



Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 12A: Religion: Man-made or Divine?

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Major world faiths offer little help in our quest to find God's influence upon the earth. Many who have claimed to act in God's name, from scandal-plagued televangelists to medieval inquisitors to Islamic terrorists, can be seen to act in their own self-interest under the guise of piety. Others, from superstitious peasants to suicide bombers, are obviously deluded. Countless wars have been fought over matters of religion, atrocities have been committed, and millions have suffered oppression in the name of faith. Yet just as an agnostic cannot rationally claim that God cannot be known because He is not known to him, neither can it be asserted that God does not work on the earth because major faiths that claim His name do not know Him.

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It is often easier to tell where a connection with God is absent than where His influence is found, because the consequences of the follies of oppression and superstition are readily manifest, whereas God speaks quietly in a still small voice and only to those who seek Him ([1 Kings 19:12](#)). Thoughtful people can perceive that many religions have been fabricated by man for his own purposes. For example, the cult of the Roman Emperors encouraged the worship of the emperor and his family as gods to whom believers built shrines and prayed, much as the later Catholics venerated the saints. This state-sponsored religion represented little more than a means of redirecting individual spirituality in a way deemed constructive and patriotic by the Roman state, with no real enlightenment to offer its adherents. Yet such faiths offered little spiritual sustenance to the local people with no direct connection to God, no divine truths, and teachings which were more civic than spiritual.

Some religions which may have had divine origins have been co-opted and corrupted by man-made institutions. One may believe that the Old Testament prophets taught truth and that Christ was the son of God, yet such a belief does not mean that anyone who picks up a Bible and starts a church is commissioned of God. The connection of the Old Testament prophets to God was clear; the connection of modern sectarian Christianity is not. We find many instances of secular authorities overriding divine order, such as the Emperor Constantine's adoption of Christianity as a state religion and the appointment of religious offices as a form of political patronage, the Catholic church's sale of indulgences, Peter the Great's fundamental changes of the Russian Orthodox Church and persecution of old believers, and so forth. The Bible teaches God's model of working through prophets and apostles, but makes no mention of popes, their alleged infallibility, nor of cardinals. Thus the fact that one may express belief in the inspiration of the Biblical prophets does not provide an unlimited mandate or authorization for those who claim to teach ancient truths.