

RELIGIONS deal with questions about who I am, and what life is all about. Science investigates and seeks to explain the origins of the universe, life, human beings, how everything works. We humans are conscious beings, self-aware. We can investigate our surroundings, and our own existence. We can wonder about how everything works. We can ask, what is the point and purpose of our existence? How does the 'I' that 'I am' come to exist? What happens to the 'I' when my life comes to an end?

WE USE IMAGINATION AND REASON to answer such questions in the light of our own experience. People of different cultures around the world think about life and its meaning in a variety of ways. Their responses have much in common with each other. There is

- a feeling of awe and wonder at the beauty and order of the natural world
- awareness of an unseen power and presence as the source of all that exists – utterly unlike what we are
- a sense of the mysterious sacred in people, times, events and places, arousing interest in the unseen
- a desire to explain the origin and purpose of all things, and express this in rituals, in stories and in images
- an understanding that moral order and consistent values in relationships enable people to live in harmony with one another and the natural world.

THE WORD 'RELIGION' MEANS LITERALLY 'TO BIND TOGETHER'. The stories, rituals, beliefs and practices labelled 'religious' express ideas that unite people and communicate life's meaning and purpose for them. A secure sense of identity, and purpose contribute to people's health and well being. It stimulates creativity and resilience in coping with suffering. Religion has been evolving since the dawn of history, as a celebration of life and its value..

In the past 500 years, the scientific approach to the world has emerged. It has transformed the way we live. It dominates how many people look at and respond to life. We live by the belief that science and technology are necessary and generally a benefit to us. *Do we need religious belief any more ?*

SCIENCE ENQUIRES into the material world to gather reliable facts upon which to base our actions. It provides tools for understanding, predicting and managing what we discover. Some people think science is all we need to make the best of our lives and make sense of them. This is a belief. It rests on the assumption that knowledge of the measurable material world and reasoning about it is all we need to give order and meaning to life.

Most forms of religious belief value a scientific approach to the world, but also give high esteem to personal experience which science cannot measure. Awareness of the mysterious element in life is believed by some to be equally important. Feelings of awe and wonder, intuition, imagination, all interact with reason and observation in religion, without need to abandon scientific discipline for investigating truth. The religious quest for truth about the meaning and purpose of life concerns the world we see and know, and the realm which is inward and unseen.

RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS people alike, feel a sense of moral outrage and shock on hearing that others kill or act in the most inhumane and cruel ways, particularly if they seem convinced that God or their religion requires this. It happens everywhere. It happens, even when those involved don't want it to happen. Sometimes, it seems as if events control people, rather than people control events.

We have grown in knowledge, understanding and control of our environment over the past ten thousand years and in self-understanding. Religious beliefs and practices have also evolved and developed. Ancient ideas do not always die away, but co-exist with the new and contemporary. Violence, in the name of religion or another ideology starts from an influential conviction, found in all kinds of thinking and argument throughout the world. It is simply this: violence is indispensable as a means of resolving human problems, difficulties and conflicts.

RESORT TO VIOLENCE is often presented as a choice only to be used as an extreme measure. The use of minimum force as a means to exert control, or to suppress worse violence, is regarded as morally justifiable, the lesser of evils. More subtle kinds of force and threats of force are constantly employed to achieve the resolution of all sorts of problems in life, both great and small. 'Belief' in the effectiveness of force, that 'might is right', is widespread, despite evidence to the contrary.

There also exists a less popular, more demanding conviction, shared by some people of faith, that good can overcome evil by the power of moral reasoning, without resort to physical force. They argue that:

- peace is a positive condition, not just absence of conflict
- violence never works; but creates new problems as it resolves others;
- it should not be used as a last resort;
- it is better to endure violence than inflict it on others;
- evil should be overcome with good, rather than with a lesser evil.

JESUS OF NAZARETH was a pioneer of the way of non-violence. Not all of his followers understood, then or now, how vital a part of living by his Gospel teaching is a non-violent way of life. For centuries when the church lived under the patronage of régimes ruling by force, this teaching was shamefully neglected and compromised.

Jesus portrayed God, source of all existence, as hating no created thing, boundless in compassion, loving human beings, ready to heal injury, rather than inflict it, pardoning offenders rather than condemning, to rehabilitating rather than punishing.

Belief in a loving God is ultimately incompatible with belief in the effectiveness of violence. Renouncing and resisting the use of violence as an act of faith in God is a demanding, worthwhile way of life, appropriate to inhabitants of today's 'global village' with all its problems and challenges.

It demands that faithful believers work together, however they can, to building trust, reconcile conflict, overcome injustices, and heal the injuries caused by conflict.

So, can religion do good for anyone?

It can, if you are up to the challenge it presents as a practical way of life, inspired by a personal relationship with the all-compassionate God Jesus proclaimed.

Christianity for 21st century people

1. Why does religion seem do more harm than good?

Looking around at the world, it seems that conflict is often fuelled by religion. Some people are willing to kill, or be killed because of their beliefs about God. Although religion claims to be concerned with spiritual health and well-being, some see it as an obstacle to progress, even fostering prejudice against minorities.

Does religious belief do any good?

Would we be better off without it?

What is it supposed to do for me?

Any questions or comments
arising from this leaflet?
Please contact the Revd. Keith
Kimber,
029 2022 0375 or
keith.kimber@tesco.net

A CENTRAL CARDIFF
URBAN MISSION PROJECT PAMPHLET