

RELIGION 3. All religions are created in the mind - as are all beliefs and philosophies. Religions teach about heaven and hell - it's all in the mind*. Religions give us commandments and rules - all created in the minds of prophets, priests and popes. **A**t best these rules are absorbed into the ethical principles of our societies, where they potentially contribute to the common laws that comprise the framework of our justice systems; they may spawn inspired, caring individuals and institutions. **A**t its worst the laws, dogmas and conventions derived from religious beliefs incite the mind to satisfy the all too human desire to control - religious rules that are presented as God-given are the strongest tools for manipulating believers. **R**eligions tell us God wants us to do certain things - or not. Believers follow these rules in an attempt to gain favours. They strive for salvation or absolution, for heaven or paradise - with penances, sexual abstinence or the murdering of infidels. **T**hese pursuits are signs of human gullibility and fallibility.

* see also THOUGHTS

Religionism stipulates that as a basis for the various religious beliefs followers accept dogmas, miracles and 'holy' scriptures; that churches, mosques, temples - even tracts of 'holy' land or certain landscape features - hold spirituality. These tenets were quashed in The Enlightenment.

It is now widely accepted that religious beliefs, while pertinent for the believers and their communities, are to be separated from politics and civic governance. In public life the doctrines of a religious group are not to impinge the rights of those who do not share their specific beliefs.

Where this rule is not observed, the insistence on 'God-given' lands for 'Chosen People' - for instance - causes oppression, persecution, war and - in a more benign context - bewilderment. Religious beliefs shall be tolerated, but they must not adversely affect other community members.

Australia adheres to a modus operandi where Aborigines deem certain stretches of land or natural features 'sacred sites' and - to an extent - may exclude the wider public from using them; the reasoning that leads to these exclusions is declared 'secret business' and is beyond reproach.

It is often argued only religion can provide ethics. Peter Hitchens says in his book, The Rage against God: How atheism led me to faith, "to be effectively absolute, a moral code must be beyond human power to alter." A ludicrous claim, as religionism historically lead to mayhem and murder.

A case in point is the ghastly Thirty Year's War, when Catholic forces opposed Protestants. The conflict, from 1618 to 1648, resulted in some eight million deaths, including about twenty percent of the German population, making it one of the most destructive conflicts in human history.

The war of Christians vs Christians was preceded by the election of a new Holy Roman Emperor, a staunch Catholic, who tried to impose religious uniformity on his domains. In response, the Protestant states of Northern Germany formed the Protestant Union to defend their interests.

The religious moral codes eventually were defeated by a total of one hundred and nine thoroughly worldly delegations, in the Peace of Westphalia. Some scholars have identified 'Westphalian Sovereignty' as the beginning of the modern international peace treaty system.

Another example of a destructive, nihilistic religious moral code is the religionism practiced by the so-called Islamic State, which follows a fundamentalist, jihadist code of extreme Sunni Islam. They are clashing with the moderate mainstream, including Shia Muslims, who reject their murderous doctrine.

see also SCRIPTURE