

BELIEF IN GOD BEING RELIGIOUS (A RESPONSE TO THE NEW EMERGING IDEA: BELIEF IN GOD BEING ARELIGIOUS)

ASMA HAMID¹

Lecturer in Philosophy, Govt. Graduate College for Women Gulberg Lahore, Punjab
Pakistan

Abstract

This paper is specifically in response to those people who believe in God but do not believe in religion. And research shows that after Christianity and Islam, the third largest religion is belief in Theism as Areligious. The purpose of this paper is to analyze this view critically, logically, and historically. This paper highlights the perspective of religion in different disciplines like sociology, psychology, and biology. The research material being used in this paper is the views of famous writers of different disciplines who wrote about religion no matter in a positive or negative way. The author has tried her best to reject this view without any bias.

Introduction

“No Religion” is the world’s new religion today. According to a Pew study, after Christianity and Islam, the world’s third largest religion is “No Religion”. This new emerging idea is because the people holding this belief do not want to bind themselves with any religion. People are trying to escape from religious boundaries and find substitute ways to express their beliefs and share their ideas in the name of – freedom of expression. This “no religion” is different from Atheism – not believing in God – and kinds of Atheism such as Humanism, which claim that we can find the truth through the senses of our natural world. Morality is the result of common reason and culture. The definition of right is the promotion of human welfare and society independent from any religion should create the meaning of life and the purpose of living. Happy Human is the symbol of Humanism. They call themselves “free thinkers” because they claim that they just think freely without believing anything. Agnosticism is a different kind of Atheism that denies the possibility of knowing any Ultimate Spiritual Being. For them, it is not possible to know with certainty that there is a God or not but allow themselves that there may be the possibility of the existence of God without entering in any specific religion. There is another famous kind of Atheism that is called Secularism that holds that religion should be kept away from governments and political activity. One can call himself secular even being religious if one accepts the perspective of secularists which is based on no grouping in a society and mutual respect for all groups, all views are subjective and all people should allow realizing their potential.

¹After defining the terms opposite to theism I am going to come back to the original purpose of this paper that is, refuting the third largest religion which is the “Believe in God being Areligious”. It will be discussed first the basis on which they maintain their view about denying religion.

Areligious Responses

The first perspective they hold is that religion confuses them because of the controversies of theism and atheism. And the second view about denying religion is that choosing the right religion is a difficult task because every religion claims its truthfulness.

¹A good life WITHOUT RELIGION <http://agoodlifewithoutreligion.com/> (accessed on August 7, 2014)

And the third view is that there is a difference between religion and God. And one can access one's God without any middle source that lies between man and God. They view religion as the name of a set of obligations and beliefs. They think that they do not need religion and just need a relationship with Him. Participating in a church or other holy places is not a condition for establishing contact with God for them.²

The fourth view they maintain is that the history of religion is a reflection to show that religious institutions strived for the lust for power that ended in massive bloodshed or continual extremism and fundamentalism in the current period. And furthermore, nowadays spirituality is nowhere to be tolerated in religious institutions as its major aim is to gain more power to rule, control, and bend everyone's will to submission.

Religious responses:

The word religion can be derived from Latin word that means "to tie back, "to tie again." The function of the all religion is to tying people back to the thing which is above and beyond to human life. A reality that is greater and invisible from our perception. Religion is the basic fundamental component in many cultures, and a source of decision making in different aspect of human life. But the period of Enlightenment brought major changes in all kind of studies and religion was not an exception. It became the object of study of different subjects like psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology rather than mere unquestionable fact. And these subjects studied religion in different paradigms.³

Before refuting areligious ideas, different theories of religion given by famous writers of different disciplines are to be discussed.

Humans made: perspective of Materialism

In this perspective the materialistic holds that only materialistic world exists and the supernatural world is the invention of human imagination. In the period of nineteenth and twentieth centuries this scientific materialism gained its position and claimed that all around the world, religion can be seen in every culture.

