

SHOULD WE LET PEOPLE BELIEVE WHAT THEY WANT?

If we could agree on what is good and does the least possible harm to others it would be okay to believe what you want and it would not matter what you believe. But truth is important and to wilfully try to believe what you suspect or know is not true is to become corrupt. You have no right to present yourself to others as a genuine person.

People sometimes say, "Let people believe what they want." Should we?

Yes if we cannot reach them but it does not mean that we must silently and politely stop trying to inspire them to enlighten themselves. Inspiring people to re-think is good because we have to inspire them one way or another anyway. We all influence each other even if we intend not to.

Supporters of that right argue that believers can accept what they want but they have no right to declare that their creeds and doctrines and religions have the support of science, evidence and reason.

Instead of talking about letting people believe what they want, we should direct them to what real belief involves. Give them an appreciation for evidence and if they comply they will start searching for truth and be open to it.

Some say you have a right to refuse to believe in God and others have the right to believe. So you and they should respect this. Nonsense! What you should respect is the people holding the views. If you are nice about the views, it is for the sake of those who hold them and not for the views themselves. You need to avoid stressing people unduly about religion so that they can think clearly and find the way out of religion. To truly respect a view would mean taking the stupid position that all views are equally true and useful. To make that position your own will lead to terrible things. It will paralyse those who see they need to speak out.

Is believing what you like or what you think the evidence points to something to be celebrated?

Believing what you like is not something you can ask others to be happy about. They should not. It is disrespectful to expect them to be happy about your preference for what you want to think as if you can make something plausible or true by believing it. If you are following evidence wherever it leads that is what should be celebrated.

BE COURAGEOUS

Take courage and speak out for those who say let others believe what they want do not really believe it. They would object to a person who says, "But my faith tells me that all people have a duty to believe it or else."

If we think helping others to drop God and stand firm on their own inner resources as a way of getting the best they can out of life even in the middle of suffering is a waste of time, then we are forgetting that denial of the truth is a bereavement stage. Their opposition to the truth and denial of the truth do not prove your efforts are failing. The person mourns the loss of their religious faith and denial is one of the stages of grief. It is a stage they have to go through before they can approach the truth. Remember, it is the priests and teachers or whatever that are accountable for their pain - not you.

Sometimes the "believe what you want" brigade think that the justification of their stance is simply that people only or mostly believe what they want anyway. In that case, they are not giving themselves or others permission to believe what they want. They just think it is the way it is that people believe what they want.

"LET PEOPLE BELIEVE WHAT THEY WANT!" - IT'S FAITH CONTEXT

Let people believe what they want is only said in the context of religion. It is actually an insult to religion. (In fairness though, some believers in religion make critics think people believe only what they want. These believers see proofs and evidences that their beliefs are wrong and still they stand by them. It is a terrible message to put out and very harmful especially in the long run.) It is an insult to religions that believe in sharing their beliefs with others so that others may become part of their faith. It is an insult to everybody to say you must let people believe what they want in nothing but religion? Why religion and not politics or health?

The advice implies people should be allowed to believe what they want in religion though they will not be allowed to believe what they want about some morals or crime. Why? It can only be explained by a suspicion that religious people are too bigoted to talk to about religion or to face a challenge to their religious ideas.

The permission to believe what you want is often given only to religious people. Believing what you want only comes up in religious matters. Nobody encourages you or accepts you believing that the tax return is right just because you want to believe it. Religion being a form of prejudice and idolatry always seeks special treatment. It wants an unfair respect to be granted to its beliefs while non-religious beliefs often being more important are not afforded as much respect.

You don't hear people saying it when somebody wants to believe that their shoddy maths exam should get an A Grade. You don't hear it said that people should be encouraged to believe that aspirin is better in cancer care than radiotherapy if they want to. You don't hear that if the President believes he should start a worldwide nuclear war then he should.

Suppose I believe in a God who punishes the bad and rewards the good. If I believe that because I want to then it follows that I am spiteful. I want people to be punished. Even if people should be punished it does not follow that we should have to like it. Rather we should hate doing it and see it as a necessary evil. Imagine the implications if I believe in eternal punishment for mortal sinners such as people who have sex outside of marriage or people who though claiming to be Catholic oppose Catholic doctrine! Imagine the vindictiveness this would imply. It is better if there is no God to punish evil people. Punishment does not stop them doing evil. At least there is less suffering without them suffering as well as their victims.

If a person believes in eternal punishment without adequate grounds for believing it, then he wants to believe it. Most Christians want to believe. You need incredibly good evidence before you can say God facilitates eternal punishment or that people deserve it.

The saying, let people believe what they want, translates as, "No religion or faith is better than another. It is as good for a religion to be totally pro-choice in abortion as it is for it to be totally opposed to abortion. Religious statements cannot be treated as facts." That insults religions that claim to be based on the truth. It insults intelligence. What about Catholicism which claims to be the only religion established by Jesus who is the truth?

Also, many religions claim that God has given them statements of fact. For Catholics, their faith is a collection of facts. To let them believe whatever they wish argument is implying that the doctrine that God reveals only facts and truth is bigotry. It is urging intolerance towards Catholicism or taking a baby step towards it. The supporters of the arguments are intolerant for claiming to have the right to lie about Catholic teaching and say its a pile of myths and not intended to be taken as factual. To say that people must be allowed to believe what they want and not be challenged is to say that religion is useless and shouldn't be requiring that people agree with it. What is the point of setting up religion or being part of it if all that matters is not it but what you want to believe?

If a religion says its beliefs are facts, then it is intolerant for it is saying what it feels is true makes it true. That would be arrogance and be the first step towards intolerance for you deny that any religion that contradicts you with its facts is telling the truth. Warmongers always start off with facts or what they pretend is facts.

If people believe what they want to believe, then some religions are intolerable for they have people wanting to believe in hideous things. If people only care about what they want to believe then it follows that all religions that claim to be based on evidence and reason are lying.

Religion conditions people to believe its lies when they are children. This conditioning will affect them forever. How can you say they believe only what they want when they have been programmed when they were too young to know any better?

If people believe only what they want, then it is not right to have religion. There is enough around that people believe in because they want to, without religion making the problem worse. Prayer and worship only manifest and maximise the selfishness and are vile though pleasingly so to some.

The hypocrites who want religion protected from challenges to its correctness and veracity are enabling bigotry and intolerance. It will only get worse. It leads to bigoted anti-religionists and sectarians fearing religion or other religions even more than they do.