

almost
I like to surf. So, every week, I paddle into the cold waters of our NorCal surf spots. As much as I like it, I notice some surfers make surfing into their *raison de etre*. When I find a friend who lives, breathes, thinks and talks nothing but surfing, I like to shock him with my own aphorism: "Surfing is a great sport, but it's bad religion." They look at me puzzled and wonder if I'm something like a preacher—well, I AM... So,

Perhaps my aphorism needs an explanation. Some things are good in and of themselves, even healthy. But turn them into a *quasi* religion and they become monstrous. And the principle applies ~~across the board to most everything else as well~~. For examples:

E.g. Nation. I love our country, salute the flag, and am a proud father of an Air Force pilot. I have little time for people who hate America... But those who *worship* America have forgotten the lessons of history. Nation is one thing: nationalism *quite* another. Rampant nationalism fomented the carnage of WW I and stoked the flames of hatred during WW II. It's good to love your homeland, but wicked to put your nation above all others *and God everything else, including*.

E.g. Sports. I love the outdoors and occasionally watch team sports. I didn't have time to watch much of the World Series, but the few games I did watch were pretty exciting. Sport is fun when put into context of bodily movement, poise, and training, teamwork, coaching strategy. But make sports into a religion and it produces diminishing returns. Win at all costs is ugly; there are higher principles than winning: *like sportsmanship, honesty and loving the game itself.*

Politics. Used to be that the political arena was divided into Republicans and Democrats. They'd put forth a candidate, win or lose, and cooperate with the opposing party to run the country. Today, the rabid right and loony left are scarcely able to concede that their opponents are human, let alone American! Have we injected ~~our~~ religious zeal into politics? In a recent article, columnist David Brooks says we have. *quote - -*

"What you see is good people desperately trying to connect in an America where bonds are attenuated — without stable families, tight communities, stable careers, ethnic roots or an enveloping moral culture. There's just a whirl of changing stepfathers, changing homes, changing phone distractions, changing pop-culture references, financial stress and chronic drinking, which make it harder to sink down roots into something, or to even have a spiritual narrative that gives meaning to life.

You can see why, in the disrupted landscape... people would form the sort of partisan attachments that are common today. Today, partisanship for many people is not about which party has the better policies, ... *It's not even about which party has the better philosophy, ...* These days, partisanship is often totalistic. People often use partisan identity to fill the void left when their other attachments wither away *"religious, ethnic, communal and familial."* → *"end quote!"*

In sum: our social and spiritual dis-ease is manifesting in our political discourse. Unless it changes, we are unlikely to remain the beacon of hope and light for those who love freedom.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment