

TCC Sunday 9th November 2014 – #2 Isn't religion bad just causing wars & conflicts? – 7 of the best series

Title: “#1 – Isn't religion bad just causing wars & conflicts?”

Purpose: To refute the superficial notion that religion just leads inevitably to wars and conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red by Tom Piper (Tower of London)

In just two days' time, the last of 888,246 CERAMIC POPPIES will be planted at the Tower of London.

It is part of an incredibly unique art installation in honour of the Centenary of the start of World War I back in 1914.

(It is estimated that since its installation in August around 4 million people will have gone to see it).

Art Critic – Poppy's too pretty

What was interesting was that “The Guardian” art critic Jonathan Jones, recently spoke out against the art installation saying that:

“The poppies were too pretty to be a reminder of the horrors of war.”

And just maybe he has a fair point:

*****SHOW VIDEO CLIP –The Horrors of War*****

War is a terrible thing

I think, if there is anything that we must be **careful not to lose sight of**, in any discussion of war –

it is the horrendous fact of: **“THE REAL HORROR OF WAR”**.

Fitting Day for our 2nd question

Now, If you weren't here **last Sunday morning**, we sought to tackle the question: **“Q. Has science disproved God?”** – and let me say that if you were not here and would have liked to have seen the presentation that was made including the various video clips that were shown – then:

***** **there are some DVD's that you can take away** *****

However today, being **REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY** – is a particularly **fitting occasion** for the 2nd of our 7 questions that we are tackling in this our **AUTUMN SERIES** called **“7 of the best”** the question:

“Q. Isn't religion bad just causing wars & conflicts?”

Root of all evil

People used to say, and you've probably heard the phrase: **"The love of money is the root of all evil."**

But today, I think the phrase is taking on a distinctly different form.

The love of money being taken off its pole position as the root of all evil and replaced by RELIGION:

"RELIGION, nowadays, is being seen as THE root of all evil."

Distinctions & Definitions

Let me mention – first **DISTINCTIONS** & then **DEFINITIONS**:

- **FIRST then Distinctions** – we need to understand that there is a world of difference between **REJECTING** something and **REFUTING** something.

CS Lewis came up with a character he called **"Ezekiel Bulver"** to describe this particular pitfall.

Let me read a section – Lewis writing of Bulver says:

"...his destiny was determined at the age of five when he heard his mother say to his father, **who had been maintaining that two sides of a triangle were greater than that of the third** (which was, by the way, one of Euclid's mathematical theorem from the 4th century BC), **'Oh, you say that because you are a man.'**"

At that moment, Ezekiel Bulver assures us, 'There flashed across my opening mind that **refutation is no necessary part of an argument.**

Assume that your opponent is wrong, and **then explain his error**, and **the world will be at your feet."**

Lewis gives the example of someone who claims to have money in a bank account and the response is to simply reject it and explain it away as wishful thinking.

Rather you should demonstrate that he is wrong (by seeing if he has such an account and discovering how much is in it) rather than assuming he is wrong and simply explaining how he became so silly!

So another way we could put this **DISTINCTION** is to say that it is one thing to simply **STATE** something to be the case– it is another thing altogether to **SHOW** something to be the case.

- Ok, that was **DISTINCTIONS**, **what about DEFINITIONS** – this is also something quite key and so let me say in this **SOUNDBITE** – "Religion is the root of all evil" (which we can ever so easily **STATE** but much less easily **SHOW**)

As **Alister McGrath** (former Atheist and now Christian academic and apologist) writes:

"Individual religions exist; 'religion' doesn't."

What he is helpfully pointing out is that RELIGION, as some sort of BLANKET, UNIVERSAL CATEGORY is not helpful and just not reality.

Religions are so incredibly varied that to try and **CONFLATE them** OR **DISTIL them down** to one single intelligible “**universal category**” makes no sense.

So the point here is that we need to talk about particulars and not play a game of lumping everybody together that mentions god OR gods, spirit OR spirits.

What is being said nowadays

Ok, we just a couple of preliminaries out of the way – let me go on to look at some of the things that you may hear getting expressed:

This is **Gore Vidal** (An American writer, died 2 years ago) “More people have been killed in the name of Jesus Christ than any other name in history.”

Oscar Wilde (a 19th century Irish writer renowned for his very cutting wit) wrote “When I think of all the evil done in the name of the Bible I despair of writing anything to equal it”.

