The 60 Second Adventures in Religion

Religion as ritual

David Mitchell:

Sixty second adventures in religion. Number two, religion as ritual.

Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte was a French philosopher and one of the founders of sociology - who preferred to be known as 'Auguste.'

He believed that society went through three stages - first that primitive people thought things they didn't understand were down to some sort of supernatural power.

Next they developed these basic ideas into the concept of an abstract god.

And finally they would cast aside religion and take up science - only believing in things that can be observed and proved.

But he worried that the ritual of religion had become such an important part of society that removing it might cause chaos.

So to fill the gap he tried to establish a Religion of Humanity, that would focus on charity, order and science - and maybe he'd throw in a jumble sale or two.

Other thinkers have followed along similar lines - including John Stuart Mill, Alain de Botton and those hilarious people who put 'Jedi' on the census form.

Unfortunately for them, a secular religion never really took off. But society has managed to fill the ritual-shaped gap in lots of different ways.