

## Why Care what Others Believe?

It seems to be a little known fact that Christian and Islamic faith while open to faith comforting you are not about that. Faith is really loyalty. In fact Jesus was clear that faith can make horrendous demands of you and is not a placebo or to be treated as one. For that reason, it matters what you believe and you must be open to letting others care about what you believe. That means instead of having a placebo and calling it faith you are open to real faith and that only comes after a challenge and if you keep yourself informed.

In ancient Greece, a philosopher was a person who wanted to heal the souls and minds of others by giving them the right approach to reality so that they might have the beliefs and truths they need to be healthy and as reasonably happy as possible. We need more people like that today and they are too few. Superstition in the form of religion and other aberrations reigns and gets in the way of true progress. The religions all disagree with each other and imply that the teachings of the others is defective and could be harmful.

If we are in a religion, then how should we relate to other religions? There are only five options and each one of them excludes the rest.

First, indifference which rejects all religious dogmas and does not worry about if they are true or not.

Second, the ostrich approach. This holds that there is one right religion and the others are false or less right. There is only one true Church.

Third, the pluralist approach. Every religion is good and none is better than another and you can choose whatever one you want and it will do. All religions are true or bring enlightenment.

Fourth, all religions are saying the same thing in the last analysis and there is truth in every religion.

Fifth, the scientific approach is that we say we do not know anything more than what can be demonstrated by scientific reasoning so we cannot have faith in religion for it is beyond science. This approach has it that one religious faith is just as credulous as the next.

Ultimately nobody converts you - you convert yourself. All people must go out and help people convert themselves to the truth for what they believe about the important things. Since they mean well, we have to respect that and listen to them. Nobody says things just for the sake of saying them. They say things to make changes in the world – to put the world the way they want it to be. That is why error should be corrected. That is why if we know religion is wrong we should say so and be distributing tracts to curb its malevolent influence.

We are called Humanists because we see that Atheism or secularism is love and so it is our duty to be militant Atheists who go out and help all who will listen see the beauty of the truth. However, the chief aim of the Humanist is not to fight religion but to stand up for reason and to promote it. The reason it is the aim is that it will have more success and win us more respect. That is why we will concentrate on winning over those who already have turned against religion and then on the clergy. Having said that, destroying religion is an aim too. What the Humanist must do primarily then is defend himself or herself from misunderstanding for we believe that ignorance concerning our position is a danger to us and we have a right to do something about it and must. That is what we are doing when we try to get all who we meet interested in the good news of Atheism. Where we are silent we are asking for Humanism and atheism to be misconceived.

The believers in God say that God is truth itself and so error is antithetical to him just because he is non-error. By their belief then, they give up any right not to hear the other side. They give up any right not to be exposed to the truth or to turn away those who contradict their faith. If they really love God they will hear what the truth says even if it means being open to the possibility of finding out that there is no God. If they do not love God then they do not love others for the love of God and people are alleged to go together. They give up any right to complain if they are offended by what others present as evidence for they are asking for it.

Truth never harmed anyone though many harm and upset themselves because of it. That is not truth's fault. Truth by its nature has to beget hostility from those who despise it. It is people's reaction to the truth not the truth that does harm and that is their own concern. It is a fault in them and they have no business of accusing anybody who contradicts their religious beliefs of upsetting them. What another person says will upset you only if you are biased and don't want to see it or don't want to change your mind. To be biased is to be bigoted and in the grip of an irrational fear. By being like that you are the one who is being offensive and that is awful for fear is the root of all evil and hatred. For example, a Spiritualist will

not want to hear there is no life after death. The truth is the Spiritualist should want to know if there is none for it is a mark of maturity and goodness and benevolence to risk your belief and be ready to find a way to cope if it is wrong. You must not be biased because that means you are claiming that your belief is probably right and you are doing so because you want to believe it and not because of the evidence. This makes you a liar and a kind of persecutor to the person who sees you are wrong or who wants you to know you are wrong. There is no need to be biased so be fair to the person who disagrees with you. Don't be offended for that is the sure sign that you are biased. Don't set yourself up against the human rights of the person by being biased.

Those who ask you to respect their beliefs or who accuse you of not respecting their beliefs just because you point out some flaw in the beliefs are just trying to silence you and silence the truth. It is not disrespecting to examine a belief. Beliefs happen to people. If you see a man stealing a bike you didn't choose to see this and believe he stole the bike. You cannot believe what you want for belief is caused by evidence. Those who want to silence you and claim it is because they want their beliefs respected are really saying truth shouldn't be respected or that beliefs matter more than truth!

To respect people and to respect beliefs is not the same thing. People don't make their beliefs, the beliefs just happen to them. So though you can't hate the sin and love the sinner you can love the mistaken believer and hate his mistaken belief.

When you refuse to let a murderer go out to slay prostitutes you are not respecting his belief. People need respect but beliefs do not. Wrong beliefs give up any right to be respected and that is simply by virtue of their being wrong.

