

BILL BARR'S CRITICS LOOK FOOLISH

Attorney General Bill Barr gave an historically accurate and sociologically sound presentation at Notre Dame Law School on October 11 that has been the source of much chatter by his critics. His topic was the militant secularist assault on religious liberty. If anyone has any doubts about whether this exists, let him read the Catholic League website. The points he made were astute.

Every society is conditioned on a modicum of order, lest it devolve into anarchy. In despotic regimes, order is imposed by the state. In democratic regimes, it relies on self-restraint. What is the source of self-restraint? Nothing harnesses the passions better than the Judeo-Christian ethos. When that is endangered, liberty loses.

Barr is rightfully concerned about the attacks on our religious heritage, leaving us vulnerable to social discord. His critics, who are sociologically illiterate, seem to think that secularism can take the place of our Judeo-Christian tradition. They are wrong. Secularism values individualism and appeals to our base appetites.

What upsets Barr's critics more than anything are his comments on the origins of today's attack on religion. "This is not decay. It is organized destruction."

To *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, this is "the language of witch hunts and pogroms." Catherine Rampell at the *Washington Post* was just as alarmed, saying his remarks are "a tacit endorsement of theocracy." *Mother Jones* reported that his speech "shocked legal experts." Mary Papenfuss at Huffington Post said his address "revealed how deeply the top lawyer in the nation is tied to his Catholicism."

Krugman's scary scenario of witch hunts and pogroms makes him sound delusional. Similarly, Rampell's fear that Barr wants a theocracy is crazy talk. Any "legal expert" who is shocked to learn about the sociological role of religion in a free society is badly educated. Barr's Catholicism, naturally, upsets the tolerant ones; they can't get over it.

Barr's critics do not believe there is any organized effort to attack our religious roots. Ironically, two of his critics—American Atheists and Freedom From Religion Foundation—are organized to do just that. This shows how clueless Barr's critics are.

If these savants had it their way, they would censor Barr. "Consider for a moment how inappropriate it is for Barr, of all people, to have given such a speech," writes Krugman. "The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion; the nation's chief enforcement officer has no business denouncing those who exercise that freedom by choosing not to endorse any religion."

The same part of the Constitution cited by Krugman guarantees freedom of speech. Yes, that even allows the Attorney General of the United States to defend religious liberty—just as it allows economists like Krugman to criticize him.

Bill Barr gave a courageous and much-needed statement on the current state of religious liberty. It sounded like it was taken right out of the Catholic League playbook.