

1 **Roger McShane**

2 **Is religion a force of good?**

3 original at:

4 <http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/591>

5 Voltaire once wrote, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent
6 him." Leaving aside whether we actually did, can the same be said of
7 religion? Most of the world's population has religious feelings of some sort,
8 and these beliefs in turn underpin many strong communities, happy
9 individuals and tremendous acts of charity.

10 Yet the world can be a very nasty place despite the fact that a vast
11 majority of its inhabitants are religious. When faith turns into dogmatism,
12 it often leads to arrogance, intolerance and violence. In other words,
13 religion is a force for bad as well as good and there is no simple metric
14 with which to measure its net effect.

15 Its impact is often subtle. For example, many consider religion the
16 foundation of a virtuous life. In 2007 the Pew Research Center found that
17 majorities in a number of countries, including America, felt that belief in
18 God was a necessary precursor to being a "moral" person with "good
19 values". But in the same survey Pew found that similar majorities felt
20 homosexuals should be rejected by society, which suggests that
21 intolerance passes for a good value in many moral households. Is this the
22 price of religion's virtue? Is it worth it? And can we get the good parts of
23 religion without the bad?

Questions

- 1) What is, according to the article, very often the cause of arrogance and violence?
- 2) What two facts are contrasted in paragraphs 1 and 2 and with what conclusion?
- 3) What paradox did the Pew Research Center study reveal?
- 4) Give synonyms for 'precursor' (line 18).
- 5) Paraphrase 'intolerance passes for a good value in many moral households' (line 21).
- 6) What does the demonstrative pronoun *this* refer to in line 21?
- 7) Do you agree that we can 'get the good parts of religion without the bad' (lines 22 to 23)? What role do you think religion plays in the Czech Republic?

Vocabulary

leave aside (line 6) – not to discuss or make a subject of conversation

underpin (line 8) – to prop up or support from below; strengthen, serve as a foundation for.

reject (line 20) – to refuse to accept

virtue (line 22) – moral goodness of character and behaviour, a particular good quality in someone's character

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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