

## **TRUE RELIGION VS. RELIGIONISM**

### **Why people hate religion so much**

Thanks to the recent flood of books by atheists, like 'The God Delusion' by Richard Dawkins, religion is taking a beating.

Good. It needed it.

Look up the word 'religion' in a Dictionary and it's a lovely word. It has its roots in the word 'respect,' and isn't that what religion is supposed to be about? It's about respect and reverence for a Supreme Being and a high ideal, which in turn creates respect and reverence for one's fellow humans and the planet.

What atheists see instead, unfortunately, is a horrible perversion of that ideal into the delusional, controlling, snobbish, fear-mongering, competing, hypocritical, irrelevant, self-centred, power-addicting mess that people actually dare to call religion.

And it's not just in Christianity they see it, either, it's in Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Unitarianism and all the other religious 'isms' floating round this globe that people name their religions by. True religion is lovely, but what atheists see instead is 'religionism' - defined in my Dictionary as "affected or false religion," and that's what's causing the problem.

False or affected religion gives the appearance of piety and respect, but it's a thin veneer covering some nasty stuff underneath, like sexual abuse of children, supreme power to the few, political infighting, exploitation of the poor and keeping people in line through fear of the afterlife and slavish obedience to ritual.

Unfortunately, all religions need do is attach the names 'God' and 'Allah' to their actions and there are always enough suckers out there who fall for the sales pitch and ignore the facts. Religionism is very good at sugarcoating itself so people stay loyal, despite its glaring errors, vile leaders and obvious lies.

So, it's good that atheists are exposing the rottenness in religionism, and with such eloquence and sarcasm.

But I wonder what an atheist would say if he bumped into true religion, the kind that changes people into what this planet is starving for, people who do, in fact, have respect - respect for God, respect for the incredible design in creation, respect for the enormous variety in people and respect for life in whatever form it takes, which in turn makes them into good people to know and pleasant people to be with.

Actually, I know one atheist to whom that happened. He was very good at mocking religion and brilliant at reducing Christians to blathering nitwits in a religious debate. It made him cocky and very sure of himself.

But one day he bumped into a couple of Christians at University who didn't fit the typical religious mould. They weren't the least bit pushy about their beliefs, nor did they come across as holier-than-thou. They were honest and transparent, and gracious in their attitude to argumentative people like himself. They also had a confidence about them, a peace of mind, free of all the usual guilt, fears and worries that religions create. He began to wonder, therefore, if there was another side to religion, a side he'd never seen before, where religion truly has the power to transform people for the better.

Imagine how hard that would be to accept, though, when all you've seen in religion is the pious, superior, judgmental and often vicious attitudes it creates in people.

That's why people in Jesus' day could hardly believe their eyes and ears when he turned up, because they'd never seen a religious chap act like he did, mixing with commoners, talking in their terms and expressing deep compassion for all in need. He didn't walk around with his nose in the air, all dressed up in impressive robes and expecting the best seats in the house, either.

They flocked to him in their thousands.

The only people who had trouble with Jesus, ironically, were the religionists, the ones who acted all pious but who really lived for prestige and power. They looked upon Jesus with disdain. How dare he mix with prostitutes and tax collectors? He was giving religion a bad name!

Actually, what Jesus was doing was showing the contrast between true and false religion, because what he was doing was lovely. Everything he did was out of care and compassion for people. He spent his entire ministry serving people, in contrast to the religionists who isolated themselves away from people, carved out a cushy living on the religious dues they demanded from people, and spouted platitudes they didn't live by themselves.

And unfortunately, it's the same type of religionists that atheists judge religion by today.

Religionists, however, do not represent true religion.