The perspective about materialistic religion can be seen in the work of the famous philosopher of the nineteenth-century Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). According to his view, the deities are merely predictions of human beings just like the other qualities like love, wisdom, and power. And these qualities are imagined in outside human beings as deities. Then people start worshipping it as Supreme as we see ourselves-sinful and less powerful. Feuerbach pointed out this view with a particular reference to Christianity.⁴

Scientific materialists believe that religion is created by humans and history tells us that religions supported materialistic power. Karl Marx said that the religion of any culture took birth from its economic framework. And also it is the reaction of the oppressed people of the society. Marx wrote, "Man makes religion: religion does not make man. The religious world is but the

²I CRAVE CHANGE <http://powertochange.com/crave/discussion/connect/> (accessed on August 8, 2014)

³RELIGIOUS RESPONSES

http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205956599.pdf (accessed on August 1, 2014)

⁴Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ludwig-feuerbach/> (accessed on July, 26)

reflection of the real world. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of the heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people”⁵

Marx’s interpretation of religion was the foundation of the atheistic communism of the twentieth century. He asserted, “The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness.”⁶

Religion is useful, the functional perspective.

The sociologist’s perspective of functionalism explains the existence of religions. Religions can be seen in every culture and every society because it is useful for a member of the society as other institutions like education, sports, and politics are useful in society. It is useful because it tells the purpose of the existence of human life.

The pioneering work of the famous sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) highlighted the functional perspective of religion. He said that organized social structure is the essential characteristic of human society and religion is the source that holds a society together. Religion preaches love, harmony, justice, utilitarianism, and altruism and fulfills our desires and emotions in a disciplined way.⁷ Robert Putnam and David Campbell took a survey about religiosity in the United States and concluded that people who are practically active in organized religious affairs are generally better in dealings with their neighbors and feel more responsible as a citizen of the state.⁸

The study of the role of religion in society is a very important issue in sociology and other disciplines. The studies predict the social change by the specific religion which the people of the particular society hold.

The discipline of Biology also presents the functional reason for religion’s existence. For example, John Bowker, the writer of, *Is God a Virus*, said that religions are a systematic system that takes people together for their common biological survival. And because of this purpose, religion is the inherent quality of human brains. Also, medical professionals found that religious faith is good for the health of people.⁹ Duke University conducted research about the people who attend religious services and read religious scriptures are comparatively long-lived, less depressed, have less high blood pressure, and less tenable smoking. And also the research shows that patient with strong faith recovers faster from operations and sickness. The studies also show the powerfulness of prayer in healing sickness. Meditation has also been proven to erase bad emotions and reduce stress in the state of conflict and difficulties.¹⁰

According to the studies of psychology, the results found much use of religion. Sigmund Freud, a famous psychoanalyst of the twentieth century said that we have neurotic needs that fulfill

⁵ Manifesto of the Communist Party <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf> (accessed on July,28)

⁶ Manifesto of the Communist Party <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf> (accessed on July,28)

⁷ Emile Durkheim: On Morality and Society, selected writings

⁸ American Grace <http://books.simonandschuster.com/American-Grace/Robert-D-Putnam/9781416566731> (accessed on July, 25)

⁹ World Religions <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/john-bowker-the-paradox-of-religions-843964.html> (accessed on July,20)

¹⁰ Duke Medicine http://corporate.dukemedicine.org/news_and_publications/news_office/news/religious-factors-may-influence-changes-in-the-brain (accessed on August,2)

religion. He explained that religion is a shelter that protects us from the horror and terror of life. It provides us sanctuaries as a reward or punishment in return for our obedience and disobedience. Freud himself was very skeptical about religious beliefs and said that religion is like mental illness.¹¹

Twentieth-century psychoanalyst Erich Fromm wrote a positive note on it. He said human needs a stable structure of reference and that fulfills religion.

