

BERTRAND RUSSELL – Religion is a Response to Fear

Sometimes referred to as the Albert Einstein of Britain, Bertrand Russell was a brilliant mathematician and philosopher of the 20th Century. Our obsession with immortality, Russell contends, is rooted in our fear of death — a fear that, [as Alan Watts has eloquently argued](#), is rather misplaced if we are to truly accept our participation in the cosmos. Russell writes:

Fear is the basis of religious dogma, as of so much else in human life. Fear of human beings, individually or collectively, dominates much of our social life, but it is fear of nature that gives rise to religion. The antithesis of mind and matter is ... more or less illusory; but there is another antithesis which is more important — that, namely, between things that can be affected by our desires and things that cannot be so affected. The line between the two is neither sharp nor immutable — as science advances, more and more things are brought under human control. Nevertheless there remain things definitely on the other side. Among these are all the large facts of our world, the sort of facts that are dealt with by astronomy. It is only facts on or near the surface of the earth that we can, to some extent, mold to suit our desires. And even on the surface of the earth our powers are very limited. Above all, we cannot prevent death, although we can often delay it.

Religion is an attempt to overcome this antithesis. If the world is controlled by God, and God can be moved by prayer, we acquire a share in omnipotence... Belief in God ... serves to humanize the world of nature, and to make men feel that physical forces are really their allies. In like manner immortality removes the terror from death. People who believe that when they die they will inherit eternal bliss may be expected to view death without horror, though, fortunately for medical men, this does not invariably happen. It does, however, soothe men's fears somewhat even when it cannot allay them wholly.

In a sentiment of chilling prescience in the context of recent religiously-motivated atrocities, Russell adds:

Religion, since it has its source in terror, has dignified certain kinds of fear, and made people think them not disgraceful. In this it has done mankind a great disservice: all fear is bad.

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/02/03/bertrand-russell-immortality-good-life/>

JOSEPH CAMPBELL – Why Myths and Religions Exist? Who is God? A Call to Deeper Awareness

*The following excerpt comes from journalist Bill Moyer's interview with Mythologist Joseph Campbell. Released in 1988, **The Power of Myth** was one of the most popular TV series in the history of public television, and continues to inspire new audiences.*

BILL MOYERS

The driving idea of his life was to understand the power of the stories and legends of the human race, especially those common themes and deep principles which energized our imagination down through the ages. The jealous god of Abraham is not the god of the stories of India, who shows neither wrath nor mercy, but however the mystic traditions differ, Campbell said, they're in accord in this respect: they call men and women to a deeper awareness of the very act of living itself, and they guide us through trials and traumas, from birth to death.

Joseph Campbell once said to his students at Sarah Lawrence College, "If you really want to help this world, what you will have to teach is how to live in it." That's what he taught. Over the last two summers of his life, in hours of conversations recorded in the library of Lucasfilm in California, we talked about how mythology can still awaken a sense of awe, gratitude and even rapture. Why myths? Why should we care about myths? What do they have to do with my life?

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: Well, my first answer would be, well, go on, live your life, it's a good life, you don't need this. I don't believe in being interested in subjects because they're said to be important and interesting. I believe in being caught by it somehow or other. But you may find that with a proper introduction, this subject will catch you.

And so what can it do for you when it does catch you? These bits of information from ancient times, which have to do with the themes that have supported man's life, built civilizations, informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage and if you don't know what the guide signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself. But once this catches you, there is always such a feeling from one or another of these traditions of information, of a deep, rich life-vivifying sort, that you won't want to give it up.

BILL MOYERS: So myths are stories of the search by men and women through the ages for meaning, for significance, to make life signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are.

CAMPBELL: People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that the life experiences that we have on the purely physical plane will have resonances within that are those of our own innermost being and reality. And so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive, that's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues help us to find within ourselves.

BILL MOYERS: Myths are clues?

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life.

Ep. 2: Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth — 'The Message of the Myth' -June 22, 1988

<http://billmoyers.com/content/ep-2-joseph-campbell-and-the-power-of-myth-the-message-of-the-myth/>

JOSEPH CAMPBELL - Myths & Religion is Way of Explaining What Cannot Be Explained

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What's the meaning of the universe? What's the meaning of a flea? It's just there, that's it, and your own meaning is that you're there. Now we are so engaged in doing things, to achieve purposes of outer value, that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it's all about.

Now, we want to think about God. God is a thought, God is a name, God is an idea, but its reference is to something that transcends all thinking. The ultimate mystery of being is beyond all categories of thought. My friend Heinrich Zimmer of years ago used to say, "The best things can't be told." Because they transcend thought. The second best are misunderstood, because those are the thoughts that are supposed to refer to that which can't be thought about, you know. And one gets stuck with the thoughts. The third best are what we talk about, you see. And myth is that field of reference, metaphors referring to what is absolutely transcendent.

BILL MOYERS: What can't be known.

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: What can't be known.

BILL MOYERS: Or can't be named.

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Except in our own feeble attempt to clothe it in language.

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: And the ultimate word in our language for that which is transcendent is God.

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KRISHNAMURTI - COMMENTARIES ON LIVING SERIES III

Chapter 27: Reform, Revolution and the Search for God

Though it is late," said the fourth one, "may I ask a question? Will belief in God help one to find Him?"

