

The enemy of spirituality

By [Steve Woolley](#)

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Spiritual but not religious. Good Grief! Not that again. How often do we have to go over that ground?

An ongoing locker room conversation led to an hour or two over coffee. If you are spiritual but not religious, I asked, what is religion? He had a quick, definitive answer. Religion is to be forced into a community where you are told what to think and believe, and be threatened with eternal damnation if you don't. This was religion as he knew it from his youth, and it seemed unlikely to him that there could be any other kind. Moreover, the religion of his younger life asserted that one's personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ was all that mattered, it was an individual thing, and if that's the case, what good is religion or the weekly gathering of so-called believers whose claims to be Christian are highly suspect based on their daily behavior?

What if religion is something different from that, I asked? We explored what, for him, was a brand new idea. That religion, the Christian religion, is made up of the rituals and traditions that serve as conduits through which we enter into a more profound communion with God. That no one set of traditions and rituals serves all people well, and some people not at all. That however important our individual relationship with God through Christ might be, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Jesus was all about restoring, healing and calling people into community. There is something essential about being spiritual that can only be found in community with others.

Consider that our whole conversation was an act of community in community: a lapsed fundamentalist talking with an Episcopal priest in a coffee shop owned and staffed by Greek Orthodox. It was church, but only for a moment, and it depended on there being other churches, organized, in buildings, centers of regular worship, places from which the Word is sent out into the world.

I wonder where our hour or so will lead. Maybe another conversation some day. My desire is for doors to be opened through which he can encounter the love of God in

Christ who commands faith, but faith not chained by fundamentalist dogma, rather a faith in which he is invited in to conversation and community with God Almighty. He may never join a religion, but perhaps he will make enough peace with it so that religion is, for him, no longer the enemy of spirituality.

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