

The Two Faces of Faith
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Faith has a place in human history? a mixed bag of good and bad consequences. Faith depends upon willing belief and assumptions that this belief is unchangeable.

Democracy depends on reasoned decisions, values that change as societies evolve. We think and know things today that were inconceivable for eons before our time.

Benefits of Faith

Faith can be a valuable unifying element, creating and sustaining communities. We do not do well as hermits. Even hermits must depend upon members of a religious community to feed and care for their needs.

Another benefit is compassion, an element of all religions since our very first. The ancient Greeks had a myth that gods in disguised visited a husband and wife who were survivors of the great flood. The old couple welcomed the strangers and fed them. The gods then revealed themselves and told the couple to throw stones over their shoulders to repopulate the world. The woman's stones would create women, the man's stones brought back men.

The message of this religious belief was: you never know when strangers coming to your door might be gods. Be hospitable. This belief contrasted with the older belief: that strangers were dangerous and must be killed.

All religions, even those in antiquity, promoted compassion for the needy. Human behavior without this teaching is not always compassionate.

The best element of Judaism and Christianity was the treatment of slavery, one of the most ancient of human practices. Judaism mandated the emancipation of every male slave after seven years of service. The Quaker sect of Christianity was the first to mandate emancipation for all slaves. Their campaign ultimately made it so in the Christian world.

Bad Elements of Faith

The worst element of faith is the belief that only one's own faith is true and all others must be destroyed. This has been acted out in religious wars throughout history. Religions have also mandated horrors: the Phoenicians mandated the sacrifice of every firstborn baby, which horrified the Greeks and Romans, who did not do this.

Countless ancient religions mandated human sacrifices to angry gods, a stupid practice that never remedied the erupting volcano.

Christianity and Islam not only warred with each other, but punished with death any disbelief by individuals. Human history reeked with fires burning suspected unbelievers and women considered witches. Fires also burned members of conquered people who refused to convert to their master's faith.

Current Conflict of Faith: Abortion

For centuries, dating back to cave times, women controlled their own bodies. Women were the medicinal experts as gatherers of plants and herbs. Migratory tribes needed to control their numbers and they aborted out of necessity. Pregnant women cannot survive the migration in dangerous country. (Still so today in migratory tribes.)

Jewish law from 1,800 years ago, mandated that the fetus was part of the woman's body until the first breath of the baby. In a conflict between a woman and a difficult birth, her welfare came before the baby's. This differs from the traditional Catholic belief that in a dangerous birth, save the baby, not the woman.

When is a fetus recognized as a human? In Judaism, at the first breath of the baby. In Islam, at the moment of perceptible heartbeat. In today's Fundamentalist Christians, at the moment of conception----and the extremists even consider the egg as a human that must not be kept from fertilization.

This Supreme Court is violating the strict separation of faith from governance. Their personal faiths must not dominate.

The 14th Amendment requires equality under the law. Roe v Wade does not force anybody to do anything. Reversal of this law forces women to carry unwanted pregnancies. Where is equality, then?

We support freedom of religion, and freedom from religion. Democracy depends on reason and equality for all, not faith.

Throughout the developed world today, religion is losing adherents. People are retreating from the old systems. Religious adherence as a divisive force is in the minority, even in the US.

We need to find community outside of religion and find a way to love each other again: community without coercion.

683 words

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