Coming more up to date:

Christopher Hitchens “Religion poisons everything- it’s even a threat to human survival.”

Richard Dawkins – he picks up the words of that song from **John Lennon** called “Imagine”:

Let me read the first two verses of the original:

“Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...”

Richard Dawkins after he has given it a fresh set of clothes – renders it like this:

“Imagine with John Lennon a world with no religion
Imagine no suicide bombers no 9/11 no 7/7
No crusades, no witch hunts, no gunpowder plots, no Indian Partition,
No Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat massacres, no persecution of Jews as Christ killers,
No slick-buffon-hair televangelists fleecing people of their money because God wants to give,
Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings etc etc....”

In his book **“The God DELUSION”**

(And by the way if you’re not too sure what ‘**A Delusion**’ is – then here’s the definition:

“It is **some belief or impression maintained despite being contradicted by reality or rational argument**, thus typically recognised as a **symptom of mental disorder**”).)

He says: “Fundamentalist religion is hell-bent on ruining the scientific education of countless thousands of innocent, well-meaning, eager young minds...”

He goes on: “Religion leads to ‘Absolutism’ in thought and ‘All the ingredients are there:

- slavish adherence to a misunderstood old text;
- hatred of women, modernity, rival religions, science and pleasure;
- love of punishment;
- bullying, narrow-minded, bossy interference in every aspect of life”.

The Four Horsemen

I want for a moment to introduce you to the **Four Horsemen** – originally this is a biblical idea taken from Revelation (the last book of the bible) where we read of “**the four horsemen of the apocalypse**” – 4 different coloured horses with angelic riders who exercise great power.

Now, some many years ago, this expression was picked up by Christians and applied to 4 very prominent evangelical thinkers some of whom you may be familiar with: **John Stott, Jim Packer, Francis Schaeffer and Billy Graham**.

Well **a bit more recently** the atheists (those who believe there is no God) started to “**up their game**” and a new breed started very slowly to emerge under the title of “**The New Atheists**” – and they also had their own four horsemen who were the most prominent and the most vocal, they were: **Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and, of course, Richard Dawkins**.

Now for some time this grouping and their publications did not really seem to be getting very much traction with all their atheistic theories and somewhat blunt and acidic writings – **well that was - until they chanced upon a ready platform:**

*****SHOW VIDEO CLIP –The Shock of 9/11** ***

A day - sadly etched into all of our minds - back there in September of 2001.

Alister McGrath (former atheist turned Christian apologist) – writes in his book “Why God won’t go away – engaging with the new atheists”:

“In September 2001 a series of co-ordinated suicide attacks was launched against targets in the USA – events now invariably referred to simply as ‘9/11’. Of the four planes hijacked by Islamic terrorists, three were flown into major landmark buildings in New York and Washington, causing considerable loss of life. **The impact of these attacks was massive, reflecting a widespread perception that the world had just changed irreversibly.**

The ‘war against terror’ became a dominant theme of the presidency of George W. Bush, and the USA and its allies became enmeshed in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Public anxiety about the deadly consequences of **religious fanaticism** reached new levels.

In the view of many, **this last point is of critical importance for understanding the sudden emergence** in the first decade of the twenty-first century of the movement now known as **the New Atheism**.

Some atheist writers such as Richard Dawkins had been arguing that religion was irrational and dangerous for years, without making much headway.

Suddenly these atheist arguments seemed both attractive and culturally plausible.

Someone or something had to be blamed for 9/11, and Islamic religious fanaticism was an obvious possibility.

In the white heat of anger against this outrage, ‘Islamic religious fanaticism’ became simplified – first to ‘religious fanaticism’ and then simply to ‘religion’.

Dawkins would play a central role in this change in cultural mood in Western liberal circles, for 9/11 confirmed everything he’d always believed: **“religion was dangerous precisely because it was irrational, and when it failed to win arguments it resorted to terror instead”.**

Just 4 days after the attack

Just 4 days after the attack, Richard Dawkins took up the offensive by writing an article in **the Guardian** entitled “Religion’s misguided missiles” where he had this to say:

“To fill a world with religion, or religions of the Abrahamic kind, is like littering the streets with loaded guns.

Do not be surprised if they are used.”

Surefire evidence – religion intrinsically evil

And it is not hard to begin to see: these sort of occurrences, ones that literally shook the world – **as surefire evidences of the “intrinsic evil of religion”.**

It is easy to imbibe the idea that lurking beneath the surface of every believer lies a potential terrorist – if only we

can get rid of religion, or at least seriously privatize it, then this world must surely be a safer place.

