

What if We Are All More Religious than We Think?

Clergy Column, *The Centre Daily Times*, October 3, 2015

by Rev. Jeremiah Montgomery

“My parents are religious, but not me...”

“I don’t like organized religion...”

“I’m spiritual, but not religious...”

How many of us have heard words like this? Perhaps we’ve even said them ourselves?

The question I’d like us to think about this week is: what if we are all more religious than we think? What if none of us can escape religion?

At first glance, most of us would say the question is ridiculous. We think of ‘religion’ as an organized system of beliefs about God (or gods) and how we relate to him (or her, or them). We think of ancient creeds and arcane rituals, of priests and pilgrimages, of sacred sites and traditional cultures. This is what we think of as ‘religion’ – and many of us are perfectly happy to leave it all behind. We aren’t interested in dogmatic baggage. We’re *not* religious.

Or so we say.

But what if all of these things are only distractions? And what if they are actually keeping us from asking the real question – the question that is the real heart of all religion?

That real question is this: what is the meaning of life? It is this question that every religion sets out to answer. And it is this question that none of us can escape.

Whether we realize it or not, all of us answer this question. We may not think about it consciously, but we all deal with it functionally. How? By the things we live for. By the goals we set and strive for. By the choices and priorities we make every day. Every human life has something at the center, something that is most important. What is life actually about?

The answers vary. Some of us live to earn money. Some strive for power. Many seek to find meaning in achievements, or purpose in relationships, or at least pleasure in hobbies. Or maybe we simply live for comfort. “I just want to be happy...” How many of us have said it?

The fact that we all live for something proves that we are all more religious than we think. Think about it. All of us, whether we realize it or not, organize our lives based on beliefs about what will make us happy. Doesn’t this sound a lot like “an organized system of beliefs about God and how we relate to him” – especially when we remember the religious claim that God is the source of happiness?

Every human life gives an answer to the question of life’s meaning. Because this is so, all of our lives are religious to the core. You may not follow a religion organized by the Buddha, by Muhammad, or by the apostles. But this doesn’t make you non-religious. It simply means you follow a religion organized by yourself. You may not worship Jesus Christ as your God. But this doesn’t mean you don’t believe in God. It means you are playing god for yourself.

I write all these things in the hopes of raising spiritual self-awareness and encouraging the search. If religion is as inescapable as gravity, then the wise thing to do would be to seek out the truth – not to try to make it up as we go. Many religious leaders claimed to have the truth, yet only one of them – Jesus himself – actually rose from the dead. If you can’t escape religion in any case, why not begin to investigate his claims? What if the stories about him are true?

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