

Hidden Religions

by [Gracjan Kraszewski](#) (April 2022)



Street Scene 1, Jack Levine, 1938

“No, I am not religious,” I say. “But allow me to say something about religion, though: nothing is worse than fake religion, than—”

“But, as an atheist, do you not believe all religions are fake?” the man interjects. “And then you told me every time you are in Albuquerque you wish you’d be in Amarillo and that Lubbock, Texas, ‘by the way,’ you say ‘sucks, it sucks,’ just an endless stream of—”

“No, no, it’s not that simple. I want to be in Las Cruces,

I say, 'by the way.' Am I a believer? No. So I therefore do not accept the truth claims of most, if not all, religions? Yes. But by fake religion I mean something completely different. Let me first define the opposite of fake religion. Real religion is, would be, would have to be, universal. It has to apply to all people in all places and—even before that, and here's like a first first thing, a primary cause, an unmoved mover upon whom all contingency would deductively rest not just propelling the internal external unexpurgated logic like capital L Logos forward but making it all stick together, like in place, like with glue, divine glue, believers would say, they'd say that, they'd like that, like, uh, something like that— it has to be good.

“What do I mean by good? By good I mean good oriented. And a good oriented religious philosophy sounds something like this: 'God is love and he made everything simply because love is a good thing and he wanted to share this good thing with all people. And if you live a good life you'll be filled with love and goodness now and forever, even after you die.' Okay, simple enough, right? Believe it or not, this is a good intention everyone can agree is good. It has to be universal, meaning that all people, so long as they keep the rules, whatever that might be, so long as they try to be good, try to do what God is asking of them, confident that it's only good stuff because God is goodness itself, can arrive at some kind of place of eternal joy. But when it's not universal, it's fake religion. When it's like 'God is good and he's love but he really only loves this group of people and everyone else is screwed,' that's fake religion. When it's like 'look, God just, I don't know, in his inscrutable will predestined some people to damnation, just made some people for hell, but, hold on, he is still love,' that's fake religion. It has to be good and universal: maybe hell is real, and maybe people go there because God is so much love he gives them the free will to reject him, to choose against him and their own goodness even, I don't know, I've heard some religious people say something

like this. Okay, fine, so let's say there's a heaven and a hell and a purgatory like the Catholics say and, whatever, the point is, the point here, the important thing, what I'm saying, getting at, what I'm getting at here, now, what I'm saying is, the point is, the point's that real religion is good and universal. It doesn't matter where you're from or what you look like or any kind of bullshit like 'there's a limited number of seats available in heaven;' no if God is real and God is love and everyone is made in God's image and likeness than the only obligations are to follow what God has taught, now this maybe might could be insanely difficult to live up to, but no matter how hard it is or would be or could be it's not going to be obscure, it's not going to be secret society esoteric neo-gnostic hidden knowledge bullshit, no, it'll be right out in the open and good and universal.

"But, let me tell you, you wanna know the worst kind of religion? It's right there in the Bible, doc. Tell me, tell me, tell me how and why and how those dudes who are prosperity gospels or something like that I think, you know, bro, you, dude, the guys that brag about the two private jets they own inside their football stadium scare quotes bolded churches with ten digit bank accounts for scare quotes bolded evangelization and say like, bro, even me, an atheist, even I know, bro, c'mon, know it's bullshit when they say all Jesus really wants is for you to be happy and the best way to be happy is to be rich, filthy rich flapjack stacked bills on bills loaded, loaded like me, Pastor Charlatan McUsury MacSimony IX. That's one type of the worst kind of religion. It's right there in the Bible, like I said. Even an atheist knows it's right there in the sixth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, smack dab in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: can't serve God and mammon.

"The second type of worst religion goes something like this: 'I'm a guru, I've got secret knowledge, it's written down, here's my secret knowledge mantras and methods and,

yeah, I'm asking you to leave everything behind and follow me and, yeah, I know it sounds like a lot but it's going to be worth it because when, later on, you compare the life I'm going to give you with your past life it'll seem like nothing, all you left behind. So, here's what you've got to do: sell all your belongings and then give me the money, we'll, I mean, we've got bills to pay, someone's gotta pay for our sprawling compound in the desert—and this is what I mean in my rants, my going on and on about Texas and New Mexico is that, look especially about the latter, that look, the natural beauty is so beautiful and so why can't be act beautiful in response, I say to you, Las Cruces because it should be enough, but then instead of good actions it's like, listen –but, guess what? Yeah, you guessed it! You get to come to the compound to live with me and the other selected elect, forever. There's a place already prepared for you, all you have to do is say yes. But, well, there is one more thing, it's kind of like an initiation process that I do with all my followers just to make sure you're legit, that you're truly one of the chosen ones. I'm going to need you to disrobe and let me touch your Johnson.' There is it, doc! That's fake religion 101. Anytime it reduces to either money or sex it's nothing but the foulest type of shit. Any time the guru or the pastor or the pastor guru is standing up there in front of his congregation and saying shit like, 'You wouldn't believe how liberating my message has been found amongst women, women especially. You asked why so many of my followers are women and I think, to be honest, I think they've finally found the crossroads of truth and self-empowerment driven by a non sexist, non-patriarchal leadership model within my message,' you can rest assured that bastard thinks nothing more sophisticated than *titties, titties, titties, titties, titties, titties*. To whip this thing around full circle, yeah, since I'm not a believer I guess that pressed to the wall I'd have to say I think all religions are fundamentally fake, are not true relative to the truth claims they're making. But I'm also saying some fake religions might be barely fake, some are a little fake, some

