

Highland

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What is important is to be and promote goodness.”

She says a lot here. In her experience, people with her beliefs (and non-beliefs) are not understood and therefore judged by those who assume faith is necessary for goodness. I appreciate that Deb makes a point of stating these folks “should really spend time with those of us” who have different feelings and beliefs. She’s honest about what she knows and doesn’t know, but brings it back to goodness. And not just goodness as an idea or belief. She says it’s important to “promote” it. A positive, proactive outlook.

Another writer, Gerald, echoed some of this. He says he feels the columns are “representing me ... as a non-believer.” He is glad to know that people are hearing that a non-religious individual can be “a thoughtful, caring person participating in society.” Gerald was in the service, including service in the Peace Corps, but now in later life “I find myself very pessimistic about the climate crisis, politics, human nature, etc.” He tries to keep his mind off those things but he’s troubled by what he sees and feels in the world. Many of us share that, I think. As we all must do, Gerald finds activities that bring him a sense of peace, whether gardening, enjoying nature or walking the dog.

Deb and Gerald represent the voices of people who often have to keep their beliefs, and non-beliefs, to themselves. They know how it feels to be misunderstood or treated differently because their choices and perspectives are not the same as the dominant religious culture. How many feel this way? Would our communities, even our religions, be healthier if they could hear these voices, and welcome them?

Hovering over these branches of belief, looking for a place to land, I received another email from Linda who wants people to know that “Christianity does not advocate hatred, violence, close-mindedness or fear.” Her faith is centered in love — “Love God” and “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” For her this means, “I cannot hate another human being just because their race, religion, sexual orientation, or culture is different from mine.” More than simply practicing non-hating, Linda finds “the joy of learning about other people’s cultures is interesting, fun and exciting! Why would I want everyone to be the same as I am?”

Can we imagine a strangely diverse flock, where Deb, Gerald and Linda, with their different beliefs, can find some dry ground, fertile land, to grow better understanding?

Imagine that. These honest and hopeful voices may offer more creative ways forward for faith and what may lie beyond faith.

If you have further reflections to share, let me know: chris.highland@gmail.com.