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Saying No to Civil Religion

Ken Briggs | Sep. 10, 2011 NCR Today

Mollie Ziegler in a "Get Religion" column provides a welcome correction to the idea that religious officials are offended by being left out of the 9/11 ceremonies.

Her own tradition, the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, is among many religious groups who disapprove of rubber stamping secular causes because their theology requires a separate critique of worldly affairs. Their mission, broadly speaking, is to honor the integrity of the secular realm from a spiritual vantage point rather than becoming contiguous with it.

The New York memorial is especially fraught with temptations to endorse unintended purposes. While religious leaders would pray as one in memory of the dead the healing of survivors, the setting lends itself to other ends. For example, does it become a virtual acceptance of the wars waged in reaction to that terrible event? Does it imply support for the legal restrictions in its wake? And how does it keep from reawakening anti-Muslim sentiments?

Perhaps ministers, imams, rabbis, priests and all other clergy wouldn't be faced with such potential conflicts with their consciences but being on the platform would run the risk.

Better then to keep a distance and preach truth without such implicit restrictions from the vantage point of faith which holds governments accountable to higher authorities.

As Ziegler points out, leaders of many of the country's most historic faith groups aren't at all upset at not being invited to the ceremonies, at least in their official capacities. We need them to keep their priorities straight and to offer other ways of seeing things.

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