The well-balanced person never fears truth of any kind and knows that if they are accused of being in the wrong that the other person means well and may be right and so should be listened to for that reason. If we don't promote truth people will never learn and grow up. But they have to be carried along the right road gently and we must remember that some truths are more important than others and the important ones come first. We must labour for the sake of the important truths for to be against important truth is to insult the whole human race for if important truth is bad so is the important truth that we exist. The sensible person likes to hear an objection to what they think or believe for it gives them a chance to grow in wisdom. If the objection is unfair they will see that and their belief will get stronger. If the objection is fair they should be glad to have been told. The Humanist sees an objection as a challenge and as a gift. Even when it is given in a bad spirit it should be appreciated because it is still something that is meant to try and improve the world. Never insult anybody by taking offence.

If you don't want to offend anybody by your words then don't speak at all. Then you will be offending people even more for they hate being ignored! Everything you say can offend if not now then later. So don't be afraid to be outspoken. Don't feel bad about it for being outspoken is a way of meaning well. People will admire you for doing that and will wish they could be like that.

Too many people these days moralise about tolerance and have no idea what it really is. There are three alternative understandings of tolerance.

One is to make all beliefs, however outrageous, equally valuable and forbidding drawing others to your own belief. One is really indifferentism not tolerance. It doesn't care what people believe or think. Indifference is often today confused with tolerance. Yet indifferentism itself is intolerant of anybody that disagrees with it.

Two is to say that all beliefs are valuable as long as they are sincere and as long as the believers are open to changing their minds and that harmful beliefs should not be tolerated. This view refuses to tolerate people who know they have the truth. It urges them to have their own opinions and not to worry at all about being right. It isn't real tolerance.

Three is to say that all wrong beliefs are bad but we must put up with them up to a point. Three understands tolerance correctly. So tolerance implies putting up with bad things. Tolerance does encourage harmless and healthy differences but only in the search for truth. It is respecting what ought to be respected.

When somebody insults Atheists or Atheism we should not allow ourselves to be offended. What we should do is with a friendly smile correct their errors if they want to listen. If we are offended we are deterring people from telling us what they really think and openness is of absolute importance. We hope we can get the same courtesy from them that we give to them. They must have the humility to realise that they force their beliefs on children which is very offensive or should be so when they find our very existence offensive they should look at themselves. It is an insult to the offender to take offence. It is giving him the power and temptation to offend you.

It is not hypocrisy for us to advise others as to what they should do though we don't practice what we preach for we are not giving orders but only stating facts as long as we admit that we are not perfect and stress that we are only asking that they do themselves justice more than we have. In advising others to do right though we do wrong we are only asking them to become better than us so let nobody be offended. We can't tell others it is right or pretend anything is right just because we do it and when it is really wrong.

You can't believe that whatever a person believes is true. What if that person changes belief? Many these days tell us to believe that trying to convert others is wrong. But they try to convert others to their belief that spreading the good news is bad! If you can't tell a person their belief is wrong then you can you tell them anything they ought to do? The same don't tolerate doctors who believe that medicine is no use and that only holy water works.

Many expect everybody not to say a word against any harmful beliefs and against wrong religion. They would not be so "understanding" if they were on the receiving end of these abominations. Do they want nobody to criticise and try to convert the person the person who believes that God tells them to cut their throats? Do they want people to waste their lives in the service of gods who don't exist? They are the worst kind of carping bigots for they condemn opposition to evil to promote worse evil.

They would not tolerate persons who believe that nobody exists but themselves and that they can do whatever they please with others for others are just an illusion like the people they see in their dreams. There are people who advocate non-criticism of religion on the grounds that religion has a right to be treated as totally sacrosanct. These people would force children in school to believe that what they are told by religion is true. So organisations come before people. This is sick. Yet even their attitude implies that truth should be intolerant in some ways though not in any overly cruel way.

If it does not matter what religion one belongs to you are being a bigoted fraud if you call your Church the true Church.

Cults that hold that it does not matter what religion you belong to may only think about how they are going to make more money.

If a religion thinks it is right then it has a duty to try and lead outsiders to its "truth". To have the true religion is to have the best thing this side of Heaven. Error harms and wastes much time. Being opposed to Atheistic or religious evangelism is not love. It isn't love for the Protestant who knows that a Catholic friend is making a mistake by entering the priesthood to say nothing. The friend needs to know. That friend could do lots of wonderful things without the needless burden of being a priest. Promoting superstition is always bad.

To refuse to try and enlighten those in error is approving of their error for it is encouraging it. The erring should be grateful if they are told the facts for they can go to their clergy if they are worried about being led astray. If you really believe in the rightness of silence that unlawfully and willingly causes delusion then you are believing that there is no good and evil. The erring should not degrade you by getting you to promote error by saying nothing. You have a right to say. What they are doing is saying their rights are more important than yours.

To invite people to adore the wrong god to worship with you is to approve of their worship. You cannot encourage it without approving of it and so it isn't caring if truth exists or not. It is apostatising from your own God and if you are Christian you are one no longer. Pope John Paul II has held prayer services with pagans.

