

In What Ways Does Religion Have a Vital and Constructive Role to Play in the Life of Humanity?

Prepared by Colin Dibdin for an
interfaith discussion topic, March 13, 2019

Some Current Views

“What is truth?” asked the King. “What you feel when you stump your toe is the truth, Sire” replied the Philosopher

It seems that less and less people are talking or discussing religion or religious matters these days. Church attendance is down by about 60% in every denomination in the Christian world. Indeed, for many people today, *knowledge* of the natural world and scientific discoveries have replaced their faith in a mysterious, magical God, making Science and Technology with its marvellous inventions the new “God”.

Many traditional Religions had urged its followers to give up the “foolish things” of this world and enjoy peace and happiness eternally in a mysterious “Heaven” after death, but today, that concept has changed dramatically and people are now looking at organized religion as “old fashioned” and archaic, if not a superstition, created by the Ancients to keep their ignorant “flock” in subjection.

Today people are looking to *knowledge*, not faith, as the basis of their existence, even the concept of an immortal “spirit” within has been discarded as superstition.

Is Religion irrelevant in today's world? by [Michael Lance Kersting](http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewArticle.asp?id=19453),
<http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewArticle.asp?id=19453>,
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“It is a betrayal of the intellect, a betrayal of all that's best about what makes us human,” [Richard Dawkins] said.

“It’s a phony substitute for an explanation, which seems to answer the question until you examine it and realise that it does no such thing.”

He added that in the scientific world, religion was a “pernicious charlatan”.

“It peddles false explanations where real explanations could have been offered, false explanations that get in the way of the enterprise of discovering real explanations,” he said.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/religion-is-redundant-and-irrelevant-richard-dawkins-takes-on-ex-archbishop-of-canterbury-dr-rowan-8476499.html>, article by [Ben Kendall](#), 1 February 2013, downloaded 13 March 2019.

Some aspects of religion are criticized on the basis that they damage society as a whole. Steven Weinberg, for example, states it takes religion to make good people do evil.^[89] [Bertrand Russell](#) and [Richard Dawkins](#) cite religiously inspired or justified violence, resistance to social change, attacks on [science](#), repression of women and [homophobia](#).^[90]

Hartung has claimed that major religious moral codes can lead to “us vs. them” group [solidarity](#) and mentality which can dehumanise or [demonise](#) individuals outside their group as “not fully human”, or less worthy. Results can vary from mild [discrimination](#) to outright [genocide](#). A poll by *The Guardian* noted that 82% of the British people believe that religion is socially divisive...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_religion#Harm_to_society,
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Bahá'í Perspective

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization. If a man is not characterized by these excellent qualities, it is certain that he has never attained to so much as a drop out of the fathomless river of the waters of life that flows through the teachings of the Holy Books, nor caught the faintest breath of the fragrant breezes that blow from the gardens of God; for nothing on earth can be demonstrated by words alone...

<https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/secret-divine-civilization/>

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion—a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion. For from a fair-minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social milieus in which they were obliged to carry out their missions, there is nothing to support the contentions and prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and therefore all human affairs.

<https://www.bahai.org/documents/the-universal-house-of-justice/promise-world-peace>

Such reflections, however painful, are less an indictment of organized religion than a reminder of the unique power it represents. Religion, as we are all aware, reaches to the roots of motivation. When it has been faithful to the spirit and example of the transcendent Figures who gave the world its great belief systems, it has awakened in whole populations capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good and to discipline the impulses of animal instinct. Unquestionably, the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature has been the influence of the succession of these Manifestations of the Divine that extends back to the dawn of recorded history.

This same force, that operated with such effect in ages past, remains an inextinguishable feature of human consciousness. Against all odds, and with little in the way of meaningful encouragement, it continues to sustain the struggle for survival of uncounted millions, and to raise up in all lands heroes and saints whose lives are the most persuasive vindication of the principles contained in the scriptures of their respective faiths. As the course of civilization demonstrates, religion is also capable of profoundly influencing the structure of social relationships. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of any fundamental advance in civilization that did not derive its moral thrust from this perennial source.

<https://www.bahai.org/documents/the-universal-house-of-justice/letter-worlds-religious-leaders>