

Agnostic Philosopher: Religion Is Awesome Emotional Therapy

Faith and religion get an increasingly bad rap in today's world. As Pew Research [discovered in 2016](#), roughly a quarter of Americans consider themselves members of the “nones,” a category which classifies people as “atheists, agnostics or ‘nothing in particular.’” This number has risen from ten percent just a few decades ago.

However, not everyone in this “nones” category would consider decline of religion a good thing. Author, columnist, and professor of philosophy [Stephen Asma](#) is one of those individuals. Asma believes that religion is irrational, but still a valuable element of life, a fact demonstrated in his new book, [Why We Need Religion](#).

In [an interview](#) with *Publishers Weekly*, Asma declares the following:

“[T]here are a number of people like me who are skeptical about the belief claims of religions yet nonetheless respect it. They haven't had the voice for what they are thinking. I say religion is actually very good therapy for our emotional lives. It resonates. There are levels of suffering that art and science can't do much with and religion is very good at. People think of religion as a system of beliefs but it is fundamentally an emotional management system, one that science and any other kind of 'cultural technology' cannot offer.”

The religiously observant may take such words as a bone of praise and encouragement for the advancement of faith, even though they are accompanied by a rather patronizing attitude.

But had acclaimed scholar and former skeptic C.S. Lewis been alive today, he would have dismissed Professor Asma's words outright. Faith, he would have argued, is not an irrational, emotional, therapeutic response to life. It is quite the opposite. "Faith and reason," Lewis notes in [Mere Christianity](#), are allies together, and the twin foes of "emotion and imagination":

"I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of the evidence is against it. That is not the point at which Faith comes in. But supposing a man's reason once decides that the weight of the evidence is for it. ...

*Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. **For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes.** I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable: but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable. **This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods 'where they get off,' you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion.** Consequently one must train the habit of Faith."*

How does one do this?

***"The first step is to recognize the fact that your moods change.** The next is to make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. That is why daily prayers and religious reading and*

church going are necessary parts of the Christian life. We have to be continually reminded of what we believe. Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind. It must be fed. **And as a matter of fact, if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?"**

Considering the rise of religious nones, is Lewis on to something? Have many turned away from religion/Christianity, not because it is irrational, but because it is too emotional?

Many churches have attempted to convey a fluffy, feel-good atmosphere in recent decades through more [relevant music](#) and less preaching. But in so doing, have they failed to help individuals recognize that Faith is not fluff, but a rational, reasonable state of mind?

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