So what can be said?

Well in coming to our question: **Q. Isn't religion bad just causing wars & conflicts?**

OR rephrasing it as a more blunt statement **"Religion IS the root of all evil!"**

Q. What can be said in answer? Seeing as I've given you all the bad and negative stuff.

Religion alone does not lead to violence

And the first thing to say, which is really obvious when you think about it, is that:

Religion alone does *not* lead to violence because you can and should turn it right around and say that:

Atheism also causes tremendous violence.

Q. Is that true you say?

Well consider the 20th century, which saw the atheistic communist and Nazi ideologies rise.

In fact, that century alone saw more killing than the previous 19 centuries put together.

Stalin, Mao and Hitler

Let me just flesh that out a bit – without making it too much of a history lesson:

- take **ADOLF HITLER** – **Alan Bullock**, the British Historian said of him **"Hitler did not believe in God, was anticlerical, and held Christian ethics in contempt because they contravened his preferred view of 'survival of the fittest'"**.

As you know one of Hitler's goals was that of creating the a pure Aryan race and exterminating elements that did not fit that agenda.

Hitler's policies resulted in the killing of nearly **two million Poles, over three million Soviet prisoners of war, communists and other political opponents, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, and trade unionists.**

This was **besides the 6 millions Jews** that he exterminated in the concentration camps.

- think of **JOSEPH STALIN** – his was an atheistic Communist ideology.

As a part of the aggressive policies that he put in place there was a terrible famine that took place between 1932 and 1934 – this has been referred to as a holodomor (as opposed to a holocaust) which simply means "hunger extermination".

The death toll, in what is sometimes known as the Ukrainian Genocide was between 6-8 million people. Deaths through other facets of his long regime, including things like the Gulag or death camps – have been estimated to be in the region of 20 million.

- take **CHAIRMAN MAO of Communist China** – at one point he put into operation what was called **the Great Leap Forward** – this led to what was called **the Three Years Famine** between **1958-1961** where it is estimated that between 20 – 46 million deaths.

We could so easily go on – anyone remember **Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge and the Killing Fields** etc.

But what of Christian wars?

Q. But what of “Christian wars”?

e.g **The Crusades** or **The various Catholic Inquisitions** in the middle ages.

Well obviously we cannot and would not seek to airbrush these out of history.

- One thing to say is that when it comes to numbers caught up in the inquisitions, those brought before the courts were only in their tens of thousands and those executed were usually only in the order of hundreds or perhaps a few thousands at maximum.

So it is worth recognising that the scale was very much smaller than in the 20th Century.

- Secondly a question we really ought to ask is:

Q. When people that carry the name of Christian, carry out violence – why is that?

Q. Is it a CONSISTENT or NATURAL outworking OR is it a NON-CONSISTENT and UNNATURAL outworking?

Tribute band – helpful illustration (Michael Ots)

I heard a helpful illustration which made use of the idea of a TRIBUTE BAND to explain things:

(If you’re not clear what one of those is, it is a musical group that tries to reproduce a famous band of the past.)

So, FIRST - Imagine a group of enthusiastic students with time on their hands and one night when they are bored they decide to form a TRIBUTE BAND for say QUEEN (the 1970’s heavy rock group) and **imagine** that they put out a big poster advertising for people to come to hear them emulate this amazing pop group of the past.

Well, as it so happens, a group of Korean students, have newly arrived on the student campus, and they come across the notice and they are keen to find out more about our culture – so sure enough they turn up to listen.

In fact they are the only ones there because every else knows this group of students barely know how to string a song together.

Well they listen for a while but then, between songs, all hastily beat an undignified retreat.

Clearly this group are **BAD REPRESENTATIVES** for the 70's Pop Group **QUEEN**.

Jesus himself clearly indicated "that he had not come to set up a political kingdom – for if he had his followers would come out fighting. When his disciples did reach for their swords – what did Jesus do, he told them to put them away and he healed the man whose ear had been sliced off".

Jesus did not come in order to kill his enemies but to die for them.

NOW, secondly – Imagine, not a rookie **TRIBUTE BAND**, but a **somewhat more accomplished TRIBUTE BAND**, you know the sort of band that places like **the Newbury Corn Exchange** would have on their books.

