

How I lost my religion

By James Henderson

Glasgow. 'No mean city.'¹

Growing up was full of fun and conflict: late summer nights, playing with my pals in the streets, laughing, joking, both avoiding and flirting with the girls; nostalgic days interrupted by bouts of conflict, hostility, and danger. The conflict was over stupid religion.

I hope the word 'stupid' does not offend too much. But it's how I saw it and still do see it. The city was divided between orange and green, Protestants and Catholics, Good King Billy versus the Pope in Rome, Church versus Chapel. I don't think many of us knew the real differences. It was a tradition that had lasted centuries and we kids neither understood it nor cared about why. It was just how it was.

well. The Catholics had green and/or brown blazers, while we had blue, the Protestant colour, so you knew instantly who was who.

My aunt had married a Catholic and so my cousins were raised Catholic. Every week we'd visit them on a Saturday night and, if Rangers were playing Celtic, there'd be tension. If you went to one of the matches, you'd have to duck to avoid the broken bottles and other missiles, thrown with the intent to harm.

Glasgow was actually a mean place to live in. Thankfully, however, now it has changed for the better as have other once troubled cities, such as Belfast and Liverpool.

But these experiences put me off sectarianism and organised religion for life. How could it be that people who supposedly followed the same book, the same God, and the same

for myself in the very Bible that both Catholics and Protestants share (at least bits of it), and discovered that, yes, Christ did speak out against organised religion. Religion had been used to control people instead of releasing them to be who they could be. There were some sincere believers, but generally there was hypocrisy along with commandments about this, that, and the next thing. In fact, Christ told the priests, the religious leaders, and his own followers that, if they wanted commandments, he'd give them a special one to put into practice. 'A new commandment I give to you', he said, 'that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another'.²

What would Jesus have thought of the religious divisions in Glasgow when I was growing up? Or, for that matter, of all the various denominations and sects that claim his name today? Or of the religions that turn their followers against those who don't agree with them?

I think he'd say the same thing: 'A new commandment I give you, love one another'.

I still don't like religion. But I give Jesus a thumbs up. I agree with him. I follow him.



There used to be skirmishes and occasionally running battles between my Protestant school and the Catholic school a few blocks away. There were sticks, stones, sometimes knives. Mainly the boys, of course, but some of the girls as

values hate each other so intensely? It was, and is, plain stupid.

I heard once that Jesus Christ objected to the religion of his day. How could this be true? Did he not start all this mess? So, I looked it up

Endnotes

¹ Quoted from the title of the book *No Mean City* by A. McArthur & H. Kingsley Long, first published in 1935, which was set in Glasgow as it was then.

² The NKJ Bible, John 13:34, but look it up for yourself in any Bible version.