



Religion Cause Wars?

By: Aftab Ahmad Khan

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# Religion Cause Wars?

## Introduction:

After 911, a common myth persistently propagated mostly by secular humanists and atheists: "The religion is to be totally blamed as the main cause of violence and wars throughout the history of mankind". The Christian fundamentalists, Neocons and Islamophobia go a step further to blame Islam for militancy and terrorism for fuelling wars. It is historical fact that Crusades and the Thirty Years' War were basically fought on religious ideology, but it is oversimplification to assert that religion has been the primary cause of such wars. In most recent history USA in eighties exploited Muslim concept of Jihad, by creating, training, equipping and financing the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan brought from all over the Muslim world to fight against USSR for its defeat and disintegration. For USA it was not religious war but the war of power struggle between Capitalism versus Communist ideology for which religious sentiments of Muslims were exploited to get cheap, highly motivated cannon

fodder. Later the Mujahedeen gave birth to Taliban and Al-Qaida, rest is history.



As a sequel, the terrorists used Islam as the cover, pretending to be motivating spirit behind 9/11, while the main cause was reaction to the US hegemony, unjust oppression of Muslims and occupation of their lands, control of resources [Oil] in the Middle East and elsewhere. The aftermath of 911; US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan clearly proved these concerns to be genuine. Most of the conflicts like Northern Ireland, Bosnia, East Timor, Sudan, Sri Lanka had territorial and political reasons at times mixed up with religious fervour. The statement by Sam Harris, contemporary critic of religion and proponent of

scientific skepticism and the "New Atheism" in his book "The End of Faith" that: "faith and religion are "the most prolific source of violence in our history" is not supported by ground realities as the statistics to follow indicate.

## **What is War?**

War is an organized and often prolonged conflict that is carried out by states or non-state actors. According to Wikipedia; War is generally characterised by extreme violence, social disruption and economic destruction. War should be understood as an actual, intentional and widespread armed conflict between political communities, and therefore is defined as a form of political violence or intervention. The set of techniques used by a group to carry out war is known as warfare. An absence of war is usually called peace.

While some scholars see warfare as an inescapable and integral aspect of human nature, others argue that it is only inevitable under certain socio-cultural or ecological circumstances. For some the practice of war is not linked to any single type of political organization or society. Rather, as discussed by

John Keegan in “A History of Warfare”, war is a universal phenomenon whose form and scope is defined by the society that wages it. Another argument suggests that since there are human societies in which warfare does not exist, humans may not be naturally disposed for warfare, which emerges under particular circumstances. Wars are mostly caused by lust for power, wealth, control of resources, exploitation, colonisation, to establish racial or religious, ideological superiority.

### **Causes of Wars:**

There is no scholarly agreement on which are the most common motivations for war. Motivations may be different for those ordering the war than for those undertaking the war. Since many people are involved, a war may acquire a life of its own from the confluence of many different motivations. An interpretation of the ancient Jewish commentary (Be Reshit Rabbah) on the fight between Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 (Parashot BeReshit XXII:7) states that there are three universal reasons for wars: 1) Economics, 2) Power, and 3) Religion.

In *Why Nations Go to War*, by John G. Stoessinger, the author points out that both sides will claim that morality justifies their fight. He also states that the rationale for beginning a war depends on an overly optimistic assessment of the outcome of hostilities (casualties and costs), and on misperceptions of the enemy's intentions.

Based on the extensive study of inter-state wars since 1648, Richard Ned Lebow outlines his analysis of the motivations which underpin warfare. He finds that contrary to the expectations of most international relations theories, wars fought primarily for reasons of security, or material interests, have been relatively rare. Rather, motivations related to a nation's 'spirit', such as the standing of a country or revenge, have been the principal causes of most wars.

## **What is a 'just cause'?**

The belligerents try to justify the war being "Just". A war is only just if it is fought for a reason that is justified, and that carries sufficient moral weight. The country that wishes



to use military force must demonstrate that there is a just cause to do so. The main just cause is to put right a wrong. Sometimes a war fought to prevent a wrong from happening may be considered a just war. In modern times wars to defend the innocent are increasingly regarded as just (which fits with the idea in some religious literature that it is better to defend an innocent than to defend oneself).

“To those against whom war is made permission is given (to fight) because they are wronged and verily Allah is Most powerful for their aid. (They are) those **who have been expelled from their homes** in defiance of right (for no cause) except that they say "Our Lord is Allah." Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another there would surely have been pulled down monasteries churches synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause); for verily Allah is Full of Strength Exalted in Might.(Qur'an;22:39-40).”