are more fake, some totally fake, and some just fucking fucking fake as fuck. I have quite a few friends who are Catholics, docpiece, and I get, I mean I understand, I see where, I understand why they think that what they think is not just a real religion but actually a true one and not just that but the one and only True One. I get why they think this. And, in light of what I just said, I get why Jesus Christ told his followers to sell everything but give it to the poor and why he was all about celibacy, as Catholic priests are supposed to be. I get it because if you're not about money or sex than you'll probably get a fair shake, a fair hearing to find out if you are, indeed, about *anything* at all. Oh, oh, also, also, oh, look, I said money and sex are the two fake religion indicators but also, yeah, also what I can't understand for the life of me is all the bullshit dick for brains sloppy ass philosophy concerning what a religion says you can or can't do connected to personal exemptions and justifications even of the furthest imaginative stretch.

"You don't want to follow the rules of the Bible? Be like me. Be an atheist. But if you claim to be a Christian, or a Jew for that matter, if we're going to be talking about commandments from the Torah, then it is what it is. 'Well, you know, cultural context, this passage, the one that says *we're talking about yellow here and yes we mean yellow literally as in the color*, that one, when you consider the constructed cultural value systems of the time and the ever evolving paradigms of meaning and value especially the meaning of the word value, well, it becomes pretty obvious the author is not talking about the color yellow at all.' That kind of shit should warrant lifetime imprisonment in solitary confinement. It's really a crime against humanity from a logical and rational point of view and, you know, it's never about logic or reason anyways. It's always an emotional see totally illogical and irrational response. It's always a hissy fit that this or that scared text won't let me do this thing I want to do and rather than grow a pair of intellectual balls

and admit it's one or the other—I can do this thing and not be part of the community or I can remain a part of the community but can't justify doing this thing—they say yellow isn't yellow when they know that yellow *is* yellow and always will be because if something is true it always will be and can never not be and to disprove a “true thing” doesn't disprove truth only that the thing we once thought was true never was in fact true. Also, wow, doc-unit, bruh, dawg, you, you really got me goin' here and I think I'm just gonna keep hittin the fake religion systems until the circuit system breaks in two if that's cool with you. You ever read Christian Bry's *Verkappte Religionen?*”

“No,” the man says. “I haven't. Is he one of the German Texans you're always mentioning? That, the whoudda-thunk thought about and on it ... Germans in Texas?”

“ ‘*Hidden Religions,*’ ” I say. “He was the first guy, I think, to really pin down the fact, and he wrote this book sometime in the like 1920s if I'm not mistaken, to really pin down the fact that most social movements or trendy social behaviors are in fact hidden religions. Environmentalists worship the environment, the earth is their church, same thing with vegans and vegetarians, teetotalers, I mean the list goes on, he goes on and on explaining how when people reject real religion they have to fill the void with something—and this, wow, this is no original revelation at all, Augustine our hearts are resettles until ... so many dudes have said things like this, note that, note my awareness of this—to fill the void with a second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh rate shitass fake as dogdung parody of a ‘religion.’ What a joke, intellectual balls again: be all in or reject it all. All this fake ass shit is, probably will be, will one day, will be, like, like one day talked about as, wow, as like, wow those people sucked at philosophy, they sucked at reason and logical position taking and, and, it sucks, that's what I'm saying.”

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Gracjan Kraszewski is the author of two books: a novel entitled *The Holdout* (Adelaide Books, 2018) and a Civil War history entitled *Catholic Confederates* (forthcoming with The Kent State University Press, 2020). The first chapter of another novel (currently in progress), *Job Search*, was published in *Eclectica Magazine*. Short fiction has appeared in *New English Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *The Southern Distinctive*, *PILGRIM*, *Bull: Men's Fiction*, *The Coil*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *RumbleFish Press*, *Five on the Fifth*, and on The Short Humour Site with pieces forthcoming in the *Tulane Review* and *Riddle Fence*.

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