Humanists of Greater Portland Essay

There is a place in one’s life, however large or small, that is fulfilled by a mosque, or a temple, or running in the forest, or from the strings of a guitar. It is the outbreath from our restless lives, and the pillar by which we realign our spirit and emotions. It matters not whether one finds this peace looking out at the ocean or toward the sun through windows of stained glass; the beauty of this outbreath is that spirituality, fundamentally, is within ourselves.

Yet as human beings we do not thrive in solitude, and the patterns of our existence show prosperity in diversity. In this country, overwhelmingly, we have immigrated from the far corners of the earth to share land, resources, ideas, and opportunities. Our state is collective. From the nature of our congregation government has risen, its purpose being to solve conflict and to serve as an established order. Essentially, our nation is structured to protect the rights of each of us, no matter where we come from or how we find our outbreath.

Organized religion--the church-- fulfills spirituality but does not reflect the abundance of our country. It serves to create and preserve an intimate community, foster a sense of comfort, and to promote homogeneity. The rules and expectations the church holds stem from intention, the goal being to retain a set of values which unite people together under one way of life. This idea is not progressive, in fact, organized religion’s role is to hold onto the past.

And while we create structure to protect this country, our progress is made by breaking down barriers, beginning with individuals and small groups rising up to stand for what they believe is right. We have thrived because of conflict, arguments, and disruption; both the beauty and success of our nation rests upon our drive to question the world through scientific reason, humanistic compassion, and the desire to seek greater truth.

The very grounds of religion should not mingle with our government; separation of church and state is not only good for us, it is vital. While a church serves a community bound by one interest, our country’s reality is one of many. The feeling of comfort that organized religion provides is counterproductive to progress; it is the yearning for things to stay the same and to squelch change. We cannot educate children in the name of comfort or solve national conflicts through the selfish desire for our own comfort. The spirit of entrepreneurship, of inventions, and of social progression go against the boundaries put up by institutionalized religion.

A secular state gives our people the foundation for growth. Growth in compassion, in new discoveries, in acceptance, and in righteousness. The spirit of each of us is able to thrive when we are urged to discover on our own, and to act from the natural, grounded truth of our hearts.

As someone untied to any specific religion, the separation of church and state has affected me most through my education. I have been given the opportunity to go to school without the pressure to conform, and without influence over how I choose to navigate the world. This secular approach to learning has allowed me to not only think objectively, but to grow in an environment where I am encouraged to question everything. I question the way religious institutions embody spirituality, while I am fascinated by the human fundamental qualities which gave life to the force of the church. It is with this same action that I am sometimes skeptical even of the scientific community’s agenda. As with any organization, the industries and group mentality can cloud the individual journey of truth and dignity.

Equally as influential to me in school has been my coexistence with people of many backgrounds-- religious and nonreligious, leaning both left and right, and from cultures incredibly distinct from my own. Because my education is unaffiliated with any one way of life, it embraces diversity, which in return, urges me to embrace difference as well. While learning under the same roof as Muslims, Catholics, Jews, and Atheists may seem trivial, what is institutionally accepted throughout our childhood shapes the way I, and my peers, view the world.

When we are encouraged to look at the world in a humanist way, we are able to understand ourselves and the world around us through a pure lens. Each of our beliefs and outbreaths shape who we are, but the institution of religion must not cross into the systems of our country. To thrive as a national community, it’s crucial that we are not guided by one god or divine spirit, but by the goodness of our hearts and the liberal curiosity of our minds.