

# 2- religion does not cause wars

Religion



Religion Causes War. " So often is this sentiment heard in the best sellers from Richard Dawkins to Sam Harris that it has almost become a proverb. It is said so often that people believe it without question. But, in fact, religion does not cause war. If you are an atheist, I ask for your intellectual honesty in evaluating this question. You have every right to believe what you will, but we should all be honest and not sling mud where it is not warranted. Laying war at the feet of religion is just not honest, warranted, fair or accurate. War is people (usually men) fighting, usually for a bit of territory or desired resource.

One party wants something another party has. The leader of the first party will use whatever he can to galvanize his entire party, usually connecting to any group identity he can think of, which includes but is not limited to ideology, nationality, ethnicity, class and yes, religion. War is two groups (of any definition, but of which the group designation is incidental) fighting over something one has and the other wants. Blaming only religion is as incorrect as blaming only ethnic groups, ideologues, persons identifying with a certain country or class struggle.

The two most destructive wars in history, World Wars I and II both had nothing to do with religion. WWI was the unfortunate culmination of dangerous levels of Nationalism. In WWII Hitler used nationality and ethnicity to galvanize his group to take what he wanted that others had: the whole of Europe. The millions who died under Communism were under a specifically atheistic ideology that explicitly proscribed religion and decried it as a delusion. All wars in American history from the Revolutionary War, the Civil

War, the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, and the World Wars all had absolutely nothing at all to do with religion.

Ah, but the major one cited by atheists is the Crusades. Once again though, one group (this time, yes the Christians) galvanized under that group because they wanted something someone else, the Muslims, had. It is important to keep mind two things though 1) that the Christians had been in possession of the land until the Muslims seized in the 700s AD and thought they were just taking it back and 2) that it was not just Christians versus Muslims. Neither Christian nor Muslim leadership was united. It was different bands of Christians versus different Muslim cities and leaders.

Several times during the fighting actually, Muslims would ally with Christians against their own Muslim enemies and vice versa. It was not straight Christianity vs. Islam. But regardless, the point is that it was one group wanting something another group had. Yes religion was the galvanizing factor in this case, but it could have easily been something else, like Europeans versus Arabs, and in the actually fighting those identities broke down as people allied with whomever would be most helpful in achieving their ends. Clearly, religion was not the only thing motivating those who fought.

Eliminating religion would do nothing to eliminate war. There are so many other group identities which may be/are equally, if not more so, abused that the elimination of one, if even possible, would have no effect on the amount of fighting in this world whatsoever. This whole thing is not to say that group identities are bad, just that they, like anything existing, may be abused. I would not advocate an attempt to dissolve all group ties simply because they

are not inherently bad in the least and I do not believe it possible to destroy them at all.

They are true, not made up or purely subjective. They are natural, are usually very good and are part of the human condition. We desire to associate, as Aristotle and so many others have acknowledged, we are social creatures. " Man is a political animal. " Forming groups and identities is just what we do. And those communities become true expressions of self, a group self that has just as much potential for affirming true ideas as philosophy or science.

Some may say that Europe, particularly France have effectively done away with public religious sentiment, but does not France identify as secular just as strongly as another country identifies as religious? Secularism too is an identity that has just as much potential to encourage war as religion or any other identity. Communism is an all too perfect example of that. In conclusion, there is a distorted story of history floating around in which religion causes everything. This is actually far from the truth.

So in closing, here is just a brief list of examples of wars not caused by religion.

1. World War I
2. World War II
3. The Cold War
4. The American Civil War
5. The American Revolution

6. The Hundred Years War in Europe between England and France from 1337 to 1453. It was over a claim to the French throne
7. The Napoleonic Wars
8. The Rwandan Genocide (ethnic)
9. The Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta in Ancient Greece (over territory and power)
10. Every Roman battle ever, such as the Punic Wars against Carthage