Nothing is sillier than people saying that one religion is as good as another. When Christians say it despite Christ's stating that he was the truth (John 14:6) ask them do they think that their hypocrisy is as good as every religion? The religions of the world are not the same. They don't agree on right and wrong so it is inevitable that one should be better than the rest.

There are some religious organisations that have one creed which is simply, "Believe and teach what you like if it harms none". The Universal Life Church founded by Kirby J Hensley is the most famous of such cults. There is no such thing as a harmless wrong belief. If I mistakenly believe in a deity I will waste time over him that could have been better spent. If I help X for a fictitious god, say, Zeus, then I am only doing it for Zeus. I should be doing it for X. I have done good but that good was only a side effect. It is a vice to tell people to believe whatever they want for they should be told to search for and believe in what is true or ought to be believed. This cult advocates the abomination of blind faith.

Humanists hate the view that we should not spread our beliefs and know that Humanism is the truth. Error has no rights - do we have the right to believe that two plus two is five? - and truth has the right to overcome it. If people have the right to err then do you have the right to lock your mother up for an hour every day because you believe it is good for her and she is not keen on the idea but puts up with it? If people have the right to err then people have the right to err as they wish. There is no middle ground. To say you have the right to err privately and not to carry out your error makes no sense. That would mean you can err thinking God exists but have no right to go to Church!

When we claim to have the truth we also claim we have the right to be critically examined to see if we do have the truth. We are telling others they have the right to tell us if we are wrong. Fact. Therefore anybody that won't listen to criticism of his or her worldview is doing wrong. If we have the right not to listen then newspapers and the news cannot have the right to say things we find offensive either. We all want people to tell us what we want to hear. We are offended when they do not. But there is no denying they are right to do that.

Nobody encourages scepticism or Pyrrhonism which is the belief that we can know or believe nothing. The sceptic or Pyrrhonist can be happy and live a normal life and act say as if poison can kill in case it will but he or she denies knowing that it will kill. We oppose scepticism. We do not oppose scepticism just because we want people to be safe and happy but because we acknowledge that all have to investigate the truth about the central things in life. We want the sceptic to believe we exist for we find it insulting when he or she says they do not believe one way or the other. This implies that all should investigate main truths of life and that religion is a disgrace for it does not encourage this. It implies that all should propagate the truth as they see it and be open to correction.

Believers have to say that atheism or agnosticism is faith for they can hardly say it is anything else. They accuse us of faith because they want to hold that we are wrong or not totally convincing for it is possible for faith to be misplaced which they believe our so-called faith to be. They need to be fully acquainted with our side before they charge us with having faith. If they accuse us of having faith then it is their duty to hear our side. We should not be afraid to tell them that either. They know fine well that we might have more than faith. We might have the might of reason on our side. We might have principles that refute God and their claims that are as certain as any mathematical theorem. And that is the claim we make. If you are going to listen to reason at all you will believe what we teach when you understand it. We will not have people manipulated to ignore us by allowing ourselves to be falsely accused.

There are random forces that kill and harm. They strike when accidents happen. Given the power to redirect these forces people would make them strike people who were in error or who were considered immoral on the basis that it is better for the wisest and best people to survive. This shows us the utmost importance of being right for being right and living in accordance with it is necessary for our human dignity to be fully respected rather than get two-faced respect. You cannot divorce concern for truth from right and wrong.

To state that somebody should do something and to state it without careful thought and logical evaluation and to state it while believing in free will is to declare that that person should suffer if he or she does not do it. You do have a right to your opinion but that does not mean you can say whatever you like. Therefore to suppose there is a God on slender evidence and then to say people should go to Church every Sunday – everybody's different and some people can get loads of spiritual benefits with going to Church say once a month – is to vent hate towards the targets of criticism. It also threatens their confidence in themselves and increases the propensity towards doing evil and being cruel. To believe in a God who can punish means that if a person does what you consider to be wrong your condemnation of them is calling on God to attack them. It is more likely they will be punished if there is a God than if there isn't so we see how thoroughly nasty belief in God is.

Nobody has the right to ask you to help them to teach what is against your conscience or to form opinions without looking at all the facts with an unprejudiced mind. Opinions are based on evidence. To have an opinion is to tell yourself and others that you are dedicated to evidence. If you are then you will listen to what the contrary evidence says and not be offended no matter what comes up. Being offended is being anti-evidence. You will not insult other people by turning your nose up at the evidence.

The Church claims the right to disapprove of our actions and beliefs. Disapproval entails discouraging actions you think are wrong. For example, if a community frowns on atheism, the atheist will feel forced to hide her unbelief. She may hide it to fit in for the desire to belong in the community is overpowering and we are all conditioned to have this desire. There is no doubt then that no matter what kind of world view you have you will be trying in some way to force it on others. You will want it enforced. And even more so if you regard evil as an offence against an all-good God for that makes it more serious. Therefore atheism and agnosticism are necessary if you want to enhance tolerance and acceptance in the world. Atheism and agnosticism will not be perfect but they are the best that is on offer.