



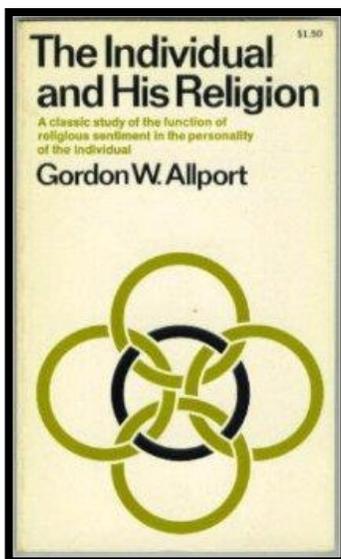
One of the saddest moments in my pastoral ministry occurred in a Burger King in another city. I've long been a fan of the *Whopper* sandwich, and as I was ordering one I noticed a couple of fellows wearing the uniform of a company where one of our members worked. I went over and asked them if they knew our member, which they did. I commented that I was his pastor, and one of them responded, "*I'm surprised that he has one.*"

I still think about that a lot. It reminds me that, while it is relationships with Christians that bring most people to Jesus, it's also relationships with Christians that keep most people away. As Gandhi famously said, "**I like your Christ; I don't like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.**"

One of my favorite courses to teach at the seminary was "The Psychology of Religious Experience," and one of the very

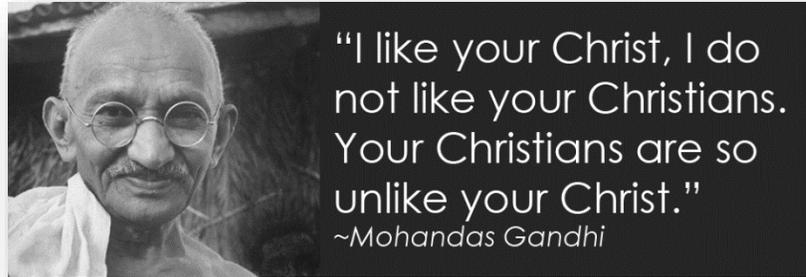
first books I ever read about the psychology of religion—way back in 1969—was Gordon Allport's *The Individual and His Religion*.¹ Gordon Allport was a psychologist who studied how people go about their "faithing," and he was the first to notice that there are two very different ways in which humans relate to their religious faith—whether they're Christians or not.

Allport noticed that some people wear their religion rather like a coat that they put on and take off as the occasion warrants, while other people's religious life is more like a persistent inner fire. Allport said that the "**Coat Folks**" practiced what he called "extrinsic faith," while the "**Fire Folks**" practiced "intrinsic faith." Whole books have been written on the differences between these, but let me try to summarize the differences in a couple of sentences.



According to Allport, Extrinsic Faith is committed to "the letter of the law." Persons who take this approach tend to view life mostly as "black or white." They tend to be selfish, defensive, and judgmental. Folks who wear their religion like a coat wear it only when they think that doing so will help them accomplish other, non-religious goals, which are actually much more important to them. "Coat Folks" tend to think in terms of "us" and "them," are suspicious of religious enthusiasm, and tend to be secretly afraid of God.

"Fire Folks," on the other hand, are committed to "the spirit and the intent of the law" more than to "the letter of the law." They view most situations as complex and nuanced, rather than "black or white." They tend to be flexible, creative, and thoughtful. Folks whose religion is an inner fire find that this fire is the



¹ Gordon Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

organizing principle of their lives, rather than something peripheral or “tacked on.” They follow the precepts of their faith whether or not it’s convenient to do so. “Fire Folks” view God as loving and forgiving, and are passionate about their intense and personal relationship with God.

Here are some more comparisons. Which sounds more familiar?

EXTRINSIC FAITH	INTRINSIC FAITH
Beliefs and convictions are superficial and selectively held, put into play when they appear to serve personal goals	Beliefs and convictions are of primary importance, consistently acted on without regard to personal consequences
Profession & practice are often inconsistent	Moral consistency between profession & practice
God is perceived as stern, punitive, vindictive	God is perceived as loving, forgiving, blessing
Closed, intolerant, defensive, protective	Open, flexible, creative, thoughtful, altruistic
Passionate or intense religious experience is suspect	Passionate or intense religious experience is desired
Committed to “the letter of the law”; everything is “black or white”	Perspectives are complex and nuanced, committed to the “spirit & intent of the law”
Unable to seriously reexamine cherished beliefs and practices	Able to reexamine cherished beliefs and practices
Exclusionist, ethnocentric, provincial; sees people in terms of social categories	Inclusive, stresses love of neighbor; sees people as uniquely created in God’s image
Suspicious and rejecting of persons perceived as different	Able to be open to the stranger, to persons perceived as different from ourselves
Tends to blame others rather than to accept responsibility	Able to take responsibility for personal choices
Unable to be vulnerable or to love deeply	Able to love deeply and to be so loved
Unable to create and sustain positive, intimate, and durable relationships	Able to create and sustain positive, intimate, and durable relationships
Fearful, especially of Death	Curious, hopeful, no longer afraid of Death

My Burger King friend was obviously among the “Coat Folk.” Where do you think you are at the moment? Where would you like to be? How do you think you could get there from here? (HINT: WORSHIP; CONNECT; GROW; SERVE; GO!)

Dave



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Summer Preaching Schedule . . .

June 14	<i>The Big Ten, #1: An Anchor that won't Drag</i>
June 21	<i>Dead Men Walking (Fathers' Day)</i>
June 28	<i>The Big Ten, #2: We Bow Down</i>
July 5	<i>The Big Ten, #3: What's in a Name?</i>
July 12	<i>The Big Ten, #4: Blue Laws or Blue Skies?</i>
July 19	<i>The Big Ten, #5: Generation to Generation</i>
July 26	<i>The Big Ten, #6: The Right to Life</i>
August 2	<i>The Big Ten, #7: A Clean Heart</i>
August 9	<i>The Big Ten, #8: Sticky Fingers</i>
August 16	<i>The Big Ten, #9: Nothing but the Truth</i>
August 23	<i>The Big Ten, #10: Lizard Lessons</i>
August 30	Youth Sunday

