

Remind Me Again: What is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism?

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is the name that sociologist Christian Smith gave to the default religious belief system of American teenagers, surfaced by the National Study of Youth and Religion (see Christian Smith with Melinda Denton, *Soul-Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (OUP, 2005). Here are its basic tenets:

- (1) A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
- (2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- (3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
- (5) Good people go to heaven when they die.

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Some problems of MTD:

- 1) *MTD reduces Christian ethics to being nice.*

“Strict” moralism is all Law

“Relativistic” moralism is nothing at all

Love without Truth is not Love

The Bible is not a rule book, but the power of God that points us to Jesus and the Gospel

- 2) *MTD is all about me and my comfort and happiness.*

We are not at the center of the universe

God created us to glorify Him and serve Him

He created us for holiness and righteousness and true “happiness” is only found in Him

- 3) *MTD cannot withstand “shipwreck.”*

God can use suffering for our good

Evil and suffering exist because of sin and we are conceived in it

God’s grace is sufficient for us

- 4) *MTD offers few resources for hope.*

Believing that a god exists is ultimately not much comfort, but believing that God sent His only Son to die so that you might have eternal life and that this God comes to you personally in Word and Sacrament, this is not an empty, hollow faith in God