Richard, "may have had?" If Jesus was God as you claim, isn't it a certainty that He had a better understanding?

*but his example of going regularly to the synagogue on the Sabbath still forms the basis for Christians, who are the disciples of Jesus, to do as their teacher did and worship regularly.*

Richard, slight problem with that one: Christians don't go to church on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is observed on Saturday by Jews - and they should know.

Since Christians work on the Sabbath and rest the next day, they are not following Jesus; nor are they following His Father who made it very clear in the first edition of The Ten Commandments that working on the Sabbath was a capital offense.

*The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer puts it this way: "The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ, to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of Christ."*

Richard, I underlined the pertinent part "give." That's why people are urged to attend church rather than worship God in the privacy of their own homes. It's all about the offering basket; always has been; and always will be.

After all, Creflo Dollar can't keep replacing 60-million dollar jets if his flock doesn't show up with the "Seed" money.

*This is the teaching of the Episcopal Church, of which I am a member. It is also the common wisdom among orthodox branches of Christianity.*

*Of course, true Christians usually will not need a legal code to persuade them to go to church any more than normal people need a police officer to make them eat when they are hungry.*

Richard, you contrasted "Christians" with "normal people." Perhaps that was just a Freudian slip. But I think you were much closer to the truth than you realize.

*Spirit-filled worship is too exciting and joyous to miss out on voluntarily.*

Richard, so is an Easter egg hunt. But at least the successful hunters have something to show for their efforts.

*In some societies, Christians are persecuted if found worshiping.*

Richard, true. But it is more true that in Christian societies those who refuse to worship are persecuted. Just ask any Atheist.

Or you can just review Christianity's long bloody history to see how they dealt with dissent. For example: Crusades, inquisitions, witch-burnings, blasphemy convictions, abortion clinic bombings, and other assorted Christian pastimes.

*Thus it is helpful to remind believers that worship is a duty as well as a privilege.*

Richard, that is unnecessary. The Bible has already taken care of that. Failure to worship the one true invisible ghost is punishable by excruciating torture ... for eternity; said torture to be executed by the loving, forgiving, perfect, wise, creator of the Universe ... Jesus.

*Perhaps one might say there is a difference between church-going and true worship. Any statement can be true, if you allow private definitions of the meaning of the words. I know I couldn't call myself a "good Christian" if I didn't worship regularly with other believers. Given the freedom to do so, without regular worship I would not dare to call myself a Christian at all.*

Richard, you just criticized private definitions, and then what did you do?

You created your own little private definition of "a good Christian"

in the very next sentence.

See Richard, that's what religion does to your brain - it fries your logic circuits.

<http://articles.latimes.com/1999/sep/25/local/me-13910>

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

The Omega-3 Story Gets An Intriguing New Twist

One in 10 Americans take fish oil supplements thanks in part to decades-old research. The Inuit—who consumed a diet mainly of whales, seals, and fish—rarely had heart attacks, and researchers speculated in the 1970s that omega-3 fatty acids found in fish guard against them. But decades' worth of fish oil pills may have been better dumped down the drain: A new study provides an intriguing new twist to the omega-3 story. In analyzing the DNA of 191 Greenland residents of almost entirely Inuit descent, scientists found they had genetic variants that may help them consume high amounts of fat without negative consequences. The find suggests that lessons from the Inuit cannot be extrapolated to other populations.

Their genetic mutations helped keep fasting insulin and LDL cholesterol levels low. Inuits with two copies of one gene variant in particular were an average one inch shorter and weighed 10 pounds less than those without it. The genetic variants—which may have come into play 20,000 years ago regulate how much of these omega-3s and omega-6s you can make naturally. The Inuit have such a high diet of omega-3s, that they produce much less of it themselves. This is perhaps the most extreme example to date of a genetic adaptation to a specific diet.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

FAMOUS QUOTES

Napoleon Bonaparte

(no biography - previously quoted)

"Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich."