

Vulnerable

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If children are the staple victims for ungodly Catholic priests, then, women tend to be victims of Buddhist cult figures. British actor and activist, Stephen Fry, in one of his sharp and hilarious takes on religion, warns us that women whose children have left for college and husbands are playing golf are most likely to turn to religious authority-figures for companionship and to generously invest in them. Evangelists and the religious are known to attract millions in wealth mainly from women with surplus time (including boredom), funds and adoring vulnerability.

Om money

A well known chief high priest of a local Vihara, a bank teller friend told me, regularly deposited huge bundles of cash in his bank. This could only mean a personal account from rich regular local harvests. Ever since organized religion arose, when piety is measured in numbers, what better pious numbers than demonstrating faith in figures. Women tend to be more generous with figures. After all, we cannot take it with us, our pious priests constantly remind us, just send it ahead through the cloth.

Anyway, if politics is about power, then, religion is often about **money**. Religion today provides for every pious service for a fee. This is understandable because we are not really bothered about religion until a child is born, or some exams are coming, or we lust for our love interest, or to get a good job or good business without trying, to heal a sickness, and of course, in time of a death.

Supposition and superstition

Since we have no control over such things, and the religious do not really “desire” what we have since they are wise beyond our ken, we trust them to support and succour us during such vulnerable moments. After all, it is for only a few worldly dollars, and we can easily get more where we come from. Indeed, suppositions and superstitions are the best catalysts for business of faith after funerary and F&B services.

The point of this reflection is that neither we nor our near or dear ones should fall for religious conning, skimming and Tartuffism, or worse. We should spend quality time with our siblings, parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and of course, spouses or partners to educate them so that our hard-earned income are siphoned neither to heaven nor to hell.

Earth your wealth

Our wealth has been hard earned here and should remain here in this world. We can put it to good use for our precious needs, and to ease the unceasing sufferings of especially those whom we know. Although it feels noble to be a lone sacrificer or donor to stretched hands, Buddhists are encouraged to wisely band together to make offerings to worthy causes, whether secular or religious. The main benefit of a common giving with friends is that we have more and better friends.

If we understand the Dhamma, Vinaya well enough, we know that it is bad karma to give money to monastics, and worse for them to receive it, directly or indirectly. However, we can provide them with the 4 supports of food, robes, shelter and health as and when the need arises, and do the offering in lovingkind fellowship.

Invitation

There is the ancient tradition of the **invitation** (*pavāraṇā*). A monastic, by Vinaya rule, should never ask for anything (except perhaps water) from others other than immediate relatives. However, we can “invite” worthy renunciants to ask us for allowable things (nothing against the Vinaya). Rolexes, handphones and cars are not the needs of a renunciant. We can limit the invitation by object, by place, by time and by amount.

Hence, we can, for example, invite a renunciant or lay Dhamma worker to ask for, say, transportation at any time he needs it (such as going for a Dhamma talk). Or, we can invite him to ask for books that he needs. Again, we can invite other friends to donate into the common hat for such acts of merits.

Salaried priests

Then, there are salaried priests who look like monastics, but since they are salaried, they have broken their bhikkhu (alms-collector) vows. Anyway, it is silly, to say the least, to give them offerings, unless perhaps it’s an affair of love. But let us not digress.

The quality of Buddhism depends on the quality of our faith and wisdom. When we show blind faith, we encourage cultish gurus. When we are idolizing fans, we get pop idols: we become idol-worshippers. The Buddha is neither and encourages neither.

We get the Buddhism we deserve

We have to work diligently for the kind of Buddhism we need. We deserve the best and the true.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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