Religion offers the ideals that can easily people follow. In the twentieth-century Mahatma Gandhi, a famous politician said that he was shy and extremely fearful child. And then he turned into a great political figure. The reason was that he focused on the second chapter of Hindu scripture, Bhagavad-Gita

“He is forever free who has broken Out of the ego-cage of I and mine to be united with the Lord of Love. This is the supreme state. Attain thou this And pass from death to immortality”.¹²

Humans need inner power for healing with personal pains and problems and people who are in a state of severe illness, grief, and terror need the Divine to solve their problems. A Christian woman named Agnes Collard expressed that her painful years of cancer brought her closer to God: she mentioned,

“I do not know what or who He is, but I am almost sure He is there. I feel His presence; feel that He is close to me during the awful moments. And I feel love. I sometimes feel wrapped, cocooned in love.”¹³

The belief that someone does not exist is a source of isolation in the universe. And this feeling is terrifying.

Faith point of view: Ultimate Reality exists

The perspective of faith says, the true Ultimate Reality exists and cannot be comprehended readily. Human relation with this Ultimate Reality develops through the institution of religion. Some people believe that this Supreme Reality cannot be perceived through our external five senses. And many simply accept the belief that has been told to them or written in their holy books and some tried to apply reason in the right or wrong way and try to come up with their own conclusions.

Direct contact with the Supreme reality is given different names among Sufis and spiritual traditions. For example, gnosis, coming home, ecstatic, illumination, etc. This experience can come spontaneously called near-death experiences which mystics come across in this temporary world. Joachim Wach, a German scholar of the twentieth century carried out research and made comparisons about the nature of different religions. He found that every religion follows certain methodologies.

(1)It is the experience of Unseen Reality. (2) The whole being involved in this experience. (3) This experience is the most intense experience of all experiences of human life. (4) It brings results in human life in the way of action, ethics, and service.¹⁴

¹¹ Sigmund Freud <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/arguments-for-atheism/the-psychogenesis-of-religion/sigmund-freud-religion-as-wish-fulfilment/> (accessed on August,2)

¹² The famous people <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/mahatma-gandhi-55.php> (accessed on August,3)

¹³ Religious Responses

http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205956599.pdf (accessed on August, 4)

Knowing of Sacred Supreme Being

The individuals come up with different conclusions in order to understand and grasp that mind cannot easily and readily understand. Mircea Eliade tried to develop the comparative study of religion in the twentieth century. That field of research helps to understand the comparison and differences of the religion around the world and tries to explain the terms like sacred, profane, immanent, transcendent, and sacred Being. The Unseen Reality may also be understood in nontheistic terms as “changeless Unity,” “Suchness,” the Way”. In such understandings, there is no sense of personal God. There is also a belief that the sacred being is invisible but sometimes seen in human personifications as Christ or Krishna.

As it has been mentioned earlier that there is the belief that there is no deity and this position is called Atheism. This position occurs when the person is incompatible with the presence of evil in the world or feels that the theistic point of view is unscientific or religion controls human freedom. The atheists of England founded a campaign in 2009. They wrote the statement on buses and signboards that “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” And this movement is called “NewAtheism”. They give the reason for justification for their conception that which is depicted in history that the religions throughout the world remained very rigid and justified political violence. Agnosticism as briefly mentioned above does not deny the Supreme Reality but the feelings, “I do not know whether it exists or not”.

Apart from agnosticism, there is a liberal ideology in which people do their daily work independently from religion and this standpoint is called secularism. And this species has been established in contemporary Europe.

When we try to explain religion through categories that seems confusing but the fact is that they are not completely separate. There is a hierarchy of gods with one top being in some traditions of polytheism. An agnostic may be following universal moral principles. And a mystic may have direct contact with Ultimate Reality and yet could not share his personal experience as he could say that is beyond human knowledge.

Refutation of Areligious Idea

Here comes the original premise of the discussion and that is to refute the third largest religion in the world, “believe in God being Areligious”. As already stated in detail that people can be categorized into two parts, those who believe in God along with religion and those who are atheists and deny the possibility of the sacred institution called religion too, but there is an eighteen percent population around the whole world who believe in God but not in religion. This belief is rationally impossible and commits a logical fallacy.

The question arises to the theists to explain and answer the nature of God and how can they prove His existence.

Is God the King, The Sovereign Lord, The Mighty, The strong?

Is He The Creator?

Is He the Wise, The Judge, The Forgiver; One Who forgives the sins of His slaves again and again?