Some of the possible “Just causes” are:

**Self-defence:**

**Invasion:** The clearest example of a just cause is self-defence against an aggressor. For example when an enemy has crossed your borders and invaded your territory. But an actual invasion is not required. The self-defence cases below are less obviously just causes for war - whether they are or not depends on how severe a particular case is:

- Attack on national honour: (eg burning the flag, attacking an embassy)
- Attack on state religion
- Economic attack:(trade embargo or sanctions)
- Assassination of a prominent person: - a monarch or president
- Attack on a neighbour or ally
- Preemptive strike: attacking the enemy to prevent an anticipated attack by them. Preemptive strikes may no longer be acceptable by UN members, since the Charter says that short of actual attack, "all Members shall settle their

international disputes by peaceful means" (Article 2:3)

- Assisting an invaded friendly nation.
- Human rights violations: Another common example is putting right a violation of human rights so severe that force is the only sensible response.
- To punish an act of aggression: This is not accepted by everyone. Some people would say that a war of punishment can never be a just war.
- In 1993 the US Catholic Conference defined just cause: Force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic rights of whole populations.

As the strategic and tactical aspects of warfare are always changing, theories and doctrines relating to warfare are often reformulated before, during, and after every major war. Carl von Clausewitz said, 'Every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions.' The one constant factor is war's employment of organized

violence and the resultant destruction of property and/or lives that necessarily follows.

### **Religious War:**

A religious war is a war caused by, or justified by, differences in religion. The European wars of religion of the 16th and 17th centuries are the classical example, often referred to simply as "the wars of religion". Earlier (medieval) wars also frequently cited as "religious wars" include the Muslim conquests (7th to 19th centuries) and the Christian military excursions against the Muslim conquests, including the Crusades (11th to 13th centuries), the Spanish Reconquista (8th to 15th centuries) and the Ottoman wars in Europe (15th to 19th centuries).



Religion is a powerful motivator, and thus is often invoked in wartime, but the real reasons most wars have been fought have nothing to do with it, while some verses are interpreted by extremists to justify violence, following verses from Quran and Bible are clear:

*“There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.(Quran;2:256)*

*“.. whoever kills a human being, unless it is in the course of justice for murder or bloody crimes on the earth, it shall be as if he killed all mankind. And whoever saves one life it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.(Quran,5:32)*

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Instead, the causes of wars have to do with political control—either allowing certain political leaders to gain or remain in power (e.g., who is the rightful heir to the throne) or they have to do with gaining political control of resources (e.g., land, money, food supplies, transportation and trade routes) or they have to do with a particular leader’s ambitions (i.e., being remembered as a great man, or not being remembered as a weak man). When leaders aren’t being totally naked about those things, they dress them up with

national pride or religion, but ultimately they are not at the root.

In more recent times, since the mid 20th century, violent conflicts along religious lines have frequently been conflated with ethnic issues; examples would include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Insurgency in the North Caucasus, the Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Yugoslav Wars, the Second Sudanese Civil War, the Syrian civil war or the Nigerian Sharia conflict, among others. Other ongoing conflicts are predominantly motivated by religious extremism, i.e. involving a faction using Islamic Jihadism, among others those in Afghanistan and North-West Pakistan, Iraq, the Maghreb, Yemen, Somalia, and the Philippines, and the genocides and assimilation of the First Nations in North America.

Medieval and Renaissance wars were also typically about control and wealth as city-states vied for power, often with the support, but rarely instigation, of the Church. And the Mongol Asian rampage, which is thought to have killed nearly 30 million people, had no religious component whatsoever.



Some commentators claim that religion as a reason for war has decreased due to the increasing secularization of Western society. This is also false. As Rabbi Alan Lurie explains:

“The wars of the ancient world were rarely, if ever, based on religion. These wars were for territorial conquest, to control borders, secure trade routes, or respond to an internal challenge to political authority. In fact, the ancient conquerors, whether Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, or Roman, openly welcomed the religious beliefs of those they conquered, and often added the new gods to their own pantheon.”

Arab Muslims conquered the surrounding land occupied by Christendom. Later wars among Umayyad and Abbasids were for power. The Turks, Iranians, Arabs fighting among themselves, wars for power and resources. The invasions of India from central Asia, involved Muslims conquering and re conquering India by Muslims on both sides, how could it be called religious wars? Timor lane killed thousands of Muslims in his lust for power and empire building.

Think of the modern wars. The American Revolution, World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Korea; None of these wars were fought for religious reasons. In fact, the bloodiest and most deadly wars of recent history were demonstrably motivated by something other than religion: out of whack nationalism (WWI), antireligious fascism (WWII), and atheistic Communism (Korea, Vietnam, the atrocities of Stalin and Mao).

