**Religion — why fight over it?**

[Huzaima Bukhari](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/huzaima-bukhari/)

March 3, 2020

*“True religion is real living; living with all one’s soul, with all one’s goodness and righteousness”-Albert Einstein*

Considering the volatile situation of the world in general and the extraordinary political mismanagement in the Third World in particular along with rampant increase in immorality together with despicable acts of inhumanity being witnessed in the South Asian region these days, it is not surprising that questions are being raised regarding the usefulness of [religion](https://dailytimes.com.pk/568966/took-long-break-from-acting-to-focus-on-religion-hamza/) under the umbrella of which, humanity seems to have converted into savagery. In the name of divinity, sanctity is being constantly clobbered at the hands of brutal forces that have sabotaged people’s minds with poisonous overtures of religious supremacy, the anti-dote of which is, ironically, religion.

Infusing a sense of extreme arrogance in the souls of followers, some of the questionable leaders of different faiths have successfully managed to convince them that their specific brand of religion is the best and all others are not only fake but are fit to be wiped off from the face of this earth. Just as people take pride in wearing a special brand of clothing or using popular branded accessories, similarly, religions as well have become trademarks for sale by the opportunists who harp the tune of the hereafter but dance to the music of earthly and material gains. These scavengers have reduced the position of the faithful to that of an automaton having lost its capacity to think logically and behave according to its conscience-a rapidly decaying faculty.

If humans are faced with such a high degree of religious extremism, is being irreligious a solution? If one is to go by statistics then as reported by Pew Research Center in a global study of 230 countries and territories conducted in 2012, 16% of the world’s population is not affiliated with a religion as against 84% that follow one faith or another. Interestingly, Worldwide Independent Network/Gallup International Association, in pursuant to a poll from 57 countries, have reported that 59% of the world’s population claimed to be religious, 23% as not religious and 13% as “convinced atheists.”

The way members of clergy paint the picture of religion is sufficient to disillusion the ones capable of thinking and those who blindly follow are easily led on to believe every word of the cleric since they lack the wisdom to delve deep into learning the truth

These organizations have also mentioned an increase in those who are rejecting religion but decrease in their percentages in the coming decades because religion is associated with fertility and irreligion with infertility, meaning by that countries which apparently are in the non-religious category have lower birth rates. For clarity, it may be mentioned here that irreligion does not necessarily mean atheism. In the United States of America, a term “nones” has been coined to indicate those who are not affiliated with any organized religion but again, these people may not necessarily lack belief. According to 2015 Gallup poll, “nones” were the only “religious” group that was growing as a percentage of population.

What then is the difference between the concept of morality as propounded by religion and the one evolved in a secular or irreligious society? A riveting synopsis was given by a friend who said: “In secular societies, moralities and ethics develop, based upon people’s innate conscientious guidance whereas in religious societies divine injunctions and sacred books form the basis of morals.” What is exactly implied here is the presence of consciousness in the case of the “unguided” and its absence in the “religious” ones. Elaborated, this means that mere possession and rote of religious texts do not invoke observance of ethical standards unless these are purposefully taught to young and receptive minds. Even the Dalai Lama thinks that there is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophies because his brain and heart are his temples and his philosophy is kindness.

There is no harm in being religious nor is it imperative that all persons conforming to any particular faith have no sense of morality and all are to be clubbed with that group of “followers” who have unleashed a reign of terror or are engaged in unscrupulous activities. Undoubtedly, religion provides man with the much-needed spiritual support that enables him to confront his day to day problems and strike a sane balance in his life. It gives him a way forward and a reason for his existence. As Albert Camus opined: “I would rather live my life as if there is God and die to find out there isn’t, than live as if there isn’t and to die to find out that there is.” Despite having great knowledge about this world, man continues to seek assurances that science cannot provide. Religion tends to attempt at providing answers to mysteries that baffle the human mind.

In her noteworthy book “Why Religion” Elaine Pagels (who suffered personal tragedies in her early life) educates the reader with her keen observations and experience of associating herself with religion as she understood it and how it mattered to her; after seeking answers to her questions. While referring to a biblical verse (Gospel of Thomas- Saying 24) which goes as: “within a person of light, there is light. If illuminated, it lights up the whole world; if not, everything is dark,” she continues to write, “Helped dispel isolation and turn me from despair. … Instead of seeing suffering as punishment, this gospel suggests that, seen through the eyes of wisdom, suffering can show how we’re connected with each other, and with God.” She concludes that scripture was written to help people deal with what they could not otherwise accept.

The way members of clergy paint the picture of religion is sufficient to disillusion the ones capable of thinking and those who blindly follow are easily led on to believe every word of the cleric since they lack the wisdom to delve deep into learning the truth. They are satisfied with whatever is preached without for a moment casting any doubt on some apparently irrational dogma.

Professing a faith creates no issues. Challenges arise when faithful proclaim supremacy over others. A human is not born with the privilege of choosing a religion. He is naturally inclined towards whatever his parents and family believe in and which is obviously more precious to him unless he applies his own thinking mind to learn and adopt something different that appeals to him. Kindness, forgiveness, nobility, love and identical traits make a man a true human regardless of any ism that he relates to. When Khalil Gibran expresses his affection for his human brothers he innocently declares his union with divinity: “I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion and it is the spirit.”

Downplaying religion would not be fair especially when the fault does not lie in its principles but rather in those vested-interests who deliberately distort them to serve their villainous goals. There is a dire need to inculcate consciousness among the people to weigh their understanding in the light of their own conscience.

*The writer, lawyer and author, is an Adjunct Faculty at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)*