

TAKING RELIGION TOO LITERALLY A PROBLEM

Dr David Tacey, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, challenges the church at a critical time claiming that it can do itself and supporters a favour by not taking messages so literally.



'The churches have failed to understand that the scriptures are primarily poetry and myth, not history. They have misread mythology as metaphysics and we have been stuck ever since with a religion that few can believe in,' says Dr Tacey.

'To read these texts literally, to take them as history, is not faith, as the churches have insisted, but a form of misreading.'

The presentation—*Beyond Literal Thinking in Religion*—was posted online and became something of a viral sensation generating thousands of hits locally and abroad on the Catholica discussion forum.

Dr Tacey outlines in the presentation, through scholastic and personal reflection, that religion is dying through the rise of atheism and doctrines being peddled as history and fact incorrectly to the masses.

'A new tradition of 'celebrity atheists' are dealing with the mysteries of the Bible with contempt, dismissing them as lies,' he says.

'Most atheists see themselves as clever, but rarely stop to consider if they are misrepresenting what they are rejecting. Those who believe in the Bible and those who

attack it are caught up in the same illusion that it is a work of historical documentation.

'Believers see it as history, an accurate depiction of things that happened, while unbelievers see it as falsification, a cooked up version of things. Both are suffering from the same malaise, the curse of literalism.'

According to Dr Tacey religion is facing oblivion in its current forms, and despite the rear-guard measures of some religious leaders most traditional forms of Christianity are destined to collapse in the near future.

'The central problem facing religion today, in my view, is how to restore significance to metaphor, and dignity and value to myth. Then and only then can religion recover its status as sacred poetry, rather than parade as a false history,' he says.

'There is every possibility that as the literalised mythology of religion goes down, people will feel betrayed, angry and deceived. They will experience a disillusioned enlightenment without passion.

'We see this despondency in children who discover that Santa Claus does not exist. There is an emotional loss and mourning, as well as embarrassment for having believed it in the first place.

'Many Christians are dealing with this despondency at the moment, and they are getting no help from the institutions which call on them to return to literal belief.'

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