### **Jihad - Misused:**

In the present environment of universal turmoil especially in the post 911 scenario, the Muslims have become a target of universal hate propaganda. In 80s USA used the concept of Jihad to defeat USSR in Afghanistan. The Mujahedeen were brought from all over the Muslim world, they were financed, equipped and trained under patronage of USA. They were treated with honor and respect at White House.



After the defeat of USSR they were abandoned, the civil war in Afghanistan provided persons like Osama bin Ladin to work on their own agenda. They declared war against USA and they Muslims who did not support their world view.

Some verses from Qur'an are mostly misquoted to defend killing of non believers and to project a permanent state of armed conflict (Jihad) between Muslims and non believers. The ignorant terrorists thus facilitate the anti Muslim lobbies to propagate and project all Muslims as intolerant, war mongers and terrorists. Even some ignorant Muslims also fall pray to this fallacy. It is important that the misconceptions

are removed by understanding the concept of Jihad in the light of Qur'an and Sunnah. 'Tolerance' has always been hallmark of Islamic heritage. Legitimate armed struggle from foreign occupation is an internationally recognized form of warfare. The resistance to occupation of Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq (now ruled by puppet government), Afghanistan and other Muslims lands falls in to this category.



The doctrine Jihad lays down guidelines and principles, to be adhered by a Muslim while striving against various forms of resistance, internal (against selfish desires and evil

temptations) or external for the cause of Allah. Muslims are required to make persistent effort to serve the cause of Islam. That effort, whatever its future, falls within the meaning of the term “jihad-fi-Sabi-Lillah” (Jihad for the cause of Allah). Jihad is derived from the Arabic word ‘Juhd’, which means “effort”. The verb Jahida means ‘to be tried as a result of exerting an effort or energy; striving, making endeavor’. So Jihad is to contend with difficulties and to work continually, especially with strenuous effort. The term presupposes that such an effort will be made against resistance. Narrated Abu Sa'id al-Khudri: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: The best fighting (Jihad) in the path of Allah is (to speak) a word of justice to an oppressive ruler. (Sunan of Abu Dawood:2040). While term ‘Jihad’ has wider application, the term Qital is used in the meaning of ‘warfare’ or armed struggle. Qital may be part of Jihad but every Jihad is not necessarily warfare.

After thirteen years of worst oppression and persecution by the pagans of Makkah, the early Muslims had to migrate to Medina as they were not permitted by God to fight even in self

defence. Ultimately the armed struggle was initially permitted to defend the frail expanding Muslim community at Medina; strategically it was defensive in nature: “To those against whom war is made permission is given (to fight) because they are wronged and verily Allah is Most powerful for their aid. (They are) those **who have been expelled from their homes** in defiance of right (for no cause) except that they say "Our Lord is Allah." Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another there would surely have been pulled down monasteries churches synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause); for verily Allah is Full of Strength Exalted in Might.(Qur'an;22:39-40).” “Those who believe and adopt exile and fight for the faith in the cause of Allah as well as those who give (them) asylum and aid these are (all) in very truth the believers: for them is the forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous.”(Qur'an;8:75).

Later in order to enable the Muslims to extend the influence of Islam outside Arabia, they were

enjoined to confront the non-Muslim powers to extend the sovereignty of the Islamic State to grant the freedom to the nonbelievers to accept Islam with free will or choose to follow their old faith, provided they paid Jizyah (poll tax) for their protection and exemption from military service:

“O believers! Fight the unbelievers who hem you in, to let them know how tough you are; you should know that Allah is on the side of the God fearing.”(Qur’an;9:123).

## **Misconceptions:**

**Meanings of Jihad: The term “Jihad” has much wider significance than a military campaign and open warfare as commonly perceived. Jihad could be with “the heart” (intentions or feelings), with “the hand” (weapons etc) a simple action, such as standing firm in defense of the cause of Islam or “with tongue” (expression through speech or writing etc). This may require speaking out in public, for extending invitation of Islam to non believers (Dawah, preaching), against ignoring Islamic**

**principles, and writing articles or publishing books to promote Islam. Since Islam is the faith of “Peace”, the early Muslim community was urged to conduct the Bigger Jihad (Jihad Kabira), through Qur’an, i.e. preaching of Allah’s message. Allah says in Qur’an: “therefore, do not yield to the unbelievers, and make Jihad (strive) against them with this Qur’an, a mighty Jihad (strenuous striving).”(Qur’an;25:52). The aim of making Strenuous Efforts (Jihad) is three fold:**

