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A Personal Perspective On Faith versus Religion

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"When Fr. Costanzo asked me to contribute an article in the Spring 2013 issue of VERBUM, I was both honored and apprehensive. My apprehension was rooted in the fact that he wanted me to write about faith and religion. Faith, religion, and politics, are topics that I avoid discussing in public; they're too personal and emotional. There seems to be no right or wrong answers and generally end with no one convinced of the other's position and sometimes hard feelings."



Beth LaVigne

A Personal Perspective On Faith versus Religion

When Fr. Costanzo asked me to contribute an article in the Spring 2013 issue of VERBUM, I was both honored and apprehensive. My apprehension was rooted in the fact that he wanted me to write about faith and religion. Faith, religion, and politics, are topics that I avoid discussing in public; they're too personal and emotional. There seems to be no right or wrong answers and generally end with no one convinced of the other's position and sometimes hard feelings.

So, I begin this article with a disclaimer. I am presenting my personal views. I am not attempting to persuade anyone of anything. Please do not attempt these ideas at home. ☺

My father was an Episcopalian, my mother was a Catholic; I was raised a Catholic. I went to Sacred Heart Grammar School and was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph. I attended Mass every Sunday and some weekdays. Our school used the Baltimore Catechism as the basic teachings of the Catholic religion. I believed that my faith and my religion were one and the same. After all, the terms Catholic religion and Catholic faith were interchangeable terms at that time. You can't get more traditional than that.

At twenty-three I experienced a difficult divorce. Instead of embracing and supporting me, I felt that the Catholic Church was pushing me into decisions about annulment and excommunication, if I would decide to remarry. Although I felt angry and disappointed in my religion, I did not lose my faith. That's when I began to make a real distinction between religion and faith and question my "religion."

I no longer practice a formal ritualized religion. I do not go to a specific building, whether Catholic, Protestant, or non-denominational to practice a religion. I do not believe in any particular church's doctrine, dogma, or rituals.

On the positive side, I do believe! I believe that there is a Supreme Being who created us and all of nature. Some choose to call this Supreme Being God, Yahweh or Allah. This Supreme Being goes by different names in different cultures.

Many prefer to worship in a formal setting; I choose to do it when I look up at a starry sky, or out at the horizon of a vast ocean. I also do it in the quietness of my home or when I am reading an inspirational book. My belief is that this Being, God if you will, does not need to be worshipped in a building, during a ritual, or on a Sunday only.

So, let me simply summarize. . .I believe that religion is something that people are identified by and that faith is something by which God is identified. I would simply conclude by stating that one has to have faith to have a religion, but one does not have to have a religion to have faith.



Aftermath of Nemo
(Photo by Dr. Linda MacCammon)