

Christians who don't read the Bible!

Jongrok Lee (Professor of Hanil University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary, PhD of the Old Testament Studies)



An atheist is a person who denies the existence of god and does not believe in god. So, atheist has no reason to have a religion. Furthermore, the religion is based upon the belief that god exists, so it is the common sense that atheists are negative to the religion. What if the atheist supports the religion?

I am a born-again Christian, that is, born to Christian parents, a pastor and theologian, and have been teaching Old Testament in a seminary for 36 years. Among my favorite books, 『Religion for Atheist』 is very high ranking in the book list of my life. Who seems to write this book 『Religion for Atheist』? At the first glance of the book title, most people would think that a theist wrote this book to inform the benefit of religion to the atheist. This book is written by Alain de. Botton. He is an atheist. Does an atheist recommend religion to the atheists? He firmly believes that the serious problem of the destruction of community in current society can be solved through the religion. So, even though he is an atheist, he says that regardless of the existence of god or the belief in god, religion has existed for a long time in human history and exerts the great influence, even atheists deny or disregard the religion. He offers ten ways we can learn from religion to restore our community.

I've read this book, and I've read it with Christian pastors' book group several times, because I think it's a good book for Christians to realize the usefulness of religion, especially Christianity, more than it is for atheists. I am convinced that the vast majority of Christians, even pastors, do not realize how valuable religion, especially their own religion, Christianity, is to humanity's cultural heritage. One of the most egregious is the trivialization of what Christians hold most dear, the Bible, the

word of God. The current state of Christianity is such that the Bible is considered an old, difficult, and uninteresting book, people don't like to read the Bible, studying the Bible is extremely annoying, and pastors only tell interesting and topical stories in their sermons. Many pastors don't even read the Bible when preparing sermons. They don't study it, and they don't try to understand it. In short, the people who are supposed to be Bible experts don't know the Bible. I deeply deplore this New Middle Age, when the abundance of Bible-related books is available, but no one reads the Bible or studies the Bible just like there is no water to drink in the flood.

Because of the current state of Christianity, a person who reads the Bible carefully for any purpose is the most lovable to me, and a person who reads the Bible critically in order to escape from blind and wrong stereotypical beliefs is precious to me. In this respect, my friend Byung Youn Kim is a very lovable and precious person. It's not just because he's a middle school classmate I've known for over 50 years, but because he's been a seeker after truth all his life. While he doesn't believe in any divine being in the way that traditional religious people do, he has spent his life preoccupied with the Tao, life, death, and after death; the dynamic forces that set our lives and the universe in motion, and he continues to devote his life to these religious issues.

Such my friend spills the beans this time. He has written a book that presents the strongest challenge yet to Christianity, which upholds the Bible as the word of God, convinced that it must be done away with for the sake of human happiness and peace, and that doing so is the true Great Awakening, and that only by bringing about a pure Religious Revolution can humanity realize and live by the perfect Tao. The effort he has put into writing this book is remarkable. I've met him and listened to him speak several times, and I've gotten the sense that the effort he's put into this book is comparable to the effort Marx put into writing 『the Capital』. He read a lot of books, talked to a lot of people, wrote a huge manuscript, and went through an unknown number of revisions before finally finishing it.

As a biblical scholar, what impresses me most is that he has read the Bible more often and more thoroughly than Christians, more than pastors, and more than theologians. Of course, there are obvious limitations to his reading of the Bible, as he was not equipped with basic biblical or theological knowledge, but it is clear that in order to criticize the Bible and to identify its shortcomings, he read the Bible more thoroughly than anyone else, explored the related materials, and talked to experts to seek their advice.

As a born-again Christian, a pastor, a biblical scholar, and someone who has taught the Bible in seminaries for many years, I want my friend to read the Bible in a positive light. But with so many Christians, pastors, and even my own students unwilling to accept and strongly reject what I have to say, I know it's not easy for a true Tao seeker to see the Bible in a positive light in this pathetic time when Christianity is being vilified internally and externally.

Nevertheless, the reason I am writing this recommendation is because the writer of this book could give a warning to the Christians. In order to criticize the Bible and to bring about a real religious and spiritual revolution, he has read the Bible critically with his best efforts and with a sense of duty to get rid of the Bible (writer's note: especially the Old Testament) from the human history.

Also, because I rarely see among the Christians who say that the Bible is the word of God, pastors who preach several sermons a week based on it, or seminarians who study for years to become pastors, anyone who loves to read the Bible as much as the author did. It would be a shame if he read the Bible so much to criticize it, but the majority of Christians who hold it up as the absolute truth of God's Word don't bother to read it, don't study it, don't understand it properly, are completely ignorant of it, hold up their own stereotypes of it as the word of God, and who reject what biblical scholars teach.

Just as more Christians than atheists should read Alain de Botton's 『Religion for Atheists』, who openly identifies himself as an atheist, and realize how precious the religion of Christianity is to the cultural heritage of humanity, I hope that Christians will read this book and realize how lazy and indolent they are about reading the so-called word of God, how ignorant they are about the Bible, and how crude the stereotypes they insist are actually the word of God. This is why I recommend this book.

In this advanced age, when the level of education and intellect is the highest in human history, and when the instinct to play and eat is seen as a lifestyle, I dedicate this book to my friend Byung Youn Kim, who has chosen to live the life of a hard truth seeker in order to realize the universal Tao and to share it with others.