

Toxic Religions: to walk humbly with *your* God I: What do holy books say?

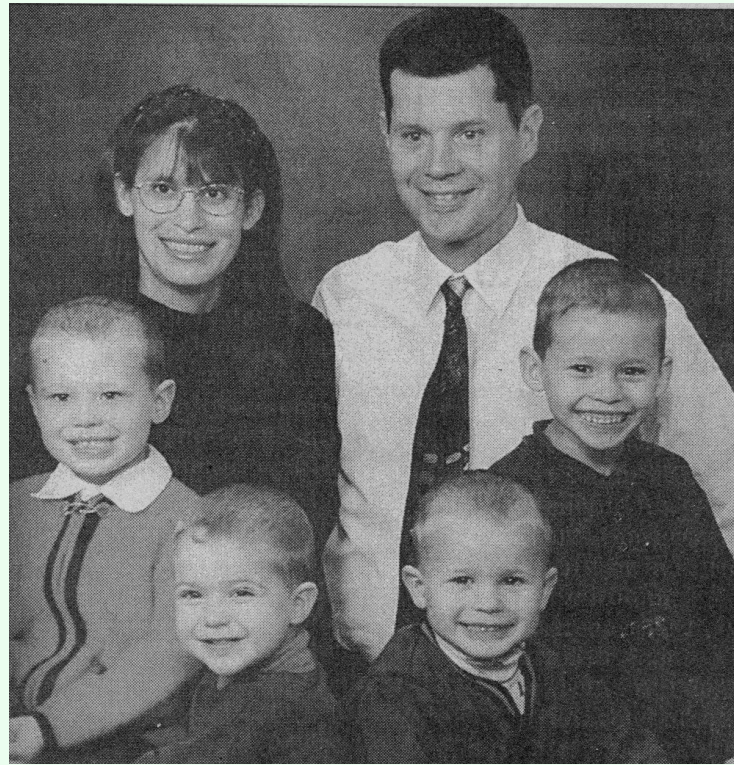
SAGE Seminar Fall 2006

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- For 20 years worked with many people...
- Preached during civil rights upheavals...
- “Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”
- As Social Worker saw much more of child and partner abuse ... often motivated by religion!
- What is it about religion that people hurt those they claim to “love,” or feel it is religious to be suicide bombers against strangers?



Why did Andrea Yates drown her five children?

Was she ill with post-partum depression?

She claimed she did it for Christian reasons

The Old Testament

- Old Testament is source book for Judaism but also for Christianity & Islam
- Troubling questions in our common history
- Cain and Abel ... what kind of a god deny with reason given?
- The flood: Anne Provoost book vividly asks what kind of a god kill all life forms?
- Explore two major events: Exodus and Exile

EXODUS

- Deut 4:34-35: Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?
- How justify kill all the first born—even livestock?
- Exod 14:30: And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.... Exod 15:1-6

- Conquest of 'holy land' after Exodus:
- Num 31: Moses said to them, "Have you allowed all the women to live? ... Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him. But all the young girls who have not known a man by sleeping with him, keep alive for yourselves.
- Deut 7:5–6: ...and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them...and show them no mercy.

- Lev. 20:9: All who curse father or mother shall be put to death.
- 2 Kings 2:23–24: Boys jeered at Elisha as “baldhead” so 2 bears maul 42 of the boys!
- *God is male, patriarchal, dictatorial, jealous!*
- Prophets appeared, starting with Amos, with new message: justice; a righteous God demands a righteous people
- Jeremiah 28 “...and Hananiah died.”
- Next major act: Exile of people of Judea

See, the day of the Lord comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the earth a desolation,
and to destroy its sinners from it....
Whoever is found will be thrust through,
and whoever is caught will fall by the sword.
Their infants will be dashed to pieces
before their eyes;

— Isa 13:9, 15-17a

Psalm 137 feelings in exile in Babylonia:
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

- Two new movements in later Old Testament:
- *Wisdom*: God is addressed as feminine Sophia; creation poem in Proverbs 8:22–31; see Wisdom and Sirach in the Apocrypha!
- Eroticism in the Song or Songs
- *Apocalypticism* primarily in Daniel: only God can and will correct injustice, and will do it violently with resurrection and hell
- Compare Dan 12:11–12: 1,290 or 1,335 days
- Summary of the bleak side of the Hebrew Scriptures – how can we understand it?

Christian Bible: The New Testament

Mary told changes coming in the Christ:
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of
their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their
thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty....

—Magnificat, Luke 1:46–55

- “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”
- “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!...Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but division!” —Luke 12:49–56
- “A man had a fig tree ... Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it... Luke 13:6–9
- Cursed a fig tree —Mark 11:12–14 then withered to the roots —Mark 11:20–25
- Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5; *discipline?*

Martrydom is a major Christian virtue:

- Revolts against Roman occupation were common
- “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” —Mark 8:34
- “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children...and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” —Luke 14:26
- “No one who has left house or brothers or sisters...who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age...with persecutions.” Mark 10:29

The Apocalypse or end times:

- “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents...and you will be hated by all because of my name.” —Mark 13:12–13
- Synoptic Apocalypse Mark 13=Matt 24=Luke 21
- The Apocalypse (Revelation) of John
- *Left Behind* series of novels
- Ignatius under armed guards to the lions

Koran

Violence in Koran in these:

- threats of punishment in hell for disbelief
- threats for bad conduct & to motivate good behavior
- fear God in stories of violent God
- justify human violence and warfare
- violence rooted in promises of paradise for believers, including those killed in battle
- images of God as holy warrior

- 5:38: As for the man or woman who is guilty of theft, cut off their hands to punish them for their crimes. That is the punishment enjoined by God.
- 5:33: Those who make war against God and His apostle and spread disorder in the land shall be slain or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides or be banished.
- ‘Compassion’ 15 times, but most refer to Allah as compassionate

- Koran 'love' 83 times, but many say 'Allah does not love the x': 2:177, 3:32, 49:9, 61:4
- New Testament by contrast: 'love' 184 times: *demanding*: Mark 3 times, Matthew 7, Luke 7, John 21, *but* Paul commands 74 times!
- Irshad emphasizes 4:135: Believers, conduct yourselves with justice and bear true witness before God, even though it be against yourselves.
- More when study women & children in a later session.

Major differences within each of these religions over answering these questions:

- Can we read these books as literature like any other? Can we ask *questions* about the texts? Can we discuss *interpretations*?
- Notice different *types* of literature: poetry, history, teaching, parables, allegory, song. Reading *literally* started in 16th century!
- We read translations of dead languages. For many there are differing ancient texts.
- Are they inspired or inspiring, motivating?

web site: yeaperson.com
click on “Dance of Living”
for further readings