

Reflections

Fostering a respectful society

A RECENT report from the think tank Policy Exchange reveals that the UK attracts more clicks on online Jihadist content than any other European country.

According to the NSPCC, one in three children has been a victim of cyber-bullying, one in four youngsters has come across racist and hate messages, and over 50% of 11 to 16 years old have seen explicit material online.

One of the main reasons why such unhealthy behaviour is on the rise is the failure to uphold our religious teachings of respect, love, compassion, care and peace.

These days the labels of atheist, secularist, free thinker, agnostic, sceptic, pagan, heathen and irreligionist have overwhelming appeal and popularity. Many countries and institutions that have strong religious origins now take pride in calling themselves 'non religious'. They see value in having visible distance from established religions with their value-based teachings.

In addition, there are some who wish to separate spirituality from religion; this is understandable given some of the atrocities staged in the name of religion in the past. But it is equally important to recognise the positive and holistic contribution of religion which has influenced and shaped human behaviour and civilisation since before the Stone Age. This was well understood by scientists like Einstein who said: 'Science without



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religion is lame, religion without science is blind.'

Evolutionary science shows us how the area of the human brain involved with religious behaviour has developed over time. The neocortex, which is mainly involved in human religiosity, self-consciousness, language and other related cognitive functions, grew by 80% during the hominid period.

Humans have a persistent evolutionary disposition to religious behaviour and unconsciously seek God at moments of desperation. I have personally witnessed this with people on their deathbed, even those who had previously expressed a convincing rationale to deny God. They have responded positively to prayers said at the final moments of their departure from this world.

There is much advice on how to protect our children and youngsters from addictive and extremist digital content, but the soaring statistics should compel us to consider returning to what we have too often ignored. 'Good' religious teachings are amongst the most basic and fundamental tools available to foster a respectful and compassionate society.