



## **ANCHOR IN THE STORM: FAITH AND THE FUTURE**

**By Kameel Majdali**



“Fundamentalism.” “Jihad.” “Crusade.” Suicide bombers, pedophile clergy, dwindling membership. These are powerful and disturbing concepts associated with today’s religious institutions. So disturbing, in fact, that some argue to keep religious completely out of the public square.

Some, like Pamela Bone in the Melbourne (Australia) *Age*, comment “...religion needs to be kept right out of politics. For, despite the undoubted good that is done in the name of religion, and despite the comfort many people derive from it, I do not see how anyone can argue that it is not potentially the most dangerous force in the world. Yes, more dangerous than communism, because you can claim God as your authority for whatever evil you want to do”.<sup>1</sup>

Under such circumstances, can religious belief and its institutions have any place in our present world?

Remember that the above sensational issues are only a part of the picture, and a small part at that. A quiet but growing trend, even tidal wave, back to religious belief is happening. Much of it is occurring in “the South,” namely the developing world like Latin and South America, Asia, and Africa. Even in the postmodern West, people are overtly returning, and indulging, in various forms of spiritualities, including Christian, Muslim, Judaism, Eastern religions, and the New Age movement.

Remember that Judeo-Christianity was the overt leader and influence in western civilization. Major world-class universities began as ministry-training schools, with theology being the “queen of sciences.” Church and state were intertwined in the body politic. Public references to God and faith were commonplace. Temporal censure, with the promise of divine retribution, was meted out for violating Biblical morality.

The transition from sacred to secular occurred over the last few centuries, with the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and rise of Marxism, secular humanism, and scientific rationalism. Religion, and its institutions, have gone from being in the forefront of society to the fringes, and not too infrequently treated with indifference, derision, and/or contempt. Even among those who possess a religious belief, there is a tendency to privatize their faith. As Harry Blamires comments, the religious person “...accepts religion—its morality, its worship; but he rejects the religious view of life, the view which sets all earthly issues within the context of the eternal.”

Despite the layers of secularism and humanism, there is no masking the religious underpinnings of our civilization. In the last decades, a massive return to religion has ensued, despite dominant atheistic ideologies of the last century. Does this growth accord religion a legitimate voice in our modern world?

Irving Kristol says “If there is one indisputable fact about the human condition, it is that no community can survive if it persuaded—or even if it suspects—that its members are leading meaningless lives in a meaningless universe.” Religious faith offers straightforward answers to questions of human identity and purpose. Who am I? Is there a God? If so, what role does God want

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Bone, “The most dangerous force in the world,” *The Age* (online), November 30 2002.

me to fulfill with the life He has given me? While our parents and grandparents were much less likely to be asking such questions, they are neither unique nor irrelevant. Purposeful living is a great motivator of today and rewarder of tomorrow.

Today offers a plethora of issues to baffle even Socrates and Aristotle, like weapons of mass destruction, human cloning, euthanasia, the lack of ethics and integrity in corporate, political, private, and even religious institutions. But how can we even begin to define what is moral and ethical unless there is the measuring stick of divine revelation? No one can rightly argue with the fact that the Ten Commandments, as stated in Exodus 20, have had an incalculable effect on western civilization and jurisprudence. Thundering with divine authority and flowing with moral clarity, these precepts function as a mirror to show where humankind stands on the highest standard of moral and ethical behavior. Adultery, theft, rebellion, perjury are held as behavior to be avoided while fidelity, obedience, rest, and simple faith are virtues to be embraced.

People today are interested in issues like relationship, community, authenticity, diversity, narrative, and more. In each and every one of these areas, religious faith offers a confident response, and like your favorite fast food outlet, you are likely to find your particular brand no matter where you travel on earth. Finally, there is the possibility, if not the participation, into the universe of the supernatural, and many people are craving these things after decades of sterile secularity. Such expressions can be found from diverse movements as Pentecostalism, mysticism, and new age spiritualities.

Some people point to the inconsistencies and extremism of religious faith as an excuse to marginalize or banish it. Just because a powerful force can be misused is no excuse for its elimination. If we had such a mindset, we would not use electricity because a few people get electrocuted or drive automobiles because of the road toll. It is not non-use, but right use, that helps get the best out of such sources of power, including faith. Like science, there are some questions religious faith has not yet answered and may never answer in this life. But rather than fall back into paralysis, religious faith faces the puzzle and proceeds in faith. The heart has reasons which Reason can never know.—  
*Blaise Pascal.*

A prominent Australian journalist—and agnostic—commented that people of faith tended to live happier, healthier lives, enjoy sound marriages, and be more productive and law-abiding. Even if you did not want to view the issues from a salvational point-of-view, one can at least acknowledge the civilizing influence such faith produces among such people as well as the possibility of an improved quality of life.

In the face of crises in the Middle East, South Asia, North Korea, and the War on Terrorism, which can help stoke up feelings of nihilism, a living faith offers a priceless commodity called hope. Some people use the word hope as a mantra for wishful thinking, but real hope is a firm, confident, and unwavering expectation of a blessed future. In a milieu that tumbles down the steps of disappointment to depression to despair, hope leads out of the valley of the shadow of death unto a mountain top. An Irish proverb says “Hope is the

physician to every misery.” As the city of Jerusalem was about to be devoured by Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian army, like an egg in the mouth of a python, the prophet Jeremiah stoked the embers of faith in the hearts of the Jerusalemites when he declared that God had plans to give them “hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). This, and other pronouncements, meant that the defeat of captivity and exile were short-lived. With an indisputable trend back to religious belief, we would do well to view this phenomenon as the rock that resists all winds, tides, and storms. In a sea of relativism, such hope—such faith—can be an oasis and anchor of hope through all life’s storms.