

RELIGION

"I got the old time religion... got the old time religion... It was good for Paul and Silas... good enough for me..." But the "old time religion" being sung about wasn't actually all that old time. In fact it was rather new, around 2000 years old. That "Old time religion" came from that of Abraham, Moses, and their forerunners and followers. Then Jesus Christ came on the scene and revealed the "Christian Faith" and that faith became the "Old Time Religion" that was being praised in song. That is the religion that continues to be preached and sung about.

A sort of general definition of religion says: "Religion is a personal act, or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices..." But when did religious beliefs, acts, and systems start? Now that question opens up a most interesting realm of thought and study, perhaps a large area of inspiration and wonder. When you research religious beliefs, acts, and practices you run into the fact that humans appear to have always had a hankering for some kind of religion. Where did they get that longing, or fear, or hope? Could it have come along with evolution? If so, why is it a hope, a fear, or an aspiration that only humans have? Are there other creatures that have something that passes as a religion for them? At times our Corgi shows great affection for us. Is there a "happy hunting ground" for him? Well, he deserves one as much as some of us humans deserve a heaven!

When we are dealing with religion we are into something that humans have had a concern about as far back as our history goes. Over time and in different places humans have worshipped a wide variety of things and

concepts. We have worshipped trees, mountains, celestial objects, cows, rocks, unseen spirits... you name it somewhere, some body has held it to be sacred!

The "after life" has always been a concern of religion. The ancient pyramid builders made grand provisions for the journey to the next life of the royal person who occupied the tomb in the pyramid. Sometimes there would be a royal chariot with a bronze horse. Also, servants might be buried with the royal person. The West Virginia miner who died in the mine explosion was expressing an ancient belief and hope when he left the note: "... see you on the other side..." Most religions have promoted some kind of concept of an "after life". However, there have been some religions that said when the clock stops on this life you have had it! American Indian lore provides some interesting concepts, and rituals pertaining to death, ghosts, and the passage into the after life. The Christian faith projects an after life. For the "saved" that life is very, very good. And there is a growing concept that there are "saved" persons who are not in the "institutional" Christian Church. However, it is the same "grace" that saves them. Christians are generous people and they will not hoard that "saving grace" just for themselves!

Religion, or perhaps religions, has its dark side. It can generate hate, fear, anger, and conflict. Religion has fostered wars. Nations, like Ireland, have had religious rivalry going on for years. Both sides in the conflict are certain of their positions! But still religion is a continuing force and inspiration for humans. There were people who predicted that religion would disappear in the 18th century and

beyond. Well that did not happen. In fact a great revival was experienced in this Country. Today there are some students of social and religious trends who say that they are sensing a revival of religious sentiments and ideas. One place this revival or search is being found is among young people. There are some groups that are expressing the feeling that they "lack something" in their lives. They are not especially turning to the established Church but they are looking for an answer to something they feel as a "spiritual" need. That is not surprising for, as we have seen, that "religious emotion", that "spiritual need", has always been part of the human need and quest.

Although you are not going to find, at least not often, quotes from the philosopher, Spinoza, in church school books he has something interesting to say about religion. He says in his philosophic writings: "The greatest good is the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole nature. He is relating our "natural instinct for religion" with the nature of our creation. Individuals are seen as parts of the great "stream of law and cause," hence, parts of God. Thus we are linked with Infinity and Eternity. With such a spotlight turned upon us it is easy to see why the religious instinct haunts us. If such be true, it is no wonder that we sometimes feel immortal! This great "urge" is so much apart of humanity! It is no wonder that the Psalmist asked God, "What are humans that You are mindful of them...?"

Religion, in the sense of Creator/human relationships, literally say to us; "Launch out into the deep..."

Religious meanings, truths, and reality are evaluated and verified very differently from scientific reality. The Faith/Religion concept of reality involves a supernatural Reality, and speaks in terms of purpose and intentions. It recognizes science but it isn't science at all! The Faith/Religion urge, or instinct, and need is inherent in human nature. It is not going to vanish from mind and soul of humans. We may push it aside, ignore it, declare it non-existent, declare ourselves to be atheists but the determining fact is, we are not our own creations.

The great message to the declining Church today is that it is Faith that spreads Faith. Not just intellectual re-adjustment. As Jesus said to the failing fishermen: "Pull up your nets, launch out into the deep...!" There is something very eternal about the religion motivation. Yes, the 'old time religion', what does it really mean?

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