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Dennis Prager: What are Judeo-Christian values?

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The term “Judeo-Christian values” is frequently used.

I am one who uses it.

I do so for the same reason the late great British prime minister Margaret Thatcher did:

“The truths of the Judaic-Christian tradition,” she said, “are infinitely precious, not only, as I believe, because they are true, but also because they provide the moral impulse which alone can lead to that peace, in the true meaning of the word, for which we all long... There is little hope for democracy if the hearts of men and women in democratic societies cannot be touched by a call to something greater than themselves.”

Mrs. Thatcher was a believing Christian. I am a believing Jew. While we have some religious beliefs in common, we have different theologies. But we have the same core values. And in societal terms, moral values are far more important than theologies.

That is why traditionally religious Protestants, Catholics, Mormons and Jews are aligned on almost every important social issue.

Here are 10 of those values.

- No. 1: There is one God. That God is the God introduced to the world by the Hebrew Bible – the source of one universal morality.
- No. 2: The Hebrew Bible (the only Bible Jesus knew and which he frequently cited) introduced the most revolutionary moral idea in history: that there are objective moral truths just as there are mathematical and scientific truths. Without God as the source of moral standards, there is no moral truth; there are only moral opinions.
- No. 3: Because there are moral truths, good and evil are the same for all people.
- No. 4: God – not man, not government, not popular opinion, not a democratic vote – is the source of our rights. All men “are endowed *by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights,” declares the American Declaration of Independence.
- No. 5: The human being is “created in the image of God.” Therefore, each human life is precious. Therefore, race is of no significance, since we are all created in God’s image and God has no race.
- No. 6: The world is based on a divine order, meaning divinely ordained distinctions. Among these divine distinctions are God and man, man and woman, human and animal, good and evil, nature and God, and the holy and the profane.
- No. 7: Man is not basically good. Christians speak of “original sin” in referring to man’s sinful nature; Jews cite God Himself in Genesis: “The will of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21). They are not identical beliefs, but they are both worlds apart from the naive Enlightenment belief that man is basically good. And they come to the same conclusion: we need God-based rules to keep us from our natural inclination to do evil.
- No. 8: Therefore, we must not follow our hearts. Both religious Jews and Christians are keenly aware of how morally dangerous it is to be led by our emotions. Those who reject Judeo-Christian values are far more likely to follow and promote the advice, “Follow your heart.”

No. 9: God gave us the Ten Commandments – the core of Judeo-Christian values.

Therefore, to apply but one of the Ten Commandments to our morally confused secular age, you must “Honor your father and mother” even if they voted for someone you loathe – meaning, at the least, remain in contact with them and do not dare deprive them of the right to be in contact with their grandchildren.

No. 10: Human beings have free will. In the secular world, there is no free will because all human behavior is attributed to biology and environment. Only a religious worldview, because it posits the existence of a divine soul – something independent of biology and environment – allows for free will.

There is another important aspect to the term “Judeo-Christian.” The two religions need each other. Without the Old Testament, there is no New Testament. Virtually every Christian moral principle derives from the Hebrew Bible – not only the 10 Judeo-Christian values enumerated here, but such basic moral principles as “Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18), “Love the Lord your God with all your heart ...” (Deuteronomy 6:5), and “Love the stranger” (Deuteronomy 10:19).

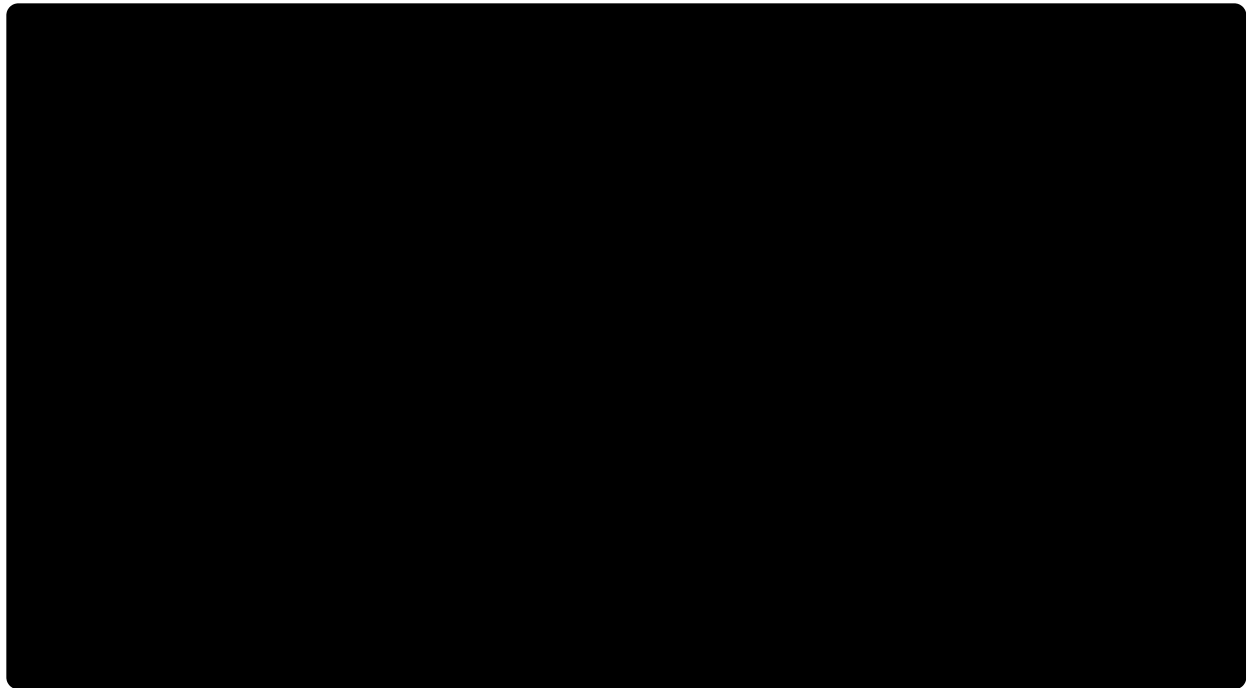
At the same time, Judaism needs Christians. It was Christianity that carried the Torah and the rest of the Hebrew Bible to the world. This was acknowledged by the greatest Jewish thinker after Moses, Maimonides.

Thus, while people speak of “Judeo-Christian” values, people do not speak of “Judeo-Muslim” values. As the noted Jewish scholar David Novak writes, “Maimonides rules that Jews may teach the Torah to Christians but not to Muslims because Christians believe Hebrew Scripture in toto to be the revealed word of God, whereas Muslims believe that primary text to be the Quran; for them, Hebrew Scripture is a flawed revelation. Thus, Jews and Christians share a common revelation in a way that Jews share with no other religious community.”

The ultimate embodiment of Judeo-Christian values has been the United States of America. America's Founders were Christians (some culturally, some doctrinally) who were rooted in the Hebrew Bible. America was founded not to be a replacement of Israel, but a "Second Israel." Until recently, it was.

Dennis Prager is a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host and columnist. His commentary on Deuteronomy, the third volume of "The Rational Bible," his five-volume commentary on the first five books of the Bible, was published in October. He is the co-founder of Prager University and may be contacted at dennisprager.com.

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