

## RELIGION SEEN AS A CRUTCH IS THREAT TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND CIVIL LIBERTY

I find the argument that religious belief is a crutch and should not be challenged by unbelievers to be outrageous. It is enabling the destruction of freedom of speech. Do not insult believers by saying they really want that! Or that they are that weak. And what happens when they come to you for a job or a government position? Are they too feeble? The argument is insincere.

We must remember that if you think you cannot live without your crutch, you may be wrong. Perhaps your crutch is not as important to you as you think and you are kidding yourself?

The notion that religious faith should not be criticised for it is a crutch is a threat to freedom of speech and the right to tell people what they may not or do not want to hear. Our need for truth and our freedom cannot be sacrificed to religion. It is particularly bad when religious people pass on their prejudices and crutches to little children who cannot reason or understand things the way they can.

We all have dodgy beliefs some of which we use to help us through life. This does not justify the argument, "Religion should be unchallenged as it is just another dodgy belief. We all have our crutches". Religious belief are different from other bizarre forms of belief. It is different to say a belief that your well water has some anti-acne properties. That is not a huge matter and you will not treat it as a fact - not really. I mean you will not insist that science verifies it and condemn anybody who disagrees. Religion treats rubbish and minor things as huge matters and wants its meandering doctrines to be recognised as facts and by implication forced on the world if possible. A weird idea about your well is nothing in comparison to God which by definition is a huge issue.

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.

If they cannot stand hearing that their faith might be in error, they are suffering from religious addiction. They need help. They need to be challenged but in another and perhaps gentler way.

The religionist who listens to the person who tells her why she should wean herself away from religion may say, "I regret that you are taking my faith away from me." But nobody ever can take one's faith away. We never ever change anybody's minds. We give them the tools so that they will do it themselves.

The religionist needs to stop being a child and fearing those who want her to become more in tune with facts and with commonsense.

We all have the feeling that we will be okay at some point in the future. We all have that crutch in common unless we suffer depression or something. This is not a religious crutch though the person might mistake it for a religious sentiment. Challenging that person's religious dogma then is not the same as challenging his or her crutch.

If the sceptic about religion is criticised for criticising somebody's crutch, then why does nobody care if the sceptic uses criticism of religion as his or her crutch? It may give her or him a purpose in life and makes him or her feel they are doing something about religious belief which they regard as a slippery slope to craziness and violence. After all, if you need religion as a crutch, you will invent new crutches for yourself every time you get dealt a blow in life. Depending on a crutch requires the creation of new crutches in order to maintain your crutch. Lying to yourself (and thus to others - you have to manipulate others to agree with you so that you feel good when you think they believe the same nonsense as you do) becomes a skill.

You would expect the Roman Catholic to feel that God somehow became man and now helps her or him and walks along her or his side. But they don't stop there. They end up telling themselves despite the evidence, and despite the facts, that Peter was a pope and the first pope and there has been an unbroken succession of popes since. They start adopting other crutches such as that Mary appears here and there and so on. Bizarrely, you will find Catholics who do not mind their belief in God being challenged but who do mind if some Catholic doctrine, such as that the pope stands in the place of Jesus on earth, is challenged. That they are using religion to justify prejudice and not as a crutch could not be more obvious.

Prejudice is their real crutch.

They hate truth and use lies as a crutch for dealing with that hatred of the truth for they want to invent their own truth. That kind of crutch is plainly vicious and bad. If it acceptable to endorse such a crutch then the very reason freedom of speech is wrong. Freedom of speech is allowed so that people can voice their right and wrong views so that the right might be sorted out from the wrong and glow.

Some say it is better for atheists and sceptics to get out there and help people instead of trying to challenge somebody's religious belief. But you can do both at the one time. The atheist can do good on the basis that he or she wants to be the god for others for there is no God to care for them. The atheist should focus on the worst aspects of religion and the biggest risks that emerge from it.

Also, if we are to enable religion being used as a crutch by saying nothing against it, where do we draw the line? Do we put religious cranks in power though they will give their faith a role in public life? Surely their faith has to be challenged. It would not only be fine to do so but necessary. And we must remember too, that we live in a democratic society. Letting religion be, leads to religious people voting religious people into power.