The first and foremost is to; ‘Strive Against Selfish Desires’ (Nafs ammarah), to purify the heart, so that the faith (Eman) of Islam is deeply rooted in the heart, to become fully subservient to the commands of God and His Apostle. Allah says: “The Bedouin Arabs say: "We have believed." Tell them: "You have not believed; rather say 'We have become Muslims;' for faith has not yet found its way into your hearts. If you obey Allah and His Apostle, He will not deny you the reward of your deeds; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”(Qur’an;49:14), “(We take our) color from Allah, and who is better than



Allah at coloring. We are His worshippers.”(Qur’an;2:138). Abu Bakr is reported to have said; To fight against the infidels is Jihad, but to fight against your evil self (Nafs ammarah) is greater Jihad. It may also take the form of reminding people of their Islamic duties and motivating them to conduct their lives according to Islam. God says: “The true believers, both men and women, are protectors of one another. They enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil; they establish prayer (Salah), practice regular charity (Zakah), and obey God Allah and His Apostle. It is they on whom God will have His mercy; surely God is Mighty, Wise.”(Qur’an;9:71).

Secondly, making strenuous efforts (Jihad) to convey the Last message of God (Islam) to the humanity(Dawah) because Allah says: “Thus We have appointed you (Muslims) a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you.”( Qur’an;2:143), : “You (Muslims) are the best of peoples evolved for mankind enjoining what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah.”(Qur’an;3:110),

“We have given the Book as an inheritance to those of Our servants (Muslims) whom We have chosen”.(Qur’an;35:32). The Prophet (peace be upon him) in his last sermon said: “O’ People, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand my words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur’an and my example, the Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go astray. All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness oh Allah that I have conveyed your message to your people.” As true followers of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), it is the obligation of Muslims to pass on the Guidance and the Religion of Truth (Islam) to the humanity. This is a great responsibility so Muslims have to gain knowledge of Islam, practice it and then convey to the humanity.

Thirdly Jihad is to be conducted to provide protection to Muslims and non Muslims against oppression. Allah says: “He is the Lord of the

east and the west: there is no God but Him, therefore, take Him as your Protector”(Qur’an;73:9), “And what reason do you (Muslims) have not to fight in the cause of God, to rescue the helpless oppressed old men, women, and children who are crying: "Our Lord! Deliver us from this town whose people are oppressors; send us a protector by Your grace and send us a helper from Your presence?"”(Qur’an;4:75). All out efforts are to be made to preserve Islam, and to create conducive environments for freely conveying the message of Islam to all the people, without any coercion. So that they may ponder and accept or reject it by their free choice using their reason and intellect in line with the teachings of Qur’an: “as for those who are bent on denying the truth and on barring (others) from the path of God - all their (good) deeds will He let go to waste;”- - - “Now when you meet (in war) those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and then tighten their bonds; but thereafter [set them free,] either by an act of grace or against ransom, so that the burden of war may be lifted: thus [shall it be]. And [know that] had God so

willed, He could indeed punish them [Himself]; but [He wills you to struggle] so as to test you [all] by means of one another. And as for those who are slain in God's cause, never will He let their deeds go to waste: (Qur'an;47:1 & 4). Hence like any other struggle, Jihad also has defensive as well as offensive implications depending upon social, geopolitical, socioeconomic, military, religious and other considerations. According to the traditional procedure of Allah, the rejection of Message by the direct recipient from the Apostle (Rasool) are entitled to Divine punishment through the messenger and his followers. This Divine punishment was accomplished in case of Arabs in the life time of Apostle and for the neighboring powers through his companions. It is no more applicable now. Jihad is a life-long mission for the Muslim as a community to struggle against all evils, socio-economic, cultural, educational and political dogmas; superstitious and mythological concepts; and directing the Muslims towards obedience to Allah, enlightenment, refinement, scientific progress, dignified character and honest actions. Its top and most noble form is to fight

the enemies of Islam in battle in order to foil their attempts to suppress the Muslims and the invitation to Islam.

### **Forced Conversion to Islam not Permissible:**

Conversion by force is prohibited in Islam. Allah says: "There shall be NO COERCION in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from the (way of ) error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing."(Qur'an;2:256). "So if they argue with you, tell them: "I have submitted myself entirely to Allah and so have those who follow me." Then ask those who are given the Book and those who are illiterates (not having revealed scriptures): "Will you also submit yourselves to Allah?" If they become Muslims they shall be rightly guided but if they turn back, you need not worry, because your sole responsibility is to convey the Message. God is watching all His servants very closely."(Qur'an;3:20). "Call people to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and best advice, and reason with them, if you have to, in the most

