

## 57 Beliefs, Truth and Falsehood

"Many World Faiths - all much the same! Take your pick - whatever works for you! Keep your beliefs private - don't bother anyone else!". Thus can be summed up the general attitude towards "religion" in much of the so-called developed world these days.

Such an approach means that all "religion" now tends to be set aside when it comes to serious debate, in areas such as politics, finance, business, education, or the media. So many thinkers, writers, opinion-formers and law-makers act as if an individual's personal beliefs have no place in contemporary debate; that mature adults such as themselves have no need for any such beliefs, for they are capable of taking rational decisions on behalf of everyone else, with no reference to a God greater than themselves.

This is clearly folly, that old human folly, that seeks to swap Almighty God for Almighty Man. It started right back in Genesis, and continues to this day, with the inevitable results now all too apparent around us. Those telling words, "Thinking themselves wise, they became fools" (Romans 1.22a) come to mind.

But the greatest part of this folly is a simple point that is usually missed - that every single human being is always and unavoidably within the realm of "religion" anyway! For what is meant by "religion" other than a system of beliefs by which a person lives? That is precisely what every single person who has ever lived has been obliged to do! - to steer their lives according to a basic set of beliefs.

Someone's belief may entail a firm rejection of "religion" - but such a belief is itself a religious response and turns out to be none other than a religion in itself. Put like that, we see that the most ardent atheist is just as religious as the most pious Christian. Both are living by their beliefs. The beliefs may differ wildly, and so the resultant lifestyles of the believers will differ wildly, but both are in the realm of belief, of religious belief. Like it or not - and many people don't - we are all "religious".

The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, made this mistake a few weeks ago. He praised "the believers", by which on this occasion he primarily meant Christian volunteers, for all the good work they do within British society for the common good. Now that was all very nice of him, but you see the assumption in his words - that only a few of us are "believers"!

But we are all believers. Each of us has a set of beliefs, be they recognised by the individual holding them or not, by which we take our decisions and steer the course of our lives.

So the real distinction in human society is not between the religious and the not-religious - for we are all religious. Nor is the distinction between those with beliefs and those with no beliefs - for we all have beliefs, we are all believers.

No, the real distinction is between those beliefs which are the most likely to be True and those beliefs which are the most likely to be False.

The debate is actually focussed in this realm of Truth and Falsehood. When we are confronted with conflicting beliefs, such as whether or not God exists for example, we are to dig below each Belief to its "Bedrock". On what does this or that Belief ultimately rest? Often we have to go down some way until we reach the Bedrock of a particular Belief, but when we do get there, we can then assess how likely it is that that Belief is actually True.

Herein lies the secret of sifting Truth from Falsehood in terms of all the beliefs on offer around us these days. We can never prove Truth in such questions, but we can get a very long way towards establishing the *likelihood* of Truth.

At the Bedrock we are faced with the optional final leap of faith, to lift us over into our own acceptance of that Belief as being True. The greater the likelihood of a particular Belief being true, then the smaller is the leap of faith that is required in terms of our accepting the Truth of that Belief.

Once we get into this habit of going below Beliefs down to their Bedrocks, we find that the likelihood of the Jewish-Christian Scriptures being True is very strong. This means that belief in the Truth of those Scriptures requires far less faith than most people realise; and similarly, a belief in the falsehood of those Scriptures requires a huge amount of faith that wilfully flies in the face of many facts.

So let us be encouraged! We are not Christians because we cannot cope with a nasty world, or because it gives us a buzz, or because Granny was a Christian, or because we like singing. No. Responding to the call of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have taken the short leap of faith into Christian belief because the Bedrock evidence in all its variety points to the Bible being quite simply True. This inner conviction is then borne out by our Christian experience - that what the Bible tells us, about God, us, each other, the world, life, and all the rest of it, fits.

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5.1). Alleluia. Alleluia!

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