Then it is self-evident that there must be a set of disciplines given by God who knows the best about His own creation.

¹⁴ Chicago Journals

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1200579?uid=3738832&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21104679454013> (accessed on July 20)

And if the theist does not sure about that what is the nature of God they believe in or if they do not believe in such attributes as it has been stated above, then they must not claim that they are theists. Because when there is a Master then there must be obedient servants who obey their Master's rules and these rules are called religion.

Nietzsche was the famous German philosopher of the twentieth century. His famous statement "God is dead" occurs many times in his work. And maybe it is the best-known statement of his whole work. But the real matter is that he was fully aware of his religious and spiritual needs.

Iqbal said that Nietzsche was really aware of his religious desires. Because Nietzsche said, "I confront alone", he says, 'an immense problem: it is as if I am lost in a forest, a primeval one. I need help. I need a master. It would be so sweet to obey'.¹⁵ Because of this awareness, Iqbal describes him as "Qalb o momindamadmaghkafirast"¹⁶ which means "his heart is a believer's but his brain an infidel's".

Now here the claim of the areligious people could be discarded who feel that religion confuses them because of the controversies of theism and atheism. And the second view about denying religion is that choosing the right religion is a difficult task because every religion claims that this is a true religion.

In this response, certain questions can be raised.

Are they skeptical about their own reason and feelings which led them to such confusion?

And when we know that is the best school or university in the world then and select the best things in each step of our life then, is that possible to remain confused about the purpose of the existence of our own self and remain ignorant about the one true religion?

The Holy Quran says,

"And we have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand. They have eyes with which they do not see. And they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are heedless".¹⁷ (7:179)

And the third view of the areligious people is that there is a difference between religion and God. And one can access one's God without any middle source that lies between man and God. They view religion as the name of a set of obligations and beliefs. They think that they do not need religion and just need a relationship with Him. Participating in a church or other holy places is not a condition for establishing an association with God for them.

In order to challenge this assertion again question rises that if knowing God and establishing a strong relationship with Him is the destination of our life then there is a logical need for some source that helps us and take us to that destination and that source that tells us the do's and don'ts of our life is called religion. If we select no source then we will not go anywhere and if we select the wrong source then that will surely astray us away from our real destination and we will reach some false place.

The fourth and last view Areligious maintains that the history of religion is a reflection to show that religious institutions strived for the lust for power that ended in massive bloodshed or continued as extremism and fundamentalism in the current period. And furthermore, nowadays spirituality is nowhere to be seen in religious institutions whose aim was to gain focus, to gain more power to rule, to control, and to bend everyone's will to submission.

Yes,' tragically we all have seen the negative aspect of religion. Sometimes religious people divide themselves into groups rather than unify humanity. And they tried to terrify people whereas the purpose of religion is to inspire people through their good actions, the exaggeration

¹⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought In Islam*

¹⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *Pyam- Mashrik*

¹⁷ The Holy Quran (7:179)

of guilt and negative use of religious escapism are also potential problems of the religion. The term "fundamentalism" is applied to evoke the negative views of other religions. This term is wrongly applied because the essence of every religion is not grounded on feelings of hatred as Iqbal said;

ہر دین دولت میں جس دم بدلتی
ہوس کی ایسی ہی ہوس کی اندیزی

In response to this view, we see that all institutions like education, sports, economy have somewhere more and less corrupted. These institutions are not bad in their essence which leads to denying the whole system. And religion the mother of all institutions is not the exception.

Concluding Remarks:

After studying deeply the consequences and the features of the third largest new religion which is being theist as areligious is the result of many factors. The major alarming factor is the disappointed reaction that religion has been corrupted by politicians and religious scholars and that people are deviating from religion. The other major factor is the huge use of the internet where people always share their religious views all the time. And when the theists, atheist, and agnostics share their views on one single web page then that is not surprising to see the fourth category on the same page try to establish a middle ground. They accept the natural need of believing in God yet escape from the protected boundaries of religion. This is contradictory to say that one is a theist but does not believe in religion at the same time. In such a situation, our individual responsibility is not to remain silent. We should point out the flaws and fallacies of such ideas.

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