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Religion becomes status symbol for the loud in `faith`

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I REFER to Farish A Noor's interesting views on the antics of the followers of various faiths in his Cross Currents series: "True faith requires no special effects" (NST, Dec 10).

I, too, feel quite amused by the antics of some very "religious" people who are wont to flaunt their religious piety - by way of dress and habitually announcing to their office colleagues "I am going to perform my prayer", even though the time is still "office hour".

There appears to be much ado about the observation of religious obligation.

To me, this tendency to impress on others how pious one is, by way of dress; to down grade others who are not conspicuously visible at prayer time; and to snub female colleagues for not wearing the tudung, are just the theatrics of some of the followers of the faith.

From personal observation, it would appear that these "religious" people, would want to convey (or impress to others) that the more "hardship" or sacrifice that they had to make for the faith, the more "pious" they'll be regarded. It's a status symbol.

An office colleague once showed a keen interest in the fact that I annually participate in the Penang International Bridge Run and marvelled at the exhilarating experience I derived from the annual participation.

But when he heard that the event is invariably being held on Sundays he lamented that he'll never be able to participate, much as he would like to: he has to attend Sunday church service! Ah, well!

A relative of mine mentioned that his brother-in-law invited him and wife to attend his (brother-in-law's) wedding anniversary dinner.

He had to decline this invitation, says he to me, even though it was held in a posh place and a promise of a sumptuous spread for a very historic occasion, as the journey and the time for him and wife to reach that venue "would mean that I will lose my maghrib and isyak prayer" - and hence his rejection. Ah well, was my comment.

I find it interesting and intriguing that intellectuals like Nehru and Bertrand Russell preferred to be agnostics rather than be stifled by "religious hypocrisy".

In this context, I am reminded of the observation of Jonathan Swift, English satirist (1667-1745) who remarked, "We have enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." How true that statement is today.

Yes, religious fervour can be very negative - if it goes off at a tangent to the true spirit of the faith. This, I am sure, is what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad laments.

I agree. The exemplification of true faith consists in acts of kindness and love for one's fellow men, not mere formal prayers uttered by rote, or by being judgmental about others.