They don't do too bad a job all in all – and yes people will pay good money just to get **that sense of nostalgia** rise up in them.

We would call these people **GOOD REPRESENTATIVES**.

Now **just as** there have in history been **BAD REPRESENTATIVES**, like those who took part in **the Crusades** and **the Inquisitions**, or in **witch hunts**, supposedly as representatives of Christ Jesus, **so too** there have been **GOOD REPRESENTATIVES** of Jesus across the centuries.

Let me mention three of very obvious ones:

- **William Wilberforce** – working over many years to **eradicate the practice of slavery** in the 1800's
- **George Muller** – working tirelessly to **take orphans off the streets of Bristol** and to build houses for them
- & take **Martin Luther King Jr.** – who worked in the 20th Century to get rid of **racial inequality & prejudice**

All these and thousands of others are **GOOD REPRESENTATIVES** for CHRIST.

And you can build up a very substantial list of **THE OVERALL LEGACY** that these sort of people have produced. It is a true legacy of Christ and of the Christian Worldview:

- the introduction of **free schooling**
- provision of **free healthcare**
- the **increase of modern science**
- the **abolition of child labour** etc. etc.

FINALLY – Imagine that you were still **not entirely convinced** by the **TRIBUTE BAND** you had heard – there would still be one more way to judge for yourself whether **QUEEN**, that 70's pop band, were really as good as they have been cracked up to be.

You simply head across to your **record shop** OR to **Spotify** and play the original tracks.

Go to the source and then ask yourself the question:

Q. Would someone who followed the teachings and the lifestyle of this man be a **MENACE** or a **VIRUS** on society?

Let me read you Jesus' own teaching from Luke's gospel and Chapter 6 Verses 27-31:

"But I tell you who hear me:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

(What we now call: "**The Golden Rule**" (and as it happens we'll be talking about this tonight (when we reach Matthew 7v12)

So – Q. If religion (and here I'm talking specifically about the Christian religion and a Biblical worldview) does not cause war & conflict in the world – What does?

George W Bush

Now you might remember George W Bush, the president of the United States of America before Barack Obama – and his "Axis of evil".

He basically introduced the notion that evil was out there and if we could get rid of certain peoples in certain places then this world would be a safer place once again.

And, though that might sound plausible under a certain set of circumstances – e.g. 9/11 or the 7/7 attacks in London – it is not really accurate enough just to say: "Well the problem is out there" – to have a sort of EXTERNAL EXPLANATION.

Solzhenitsyn

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn the Russian novelist and historian (one who had had first-hand experience of the horrors of the Gulags) wrote, very perceptively:

"The dividing line of good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

Burger King

If you were to visit the Malta Airport website and looked at the fast food outlets there you would see that they have a Burger King – no great surprise – what was very fascinating is the words they use to sell themselves as Burger King:

"Established back in 1954, at Burger King® you have the right to have what you want. Because on the menu of life, you are: "Today's Special". And tomorrow's. And the day after that. And ... well, you get the drift.

Yes, that's right. **We may be the King but you my friend are the almighty ruler."**

Individually we don't have the clout to start a war –BUT, our very in-built love of ourselves, our innate selfishness – leads to conflict and to violence.

Going back to the source and to the book of James – this very question we are discussing today comes up:

James 4 Verse 1-3 “What causes fights and quarrels among you?

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.

You do not have, because you do not ask God.

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

CONCLUSION

Q. So what is the conclusion of the matter?

Well it is certainly *not* that all the warring is out there – something EXTERNAL.

Instead what we see is the opposite – the problem is INTERNAL and it will always find its way out, giving rise to quarrels and conflicts and wars.

Q. So, is there any hope? Q. Is there any fix?

Q. Should we be **optimistic**, **pessimistic** OR just be something of a realist saying “war is never really going to go away” so we'd better just make the best of it, and where we can learn from history?

Well the message of both the OT and the NT is consistent and lets us know that one day war will cease:

Isaiah 2 Verse 4-5 “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Yes that a day is coming when there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth, as the last but one chapter of the bible says:

Revelation 21 verse 4 “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Jesus alone has paid the price for all the sin of all the broken hearts of this world and he has taken the hit for all the evil of the world and has provided forgiveness for all that will seek it with repentance and faith.

There is no greater solution to war and conflict than that – the only question is whether we will let Him transform us and be our eternal forgiveness and our eternal salvation.