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The Answer to Bad Religion Is Not No Religion: A Guide to Good Religion for Seekers, Skeptics, and Believers

Martin Thielen
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Martin Thielen credits religion with having contributed to the betterment of the world by establishing educational institutions like Oxford, Harvard, Cambridge, and Yale; building and servicing hospitals; creating the first charitable organizations, including the Red Cross, World Relief, The Salvation Army, and others; working to end child labor and slavery; and fueling the American Civil Rights movement. Religious organizations are also central to feeding the hungry and caring for the homeless and abandoned. Why then, are so many Americans turning away from organized religion?

Research has revealed that it's because, by the early 1990s, most Americans had come to identify Christianity with Religious Right fundamentalism. Thielen, senior pastor of the Cookeville United Methodist Church in Cookeville, Tennessee, and the author of the bestselling *What's the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian*, says that "a growing number of Americans are starving for an alternative to closed-minded, judgmental, partisan, antiwomen, antiscience religion. Instead, they are searching for a positive, grace-filled, open-minded, gender-equal faith option"—an option that he believes is available in America's moderate mainline denominations.

While admitting that bad religion abounds in today's world, Thielen contends that abandoning religion is not the answer; his moving stories of real people who have been hurt or turned off by bad religion and have found comfort and healing in good religion offer hope that it isn't necessary to leave Christianity behind—only to find a faith home that prioritizes love and the characteristics that make Jesus so appealing: humility, grace, mercy, compassion, and justice.

KRISTINE MORRIS (Spring 2014)

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