

## **ARE ALL CHURCHES LIKE THIS?**

### **How religion loves to rule people**

For several years, George and Susan shuffled from church to church looking for one that didn't believe it had the right to rule people's lives.

They tried a charismatic church first and received the gift of speaking in tongues, which was all very exciting and for a while everything was fine. But it wasn't long before the church started exerting its authority over them. They were reprimanded for not speaking in tongues enough, not showing up to church every Sunday, not tithing a full ten percent of their income and for not wearing the right clothes to services.

They tried talking to the pastor but their trifling concerns were clearly far below his exaltedness, so George and Susan shuffled off to another church where, unfortunately, things weren't much better. In this church, you weren't allowed to read any other Bible but the King James Version, you couldn't shop or work on Sunday, women had to wear hats at services to hide their hair, and men and women couldn't share communion together. Things got stricter and stranger the longer they attended. "It was creepy," Susan said later.

Disillusioned yet again, George and Susan moved on to another church, where the preaching seemed more balanced. But, they were told, they weren't allowed to dance, play cards, watch movies or play certain sports. A high-ranking member also told George he was going to Hell for drinking alcohol and for wearing jewelry to church. It all turned icy cold from then on, and the pressure to comply to all the rules and rituals became so oppressive that George and Susan decided to give church a total break for a while to recover.

No one from any of the churches they'd attended contacted either of them, so they flirted with the idea of trying a non-Christian religion next. But a little research soon revealed that Christian or non-Christian, it was the same old story. Religions or churches, they all had their custom-built package of rules and rituals that had to be obeyed, or else.

When George actually challenged one religious leader as to how a human organization could justify having such authority over people's lives, he was told in no uncertain terms "it is not one's duty in life to question, my good man, but simply to obey."

It reminded George of his old Catholic upbringing and the time he got into serious trouble for daring to question the priest on a point of doctrine. George soon learned that religions don't take lightly to having their precious authority questioned.

"But what right do they have to any authority at all?" Susan cried. "How can one church say it's the great authority on how people should behave when another church down the road enforces a completely different set of rules and rituals that must be obeyed or else, too? It's completely nuts. You've got all these churches and religions chucking their weight around as though they're the last word on everything, and yet they're all different. Worse still, people just accept whatever their church demands, without question. What's wrong with these people? They've got brains; can't they see what's happening?"

"But that's the power of religion," George sighed, "it reduces people to the level of morons, so it can crack the whip whenever it likes and people jump."

"But how does it do that?" Susan cried.

“Simple,” George replied, “it claims everything it says has divine inspiration, and people are dumb enough to believe it. But it’s so much easier for people to check their brain in at the door and do whatever they’re told than having to think for themselves and do their homework.”

“So, what do we do,” Susan asked, “we can’t just go nowhere, can we?”

“Well, we could always start our own church,” George replied.

“Hey, yeah, and we could make up our own rules,” Susan cries, “and make everyone obey us instead, and if they don’t do what we say we’ll just threaten them with Hell or tell them they’ll come back in another life as dung beetles. It works for all the other churches and religions, so why not for us?”

“Good point,” says George, “but one thing we ought to get settled first if we’re going to start another religion.”

“Oh, yes, what’s that?” asks Susan.

“Who’s in charge,” replies George, “you or me?”