

Religion - is it a Crutch?

Religion claims to be an account of what is true. Ideology is inherently oppression-enabling. Paradoxically, the milder the oppression the worse it is for then the ideology may be safe from falling apart. Too brutal is too self-defeating. Like any ideology, religion in fact is not the truth and tries to blur the reality of what is really going on and in that way makes the life of people more bearable and that bit more content. The danger is that they will be left unable to pinpoint exactly what they need and exactly what is hurting or exploiting them. Marx pointed out that religion manipulates society to think it is up to God to make it happy or unhappy so that they don't see that capitalism is destroying them. To be led to see your suffering as inevitable for it is God's choice is harmful.

A crutch is what you have to try to get rid of and is not a good thing. A crutch means you shouldn't need it. A crutch by definition is ultimately what should be thrown away and then you are left with the real help. Do not lose your faith - just see through it. Marxist doctrine is that religion is the opiate of the people or a crutch. This oddly enough leads some to respect religion but more commonly it leads to disrespect and even antagonism towards religion.

Accepting and nurturing a belief that is untrue or probably untrue is a way of being unfair to yourself even if it is a comforting belief. It takes you away from reality and if that does not do much harm then it is down to luck and chance and not the belief. Then you do yourself a further injustice by seeing any good that takes place as being down to the faith. Faith that only cares about how you get comfort from it and feel it supports you to do good is self-absorption not faith and the good works will not be kept up for long. If that is what religion exists for then it is disgraceful that it gets money for preaching. You are not an island - especially if you are in an organised religion which is your crutch. Thus you harm others more than yourself through your example and believers reinforce each others crutch. No crutch lasts unless others make it for you and keep you using it. Faith or religion being a crutch means you are not trying to stand up straight without it.

OBJECTIONS TO THE SUGGESTION THAT CHRISTIANITY IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CRUTCH

1 The pagans and most religious people did not do not believe in our all-loving Father God. They worship something that is greatly inferior.

But they still believed in powers they could pray to make things better. That is where the crutch is.

2 If Christians are so easily fooled by their own psychological makeup, what makes sceptics so sure they their own makeup is more reliable?

It is up to the sceptics to prove that they are being objective or at least better at objectivity than religionists. If Mormonism is anti-facts, that does not mean every other religion is the same. Sceptics could be pro-facts and Christians could be anti-facts. It depends.

Sceptics recognise that a strong emphasis on the importance of people looking at and checking the evidence for big religious claims protects against charlatans and against becoming a person who unwittingly leads the vulnerable and the needy and indeed anybody astray. Sceptics will only come to faith if it really does seem to be true and if the logic and evidence for faith being correct is solid. If sceptics are anti-facts at least they still stand for a principle that leads people to catch them out.

2 lumps Christians and sceptics together which is unfair.

Christians themselves become sceptics when it suits them. For example, Stephen Hawking says science shows there is no need for God. The Christians claim Hawking THINKS or merely SAYS there is no God. This is to make him sound less sure than he is.

3 If faith in God is a crutch, then why do we adore a God who claims authority over us and who judges us and tells us what to do and who will punish us if we are wrong?

Most Christians feel that God looks after them and worry very little about their sins. The crutch is in the feeling they will be fine with God. People tend to act and feel as if other people deserve punishment not them. It is as strong as the notion that others go to jail for crime not us or others get seriously ill not us.

4 Some happy atheists become believers in God. They didn't need God as a crutch.

Maybe they did and didn't say! And we all have a crutch even atheists. An atheist who uses mere optimism as a crutch can take on a new crutch: God.

5 The idea that belief in God is a crutch begins with the assumption that God doesn't exist and is a human invention. This idea is merely an assumption - no reason is given for it. It is prejudiced.

Not true - there could be a God despite the fact that everybody uses the idea of God as a crutch. All they care about is feeling that life will be okay and not God.

6 Jesus never offered a crutch. He offered a cross.

Jesus condemned the use of the faith as a crutch but it does not follow that Christians take that seriously.

We would say, "Well, Jesus wants to save me from loneliness or He wants to save you from purposelessness, or He wants to save you from anxiety, or He wants to save you from poverty, or He wants to save you from failure, or He wants to save you from sickness, or He wants to save you from disappointment. No, no, He desires to save you from hell, from the fiery hell, the lake of fire that is eternal. The message of Scripture is that salvation is a rescue, a rescue from a real place called hell." That is the bottom line. The other things are indirect. They are by-products. The trouble with them is that even if they are intended that is not why they happen. So there is nothing to thank God for except that he saved us from everlasting damnation. Even accepting that God only saves you from Hell is a cross. Human nature does not want that to be what it is all about.

7 Even if every believer uses God as a crutch, it does not follow that there is no God.

True. But it follows that their God is an idol. They adore not God but what they would like him to be. The objection has nothing to do with proving that religion is not a crutch. If we find it so hard to approach God in reality, then God either does not want to be our God or there is no God. Why else would it be so hard. While it is true that it does not follow that an inability to love God means there is no God, it makes the existence of God very unlikely. Even if every believer uses God as a crutch, it does not follow that there is no God but it does follow that it is unwise to believe in God.

THE FINAL WORD

The crutch prevents us seeing the reality. It prevents us dealing with it and moving on. It keeps us where we are. It makes us fear the truth and hate those who seem to offer the truth.

A religion that is a crutch is sure to want to become oppressive and tyrannical. It will actualise these curses when the time is right.

Do not use religion as a crutch. Man up guys and girls!

There is nothing wrong with inviting or helping a person to challenge their own beliefs. It is important to reflect your atheism and your humanism in your life. Do that and you won't need to speak up for them much. You won't need to annoy people or rub your atheism or humanism in their faces. Help them to see that we all use the perception that life will be okay and that is the only crutch we all have in common. It is in fact the only crutch we really need. Help them to see that the truth is important. They will agree with those pretty easily. Then you can move on to helping them challenge their own beliefs without offending or hurting them.

A religion being a crutch means that it is being agreed by both followers and perhaps critics that it is exploiting vulnerable people and trying to make them addicted and therefore potential bigots. Its not the faith that is revered nor the results of faith but the results of treating it like a crutch. It is no advertisement for faith. The view that faith is to be encouraged as a comfort is showing little or no concern for the faith being true. It is treating truth as unimportant as long as people feel happier. That crutch is made at the expense of honesty and genuine respect for people. Dishonesty is toxic and gives shoddy happiness or fragile happiness and robs one of the chance to find the real thing as far as possible.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE - IS CHRISTIAN FAITH A CRUTCH?

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HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

The Power of 'Negative Thinking', Tony Humphreys, Newleaf, Dublin, 1996

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Vitz, P (1999) Faith of the Fatherless. Dallas: Spence.

Nagel, T (1997) The Last Word. Oxford University Press.

Dawkins, R (1995) River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life. Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London.