To find truth, or God, there must be neither belief nor disbelief. The believer is as the non-believer; neither will find the truth, for their thought is shaped by their education, by their environment, by their culture, and by their own hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. A mind that is not free from all these conditioning influences can never find the truth, do what it will.

"Then to seek God is not important?"

How can a mind that is fearful, envious, acquisitive, discover that which is beyond itself? It will find only its own projections, the images, beliefs and conclusions in which it is caught. To find out what is true, or what is false, the mind must be free. To seek God without understanding oneself has very little meaning. Search with a motive is no search at all.

"Can there ever be search without a motive?"

When there's a motive for search, the end of the search is already known. Being unhappy, you seek happiness; therefore you have ceased to seek, for you think you already know what happiness is.

"Then is search an illusion?"

One among many. When the mind has no motive, when it is free and not urged on by any craving, when it is totally still, then truth is. You do not have to seek it; you cannot pursue or invite it. It must co

KRISHNAMURTI - COMMENTARIES ON LIVING SERIES III

Chapter 52 'Can God Be Sought Through Organized Religion?'

Three men had come from the distant town by train and bus. One, considerably older than the other two, with a well-kept beard, was the spokesman, though the others were in no way subservient to him. Slow and deliberate in speech, he was able to quote freely from the well-established authorities. He was never impatient, and there was an air of tolerance about him. Of the two younger men, one was nearly bald, and the other had heavy hair. The balding one seemed not yet to have made up his mind about serious matters and was willing to examine what was said; but here and there definite patterns of thought could be noticed. He smiled widely as he talked, but did not gesticulate. The other was rather shy, and spoke very little.

"Is it not possible to find God through the established religious organizations?" inquired the older man.

"Yes, that was our question," the balding one replied. "All we know of religion is what has been drilled into us from childhood. Throughout the centuries, organized religions have taught us to believe in this or that. practically every saint we know of has followed the religion of his fathers and depended on the authority of its sacred books. The three of us here belong to one of the traditional religious organizations, but since listening to you, we have come to doubt - or at least, I have come to doubt - the point of belonging to any religious organization at all. This is what we would like to talk about."

What does organization imply? We organize in order to co-operate in doing something. Organization is necessary for effective action if you and I wish to do something together. We have to organize, put ourselves in right relationship,

if we are to carry out effectively some political, social, or economic plan. Are religious organizations on the same or a similar footing? And what do you mean by religion?

"To me, religion is the way of life," replied the third one. "The way of life is laid down for us by our spiritual teachers and the sacred books, and the following of it in our daily life constitutes religion."

Is religion a matter of following a pattern laid down by another, however great? To follow is merely to conform, to imitate, in the hope of receiving a comforting reward; and surely that is not religion. The releasing of the individual from envy, greed and violence, from the desire for success and power, so that his mind is freed from self-contradictions, conflicts, frustrations - is not this the way of religion? And only such a mind can discover the true, the real. Such a mind is in no way influenced, it is not under any pressure, and so it is able to be still; and it is only when the mind is totally still that there is a possibility of the coming into being of that which is beyond the measure of the mind. But organized religions merely condition the mind to a particular pattern of thought.

"But we were brought up to think within the pattern with its code of morality," said the balding one. "The temple or the church, with its worship, its ceremonies, its beliefs and dogmas - to us, this has always been religion, and you are destroying it without putting anything in its place."

What is false must be put away if what is true is to be. The aloneness of the mind is essential; and the way of religion is the disentanglement of the mind from the pattern which is put together by the collective, by the past. At present the mind is caught in the collective morality, with its acquisitiveness, its ambition, its respectability and pursuit of power. The understanding of all this has its own action, which frees the mind-feeling from the collective, and then it is capable of love, compassion. Only then is there the sublime.

"But we are not yet capable of such immense understanding," said the older one. "We still need the cooperation and guidance of others to help us along in the right direction. This cooperation and guidance is provided by what we call organized religion."

Do you actually need the help of another to be free from envy, ambition? And when you do have the help of another, is there freedom? Or does freedom come only with self-knowledge? Is self-knowledge a matter of guidance, of organized help? Or are the ways of the self to be discovered from moment to moment in our daily relationships? Dependence on another, or on an organization, breeds fear, does it not?

"There may be a few who are strong enough to stand alone and combat the world, but the vast majority of us need the comforting supports of organized religion. Our lives, on the whole, are empty, dull, without much significance, and it seems better to fill this emptiness with religious beliefs, rather than to fill it with stupid amusements, or with the sophistication of worldly thoughts and desires."

In filling that emptiness with religious beliefs, you have filled it with words, haven't you?

"We are supposed to be educated people," said the balding one. "We have been to college, we have fairly good jobs, and all the rest of it. Moreover religion has always been of the deepest interest to us. But I see now that what we considered to be religion is not religion at all. On the other hand, to break out of this prison of the collective requires more energy and understanding than most of us possess; so what are we to do? If we left the religious organization to which we belong, we would feel lost, and sooner or later we would pick up another belief with which to deceive ourselves and fill our own emptiness. The attraction of the old way is strong, and we lazily follow it. But in talking all this over, certain things have become clear to me as never before; and perhaps that very clarity will produce its own action."