

Reflections on the Earnest “Pursuit Of Happiness”

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When you consider that the founding fathers of our country tried to provide us with the means for the actual separation between church and state, you may find yourself forced to acknowledge that, at best, they could only have partially succeeded in doing so, and could do no better today. After all, the religious and secular aspects of our lives intersect in inescapable ways, overlapping in so much of our culture and society.

Their joint effects can be seen in our attitudes to so many things: debates over the question of marriage laws and parenting; the capitalist, democratic economy that is ours and includes so many socialist overtones via Social Security and Medicare; Medicaid and our views on abortion and contraception; the value of incentives in business or farm subsidies; the justice of our tax system; our care for the environment and ecosystems; the extent of aid we provide developing nations and the reasons we obsess on going to war.

One result is that as individuals, we are required to make choices and decisions that strongly affect our happiness, or our ability to pursue what we believe will make us happy. All this in a context in which various churches and the laws of state (and individual states) or the US Constitution, simply collide, affecting our private and public lives on a very regular basis.

A second result is that if you're a genuine grown-up, you feel that your catching up with happiness has to really include happiness knowing your brothers and sisters, your fellow citizens (people of other colors, flags and persuasions) will have the exact same opportunity too. Otherwise, there is a kind of disconnect that interferes with our happiness as much as poverty or a bad relationship

So, maybe we've got to at least look at the happiness aspect of life in this way: it is in many ways obvious that no one would pursue happiness unless they were somehow

unhappy or 'lacking in happiness.' And Benjamin Franklin was quoted as saying that the US Constitution "doesn't guarantee happiness, only the right to pursue it. You have to catch up with it yourself," So, if there are schisms and contradictions between your religious beliefs and the state, then without resolving them, it can be difficult to be truly happy about the life you lead.

But how about this? Someone once wrote "There is a wonderful, mystical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life—happiness, freedom, and peace of mind—are always attained by giving them to someone else." We've been unable discover the identity of the writer, and of course, lots of folks would argue there are other paths to happiness and ways to pursue it. But that's still not the same as finding it.

As for freedom and peace of mind, the facts are probably obvious. Anyone who understands anything like the meaning of relativity and how to allow successful relationships to develop and bear fruit, consciously or, at least, unconsciously knows so.

Alternatively, in many ways, whether they admit it or not, such things are a mystery to individuals who are merely out for themselves, their corporation, political party or secular religion, people who are caught up in the pursuit of power or the almighty dollar, or who suffer from emotional and spiritual insecurity or negativity.

Well, stating what in today's world might have become a Tweet, the twentieth century poet, writer and critic Dorothy Parker once wrote, "If you want to see what God thinks of money, just look at all the people He gave it to."

Again, during the same era, social writer Eric Hoffer remarked, "You can never get enough of what you don't need to make you happy."

All of which can leave you on the horns of the original dilemma between church and state, socialism versus incentives and a long list of other opposing tendencies that exist in this country (and a slew of other countries) and lead to the question "How does a grown-up pursue happiness." Or if this is God's world, how did it ever get to be this way?

As far as happiness goes, can this consideration maybe lead to the conclusion that discovering how to be happy in God's world may amount to understanding all of the above, letting it all go, and trusting the Process?

Hell, why not actually practice this notion. It *must* result in happiness