

Religion and Evil

When Religion Fails

Introduction

- Defining the topic
- Examples of religion and evil?
 - “Groupthink”
 - Wars, brutality, torture, terrorism
 - Racism, social marginalization, ostracism
 - Others?
- How have you experienced an “evil side” of religion?

Psychological Anatomy of Harmful Religion

- Personality factors
 - Cult of Personality
 - Mental Illness?
- Cognitive factors
 - Authoritarianism, ignorance
- Social factors
 - Group dynamics
- Ethical/Moral factors
 - When the ends justify the means

When Religion Fails

From (Pargament, 1997, Chapter 11)

- Religious One-sidedness
 - Focusing on religion to the detriment of other needs (social, personal).
 - Imbalance and oversimplification of life.
 - Example: service attendance, AA meetings
 - Religious fervor is not destructive in itself, but becomes harmful if not balanced.

When Religion Fails

- Religious One-sidedness (continued)
 - Overvaluation of ends leads to the justification of almost any means.
 - Man murdered wife and children reportedly due to his fear that she might lead the children “astray”.
 - Corporal punishment or child abuse?

When Religion Fails

- Religious Deception
 - Outright deception cloaked in religious language and culture.
 - E.g., Financial fraud in Scientology
 - The use of religious texts, terminology, or status, to explain or justify evil and injury of others.
 - E.g., Slavery in the U.S.

When Religion Fails

- Errors of Religious Explanation
 - Use of religious explanations that leave no room for alternative explanations.
 - Can often result in “blaming the victim.”
 - E.g., Religious explanations of AIDS
 - E.g., Friend’s experience of religious marital counseling.

When Religion Fails

- Errors of Religious Control
 - Failure to understand and to gather the resources to meet the needs of a situation.
 - Religious overcontrol
 - Christian scientists’ not allowing medical treatment
 - Personal overcontrol
 - Example: 8-yr old’s death in 2003