

Of what value is religion?

Michael Shermer, a renowned skeptic explains as he reviews “Breaking the Spell -Religion as a Natural Phenomenon” by D.C. Dennett

- 1) mythmaking to explain apparently inexplicable phenomena in the world
- 2) redemption (forgiveness in this life) and resurrection (immortality in the next life)
- 3) morality (reinforcement of pro-social behavior and punishment of anti-social behavior)
- 4) sociality (encouragement of within-group amity and between-group enmity)

I thought about his list, modified  
it and placed it as I see the order  
of importance.

1) redemption (forgiveness in this life)  
and resurrection (immortality in the next  
life)

2) morality (reinforcement of pro-  
society behavior and discouragement of  
anti-social behavior)

3) sociality (encouragement of amity  
among all groups)

4) rational explanation of purpose in the  
world

Shermer is obviously unaware or doesn't want to admit the differences in the religions of the world. When people do not have the Bible and interpret it rationally, he is correct in his #1.

1) mythmaking to explain  
apparently inexplicable  
phenomena in the world

The Norse, Greek, Roman, Indian  
or American Indian myths were  
and are just that. Uninspired  
(man made up) explanations of  
things they didn't understand.

Examples of such explanations are the world being suspended by Atlas (the Greek Titan). We know this to be false, but it illustrates a common problem in defending “religion” in general.

Job 26:7 "He stretches out the  
north over empty space, and  
hangs the earth on nothing.

This passage in one of the oldest books of the Bible displays a wisdom not seen in the myths of men. Nor do we find any absurdities in the Bible which are equivalent to those about Atlas, Prometheus or Hercules.

When Hiawatha of the Iroquois (16<sup>th</sup> century) said that plants had spirits and were beautiful women clothed in vines, he spoke of a religion that was equivalent to the idol worshipers Isaiah wrote about.

Isa 44:14 Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak, and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. 15 Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image, and falls down before it.

Shermer – 1) mythmaking to explain apparently inexplicable phenomena in the world

Calton - 4) rational explanation of purpose in the world

Neither Shermer nor any other scientist can tell you why the world came into existence. (But many scientists will make up stories about it – oscillating universe until 1960's)

Neither Shermer nor any other scientist can tell you why you are here. (But many scientists will make up stories about it – “a fortuitous circumstance – no data because it can't be replicated)

If you are here as a random accident, you have no purpose.

If a scientist tries to give you purpose by saying that you are going to propagate the species, the question would be why you would try to do such a thing?

Our purpose – given by God!

Ecc1 12:11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. 13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

This surely explains our purpose.

Without God there is no purpose  
in life nor reason for progress,  
kindness or love.

Most of all, there is no reason to  
refrain from doing evil.

Life simply has no point for an  
atheist or agnostic.

Shermer - 4) sociality  
(encouragement of within-group  
amity and between-group enmity)

Calton - 3) sociality  
(encouragement of amity among  
all groups)

Shermer, like most atheists, believes that religion is the cause of hatred – my group vs. your group.

He fails to distinguish between Christianity and the religions of the world (not Roman Catholicism and world government vs. Protestant world domination) .

There is a vast distance between  
Christianity and Islam.

The Qu'ran counsels earthly war  
with all who oppose Islam.  
Moderate Islamists simply ignore  
what their holy book tells them  
to do!

Koran [5.51] O you who believe!  
do not take the Jews and the  
Christians for friends; they are  
friends of each other; and  
whoever amongst you takes them  
for a friend, then surely he is one  
of them; surely Allah does not  
guide the unjust people.

Koran [9.29] Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His Apostle have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.

Jesus counsels peace with all  
men.

Rom 12:18 If possible, so far as  
it depends on you, be at peace  
with all men.

The history of Catholicism and Protestantism over who would rule the earthly kingdom they established has been the cause of war and massacres (in August-September of 1572, 70,000 Protestants were killed in France).

Looking at the history of those who say they follow the Bible and do not places Shermer at a serious disadvantage.

Without knowing more about the Bible, it is no wonder that Shermer finds religions to promote “between-group enmity”.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Truly, it is difficult for the uninformed to see that religion is not established to “between-group enmity”.

On the other hand, Christianity  
does not seek to establish  
sociality consisting only of  
“encouragement of within-group  
amity”.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor  
Greek, there is neither slave nor  
free man, there is neither male  
nor female; for you are all one in  
Christ Jesus.

2 Cor 5:18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

2 Cor 5:20 Therefore, we are  
ambassadors for Christ, as though  
God were entreating through us;  
we beg you on behalf of Christ,  
be reconciled to God.

Where do you stand today?

With God or against him?

Acts 22:16 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'