

Dear People Whom God Loves,

RELIGION  
BLESSING OR CURSE?

Is religion a blessing or a curse? I believe that if we go deeply enough we will find that religion can bring either.

There are two things that can drive a person or a group to make an impact on society. These are love and hate. We call these good and evil; or, to use the language of many religious people, God and the devil.

We must be aware of who and what God is to us. If we see God as love, as someone who wants the flourishing of all people, we will be drawn to see the flourishing of all people. LOVE (GOD) will be the engine that drives us. We now know scientifically that the image we have of God changes our brain and thus influences our behavior. When our God is seen as love, and especially when we meditate on that image, or on any loving situations or events, our brain will draw us into more loving and compassionate feelings and behaviors.

On the other hand, if we see God as vengeful and punishing, and especially if we dwell on that image, or on other hateful and vengeful situations or events, our brain will draw us into hateful and vengeful feelings and behaviors. A vengeful, punishing "God" will be the engine that drives us.

Religion can be the source of love or hate. This is why some people who are religious can do wonderfully good and at times heroic things for people. This is why some people who are religious can do petty and at times ghastly, harmful things to people.

Is religion good or bad? This depends on whether we have "our God" feed our love or have "our God" feed our hate. The history of religion shows religions have been prone to this love/hate. In our Catholic church we have had people who, at great self-sacrifice, have ministered to the sick, the poor, the down trodden, and the outcasts. We have also had those who have slaughtered people of the other religions and have had people burned at the stake because they didn't "believe right."

I suggest that we listen more closely to *compassionate* people who are atheists and people who are not religious when they voice their criticisms about religion. From the outside, they have a perspective that we on the inside don't.

It is my belief that until we allow ourselves to rest in the infinite love that God is and allow that LOVE to transform us into more compassionate and merciful people, we will have a hard time following Jesus.

Smile, God Loves You  
Father Clay