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The Logic of Love

Chapter 13: Religion



For the sake of the argument, let's assume that religion has been a cancer running rampant through the body of human history. Even if religion is a cancer, logic would not support this as a reason for choosing against having faith in God. I could go out and persecute people in your name. This

would not mean you actually approved of the atrocity simply because I said you did. If we are going to consider belief in God with an open mind, we should be willing to give God the benefit of this same reasoning. Diluting the concept of God, based on the acts of humanity, forsakes the value of objectivity. It is the ultimate in anthropomorphism to let the history of institutionalized religion define the attributes of God. This is the type of projection that religionists get criticized for.

On the other hand, one might reasonably assert that those who claim to know someone are the ones we should appeal to for information on the character of that person. For instance, let's say Harry Tymes owns a store in a dangerous neighborhood that has been robbed twice in the last week. Right after the second robbery, before he has even had time to call the police, two thugs come in, flash guns, and inform him that they work for Big Al. Harry has heard that Big Al is the local boss of organized crime. He is aware that other shop owners pay Big Al in return for "protection." The thugs, on behalf of Big Al, offer Harry Tymes protection for ten percent of his income. Even though Harry has never seen or met Big Al, he has heard enough horror stories to decide to take the deal.

These things happen. In this case, Harry's acceptance of the deal is altogether reasonable. Unfortunately, this same type of reasoning gets inappropriately applied when talking about the attributes of God and trying to understand how God is "organized." In the "Big Al" scenario, there was no particular reason to doubt the existence of Big Al, nor were there inconsistent claims about his character. In contrast, when it comes to statements about what God wants us to do or what should be done in the name of God, there is a lot of inconsistency.

Of the qualities attributed to God, the goodness of God is one of the most unquestioned. There is not always consensus as to whether the justice of God requires one to kill the "infidel" or whether the mercy of God admonishes one to try to convert the "lost soul," but love and involvement tend to be universally attributed to God. If anything, the story of the shop owner supports acceptance of the goodness of God, just as it supports accepting that Big Al is dangerous. People may differ on whether to pay off Big Al, involve the police, or run, but these options do not bring into question Big Al's character. Similarly, the various ways that religions and theologians prioritize the values refracted from the white light of love should not become a reason to question God's love.

There is no reason to consider faith in God with a defeatist attitude about the potentials of religious institutions. The issue here, however, is only individual potentials, not collective ones. Any criticism of the way others express spirituality, individually or collectively, carries with it the possibility of a better expression. Just the possibility that there can be a personally acceptable expression of spirituality is sufficient reason to consider whether faith in God might be the best expression of love.

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