

Vicar's Pastoral Letter

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Subject : Religion can be bad for your health.

Dear Friends,

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 6th February: what are you intending to give up? I'd like to give up religion and not just for Lent but for the rest of my life. Religion is like smoking in that it can seriously damage your health: in this case your spiritual health. If you're a religious person then I strongly advise you to reconsider your ways and if you've never tried religion then my recommendation is that you should never begin. Never ever take that first puff on the opium of religion or ever get a whiff of the hypocrisy that constitutes most religions including Christianity.

And so what are the symptoms that you've caught religion? Check these out, if you dare, and see if any of them apply to you:

- 1) thinking that only you are right and that everyone else is wrong.
- 2) petty mindedness.
- 3) a holier than thou attitude and pointing the finger at everyone else but never ever at yourself.
- 4) believing that you're a "good" person when in actual fact you're a seething mass of frustration, anger, jealousy and bitterness.
- 5) self-pride, arrogance and a willingness to fall to your knees in church whilst in reality this does not reflect the state of your heart.
- 6) lack of compassion and accepting others as they are.

Religion has done more harm in the world than anything else and it has claimed millions of innocent lives throughout the centuries. More wars have been fought in the name of religion than anything else and, quite frankly, religion stinks. Good examples are:

- 1) The Crusades when Christians set off to conquer the "infidels" of Mohammed and to claim Jerusalem in the name of the one true God who was, of course, white and Anglo-Saxon.
- 2) The Spanish Inquisition and witch hunts across Europe and America.
- 3) The European Colonialists who set off "with God on their side" to claim other people's lands as if they had a justified claim to them.
- 4) Protestants and Catholics blowing themselves apart in Ireland.
- 5) The Jews who have claimed Palestinian soil that they have no right to occupy.
- 6) The extreme Muslims who turn viciously on their own people on the "religious" assumption that everybody has to be like them and seek to blow up the whole world in order to create a true worldwide Islamic State and to ensure themselves "a place in heaven!"

The only religion, as far as I'm aware, in whose name a war has not been fought is Buddhism.

The list goes on and on and you could fill volumes with the infamies and atrocities that have been and are being committed in the name of religion and the God it seeks to serve. A "Holy War" inevitably ends up in an un-holy mess and tragedy and suffering for millions of totally innocent people.

If this is religion then I say as a clergyman in the Church of England that I want no part of it and, quite frankly, I am ashamed of what has been done in the name of Jesus Christ over the centuries. I do not want to invite anyone to a church which in any way represents such misguided values and is based on human pride, arrogance and self-seeking.

Nothing could be further from the true Spirit of Jesus than man made religion.

Jesus was a person of total and absolute humility: a man of compassion and forgiveness who accepted people as they were whilst offering them an opportunity to become all that they were meant to be: a kind man, a gentle man and one of unbelievable love who reflected the very nature of God. This has nothing to do with religion as we have misused and abused it in order to serve our own ends rather than the true purposes of our all-embracing all-loving God.

The Lenten prayer reads "the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart God will not despise." If you're still unsure about what to give up for Lent then I advise you to give up religion for good and embrace Jesus instead.

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