

Morality begins with a perception of, and a regard for, the rights and the needs of others. We see it first in the family, in mutual sympathy and love, in mutual aid, unselfish fidelity and self-sacrifice, in solicitude for and devotion to the needs of the weaker members of the family. In short, the family is the fountain of equal freedom, sympathy, and love—of all that is noble and progressive in man. This is the beginning of Natural Religion.

Many books have been written, and many thousands of sermons and lectures have been delivered, in ancient and in modern times, to explain the signification and numerous applications of the word religion. But most of these books and speeches were intended to uphold narrow and sectarian views—arguing, and generally insisting, that this or that form of belief and conduct is the only true religion. (This matter will be dealt with more fully, when we come to review the different religions of the world.) In the meantime, it will be sufficient to give here the two-thousand-year-old explanation of the word religion, given by Cicero, the eminent Roman scholar, orator, and statesman, who lived before the time assigned to Jesus of the New Testament.

As quoted by Prof. Max Muller, in his Gifford Lectures, vol. I., pp. 33-40, Cicero explains that the word religion comes from the Latin verb *relegere*, the opposite of *neglegere*, and as *neglegere* means to gather not, not to heed, not to care, to neglect, etc., *relegere* means to care, to regard, to live circumspectly, within our rights, without interfering with the like rights of others. What the ancient Roman meant by religion was practical moral living,—not believing, or saying we believe metaphysical dogmas and traditional fables. Cicero made a broad distinction between these, calling the one "religion," the other "superstition."

This is in harmony with all the great teachers and reformers of the world; for among all the races of men, in all countries, in all ages, the true moralists have all taught the golden rule,—“Do to others as you would have others do to you.” This is the fundamental moral law. “This is the whole of religion.” And this is not a miraculously revealed religion, nor a miraculously given law. It is quite a natural moral law, and it has been in use ever since men lived together in families and communities. If two agree to live together, there must be some sort of morality between them.

Religion does not consist in believing any particular creed. Religion is a practical way of thinking and acting subservient to morality. And let no clever talker, whatever learning, or pretensions, or unction he may have, persuade you it is anything else. Morality is the end; religion is the way to, the handmaid of, morality. Do to others as you would have others do to you, and you will be moral and religious. We should use the word religion in its original and proper sense, and rescue this good old word from its perverted ecclesiastical use.