

Why Does Religion Get Such a Bad Rap?

It all begins with how one interprets religion. For myself, religion is the celebration of the Spirit that is shared with people of mutual mind and agreed upon mission or paradigm. We often blow off religion saying that it represents one person's vision and for that reason it cannot be spiritually liberating. Often times this comes from the negative press that Christianity has received as a result of its corruption. In our own Thelemic communities the distaste for religion may also exist as a result of bad experiences with Thelemic clergy, or a misunderstanding by our clergy as to what their functions are. This is certainly is not the fault of religion, or all organized religion in general.

What does it mean to be religious? A religious person is an individual that thinks he or she can attain the price of enlightenment faster with a mentor, group of mentors or peers. Community minded individuals might also be religious, as they seek others to share their celebration of their spirituality with. This is known as fellowship. What about the atheist? Arguing the existence of “god” is just as fruitless as arguing for Its nonexistence.

I have never met an atheist in my life... only people who are mad at God. A real priest or priestess is always mindful of the fact that they serve (and therefore represent, to some extent) the deity particular to the religious paradigm they follow. If some one behaves in a way which does not become that deity, then you can rest assured that they are clergy in word only.

Priests are teachers, consolers, counselors, and with any luck¹ they have some understanding of the frailties of being human. If we are really fortunate, we may get clergy that has bothered to study the paradigm they claim to follow so that when a person in need approaches them they are able to communicate things that a person can put to use to improve their condition. A Jewish rabbi would not be much good trying to administer to a dying Catholic because the paradigm is different.

Questioning the purpose of clergy is like questioning using intermediaries at all, such as psychologists and psychiatrists. It is the same thing, except for the priest deals with deeper, more personal issues.

Why bother with Clergy in the first place? When one is rebuilding a car it may be wise to ask the advice of a mechanic first. The area of spirituality is dangerously close to that of psychology. This is why I object to just anyone considering oneself clergy simply because they do something as mechanical as performing Mass. A priest is much more than that... or should be... because if we really believe that “there is no god but man” then the role of Thelemic clergy is to be a servant of the people.

Why couldn't some enlightened individual fulfill the role of clergy? I would hope, perhaps naively, that terms like “enlightened individual” and “priest” would be synonymous. At least that is our goal with our own clergy. An enlightened individual could (and they often do) fulfill that function: no question about that. But they are neither obligated nor checked against indiscretion. Let us examine the root of the word “religion” which is *religio* in the Latin. Religio means “to regulate” or “regulated.” Clergy is “regulated” by the Church to make sure that it performs its functions with dignity befitting the nature of both: the deity and the congregant.

¹ And they have avoided the Thelemic form of stoicism which supposes empathy to be some sort of aberration.

But the journey may only be taken by the individual! This is correct. Clergy can be a mirror for the aspirant. If any initiation is to occur at all it because the aspirant allows it to occur. The priest or priestess just makes it easier by providing the appropriate information, celebration or by constantly exposing the congregant to the symbols he or she has adopted. Often times, initiation may take place when a priest or priestess asks the right question at the right time. But all of this requires training.

Fundamentalism gives religion a bad rap. Fundamentalism is a dangerous, sometimes fatal cocktail composed of a paradigm with a twist of tyranny and a splash of fanaticism. Initiation is a two way street. An enlightened creature will listen to opposing views and test his own beliefs in the light of conflicting paradigms. Consider this: nowhere in the bible does Jesus say that people should be slaves. He came to free people from the Pharisees and Rome. The people were told that they should do the same work that he has done. When he says that he is “the only way to the Father (tm)” he is speaking of having attained to a station know as Tiphareth. With a little help from the Council of Nicaea, people today take that to mean that they should worship Jesus. This is an aberration of Jesus’ teachings... but they are not Jesus’ teachings.

Personality cults are not religions. They may try to pass themselves off as one, however. It is natural that a person is admired for having the spiritual insight to come up with a method of attainment. But the adherents of that method should resist forgetting the message and ignoring the work and worship the person instead. Consider other points of view from people who adhere to the same paradigm as the founder. Crowleyanity hurts the practice of Thelema as a philosophy, religion and way of life.

Why do clergy get a bad rap? Perhaps it is because as a culture we have no real tradition of our own. Maybe we don't respect our Holy Men and Women because we have learned to associate them with shysters, phonies, quacks, and posers. Maybe we ignore them and discredit them because they remind us of our own insincerity and laziness. Or perhaps we ignore them because we measure them against some unreal figment of the mythological Jesus? Possibly, it is because our recent memory of religion or clergy is marred by a group of very loud people who think that being a priest means being in control of people’s lives?

A word of warning. Magick is hard. The Ministry is even harder because it deals with others. It takes effort most people aren't willing to put into it... but humans do like the titles that come along with the achievements... so much that they often covet them without having attained the achievement. In a way, I am surprised anyone wants to be a holy person at all. The only saving grace is that it really doesn't matter what anyone thinks or does... what is important is what we do.

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