

RELIGION AND POLITICS

GOD, RELIGION & POLITICS: A REVIEW—What is religion, exactly? As one scholar put it, religion is the result of an attempt by man to contact a higher being. Through prayers, ceremonies, cults, and even sacrifices, man has attempted to establish contact with God or gods. Our mortality and fear of death play a crucial role in our devotion to religious activities. The rationality of our belief in deities, for example, and the demonstrability of their existence have been subjects of countless debates throughout human history. The central question we often ask ourselves is whether there is a good reason for man to believe that a divine being exists. Most medieval writings about nature, human knowledge, and human living, for example, have both philosophical and religious roots. Between the 5th and the 15th Centuries, a large number of Western intellectuals devoted their time to pondering and discussing questions about God and divine attributes.

Religious contexts and doctrines are found in vast cultures, ranging from Jewish and Byzantine to Islamic and Hindi history. The idea of the existence of a single god or multiple deities is limited only by man’s ability to conceptualize and rationalize. Plato said that human beings know little enough of their own souls and less of the divine. Roger Bacon argues that nothing can be known of God without the prior study of languages, experiential sciences, mathematics, and moral philosophy. In *On the Nature of the Gods* Cicero discusses his view of the Epicurean doctrines and more. Theological perceptions are as complex as the men and women who conceived them. In Nietzsche’s eyes, God is dead not because a divine being has perished, but because man, who once confected God, murdered Him by acting out his unuttered disbelief.

Each religion has its own criteria for when and where to worship. The point of prayer, in the view of a philosopher, is for the individual praying to align his attitude to the world with that of the correct moral stance. On that note, defining the right moral stance becomes problematic since one man’s right is often another man’s wrong. The sum of our beliefs is not simple, as evidenced by our constant conflicts in war and territorial conquests in the name of God or gods. Why didn’t God create man pure and perfect to begin with, so that he need not fight, quarrel, or kill? Perhaps God wants to intervene in the natural order of things, or maybe He wishes to bring about good in response to human requests. But why does He want to leave man capable of improvement instead of making him perfect? Is He bored or lonely? These questions bring us back to the arguments for and against the existence of God. Throughout human history, man has waged wars not because God told him to but because man wanted to. Man uses the excuse that it is God’s will. If God is pure and good, why does He want man to slaughter other men? How do we really know what God wants when we don’t even know what we want? Do we truly believe that a single all-powerful entity exists? Humanity, in consensus, agrees that good and evil exists; but no mortal, since the beginning of time, has returned from the dead and proved to us, once and for all, that a greater and holy being exists. We can only conceptualize and believe. Faith is an inexact science. It is an idea of what could be, an idea that is subject to diverse interpretations. Whether these interpretations are valid has yet to be universally proven.

The Hindus believe in the cosmic law of karma. They believe that the effects of moral actions are carried over after death, to the next existence, and therefore influence the subsequent birth either positively or negatively. The Native Americans placed great importance on their relationship with the animals they hunted and the spirit guardians of each species. The pre-Columbian indigenous people of Central America believed that their stepped pyramid temples would bring them closer to their gods. The Buddhists encourage self-awareness, asceticism, and enlightenment. So who is right? Over more than six billion people inhabit the world today, and we can’t agree on the single most important point—the existence of our creator. More importantly, out of the estimated 106 billion people who’ve walked our planet since the dawn of civilization, not a single one has returned from the other side to tell us what, if anything, exists after death. Those who have so claimed to have returned from the dead have turned out to be frauds or liars. We can build rockets that fly to the moon. We can reengineer cells and body parts, a role once thought to belong only to the gods. We can even learn to control inanimate objects with our mind. However, with all of our intelligence and scientific advances, we cannot produce a shred of concrete evidence to shed light on what is really out there for us after death. Maybe that shrouded mystery will remain hidden from us forever, because to learn the truth would mean revealing the secret of our creator, which in turn would leave man superior to God, if He truly exists.

The question comes full circle. Did God create man or did man create God out of desperation and fear of the unknown? As a collective, we can believe. But as individuals, free of influence in any shape or form, do we *truly* believe? Yet in believing, can we truly be sure? When we are unsure, religion holds the potential to transform us into something more, something less pure ... something we call politics. And we know politics breeds ... war.



RICHARD QUAN

Managing Editor