

Robots and Empire
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
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Mark 9:23 – 24

(NA 28th ed.)

(NASB)

δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τὸ εἰ δύνῃ,	And Jesus said to him, “If You can ?”
πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι.	All things are possible to him who believes .”
εὐθὺς κράξας ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παιδίου	Immediately the boy’s father cried out
ἔλεγεν· πιστεύω·	and said, “ I do believe ;
βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ.	help my unbelief .”

You can readily identify Jesus, of course. Note “**to be able**” in two lines. In line 3, see *pater* (father); also *paidion* (child) as in pediatrics. To believe is *pisteuō*. The desperate man cried out, “I believe, help my *a-pistia*,” that is, faith with the “*a-*” privative. Like in English, a-gnostic or a-theist. Un-faith. Help me, Jesus, with my secularity.

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I became acutely aware of my own secular heart after terrorists attacked the World Trade Center towers in 2001. With declining birthrates in Europe and massive Muslim immigration, for the first time I could envision a future that was not bright. What really bothered me was *not* that people would be living in spiritual darkness, or that the truth of the gospel would be suppressed, or that persecutions would follow. What *did* bother me was that if Islam became the order of the day in the West, the science-fiction Isaac Asimov vision of the future would not be realized. I mourned the fact that our civilization would not achieve greatness, that it would not reach the stars.

I know, that is quite silly. And yet—before then, I wasn’t even aware that I trusted in the ever-progressing West for my positive outlook.

When I came to my senses and remembered the gospel, I realized just how faithless I had been in my thinking. I never would have known this without my secular vision of the future being threatened by encroaching Islam.

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I have a friend who is an Orthodox priest. He and his wife invited me to their home. We were there with a number of his parishioners. They dressed in special clothes with religious accoutrements. They sang hymns and Orthodox liturgy over the dinner table. These were people who loved their religion and their God. It was actually intense for me; very different from a typical dinner at my house, which is pretty worldly to be honest.

You have probably heard gags about fruitcake. A fruitcake fell off the table and broke the hostess's foot. A man had a flat tire, but instead of a spare he used a fruitcake.* True story: Curtis Publishing Company would give a slice of fruitcake to their employees as a Christmas bonus. When I was young, every Christmas someone would buy a fruitcake, but few would eat it because fruitcake is barely edible. It is just too rich. And dense. And heavy.

I told my Orthodox friend that his faith was like fruitcake. It is just too rich. When I am around him or in his house, I become aware of just how very secular I am in my lifestyle and in my attitude. I want a break from it all. But I never would have been aware of my own secularity if I hadn't been treated to the rich alternative of his Orthodox lifestyle.

* Some believe there has only been one fruitcake in all of history. The same one keeps getting passed around from person to person.

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Assuming that I am not alone in this, I wonder how much we Presbyterians all need to hear Jesus' challenge, "If I can? All things are possible for the one who believes!" How much do we need him to help us with our lack of faith?

True story: a missionary recounted how dreams and visions were leading to conversions in the field. His Presbyterian board told him, "Those things never happened." Unbelief?

Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything" (Phil 4:6). When you are anxious, you struggle to believe that God is sovereign. You can't repent of anxiety—but you can repent of doubting that God is in control. Such anxiety follows secular thinking.

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb 13:5). Demanding more income can be a failure to trust God with your life. Such discontentment follows secular thinking.

"We speak, not to please man, but to please God" (1 Thess 2:4). Do you want to fit in and be respected by unbelievers, so you moderate your Christian witness? Such timidity follows secular thinking.

And so on. I'm sure you can think of more examples. How secular are you? Do you need Jesus to help with that?

Ask him to!