courteous manner: for your Lord knows best who strays from His Way and He knows best who is rightly guided.”(Qur’an;16:125). “O Muhammad, declare: "O mankind! The truth has come to you from your Lord! He that follows guidance (Right Way) follows it for his own good, and he that goes astray does so at his own risk; for I am not a custodian over you.”(Qur’an;10:108). “Say "The Truth is from your Lord": let him who will believe and let him who will reject (it): for the wrongdoers We have prepared a Fire.... (Qur’an;18:29). “Will they not then ponder on the Qur’an?..”(Qur’an;4:82). “Say, O Muhammad: "Would you dispute with us concerning God, who is our Lord and your Lord as well? We shall be accountable to Him for our deeds and you for yours; to Him alone we are devoted.”(Qur’an;2:139). “And argue not with the followers of earlier revelations unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender.(Qur’an;29:46). “Have you ever seen the one who has taken his own desires as his god? Would you take the

responsibility of guiding him?”(Qur’an;25:43). “If there are some among you who believe in the message with which I have been sent and others who disbelieve it, then be patient until Allah judges between us, for He is the best of all judges.”(Qur’an;7:87). “He creates man out of (mere) drop of sperm: and lo! This same being shows himself endowed with the power to think and argue”(Qur’an;16:4).

**It is well known historic fact that after eight centuries of the Muslims in Spain they were totally eliminated from that country after Christian re-conquest. If the Muslims had used force, military or economic there would not have been any Christian left in Spain to have kicked the Muslims out. One cannot charge Muslims with using the sword to convert Spaniards to the Islamic religion. Today, Islam is still spreading all over the world and Muslims have NO sword!!**

The Muslims were also the masters of India for almost thousand years, but they did not force Islam down the Hindus. The majority Hindus population is living proof. In Spain and in India,

the Muslims were no paragons of virtue, yet they obeyed the Qur'anic injunctions. Indonesia and Malaysia in the Far East and The majority of the people on the East coast of Africa as far down as Mozambique, as well as the bulk of the inhabitants on the West coast of the continent are Muslims, but history does not record any invading hoards of Muslims from anywhere. The Muslim traders and preachers through their good conduct and moral righteousness achieved the miracle of conversion. This forced De Lacy O'Leary in to write : 'History makes it clear however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.' ("Islam at the Crossroads" London, 1923, p.8).

### **Does Quran ask to “Kill the Non Muslims Wherever You Find”?**

Killing of innocent people whether Muslim or non Muslim is strictly forbidden in Islam. Allah says: “..whoever kills a person, except as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land, it



will be written in his book of deeds as if he had killed all the human beings and whoever will save a life shall be regarded as if he gave life to all the human beings..”(Qur’an;5:32), “You shall not kill anyone whom God has forbidden, except for just cause under the law. If anyone is killed unjustly, We have granted the right of retribution to his heir, but let him not carry his vengeance too far in killing the culprit through taking the law in his own hands, as he is supported by the law.”(Qur’an;17:33). The verse number 5 & 6 of Surah Tuba (Chapter Number 9 - The Repentance) from Qur’an are most frequently misquoted, out of context by critics of Islam, to create misunderstanding, as a part of deliberate campaign to malign and project Islam as barbaric religion. Killing is only permitted in the state of war. Allah says: “But when the forbidden months are past then fight and slay the idolaters wherever you find them and seize them beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.”(Qur’an;9:5), “**If anyone from the**

**idolaters ask you for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to the place of safety: this should be done because these people do not know the truth.”(Qur’an;9:6).**

It is made to appear that the Muslims have been given free hand to kill the pagans or non believers. It may be kept in view that some verses of Qur’an were revealed for specific occasions and carry instructions for similar circumstances if they ever exist again, out of context quotation of such verses in parts, by any one is misleading. Such efforts to twist the meanings with ulterior motives result in tarnishing the image of Islam. A look at verses (Qur’an;9:1-6) in Qur’an revealed before conquest of Makkah, provide the context, thereby leaving no room for misunderstanding. Allah says in Qur’an: “A declaration of immunity from Allah and His Messenger is hereby made to those of the pagans with whom you have made a treaty: "You have four months to go around in the land unmolested; but you should know that you cannot frustrate the will of Allah, and that Allah will humiliate the unbelievers."

This is a public proclamation from Allah and His Messenger to the people on the day of the Great Hajj (Pilgrimage) that Allah and His Messenger do hereby dissolve treaty obligations with the pagans. Therefore, if you repent, it will be better for you but if you turn away, then you should know that you cannot frustrate the Will of Allah. O' Prophet, proclaim a painful punishment to those who are unbelievers. Except (this proclamation does not apply to) those pagans who honored their treaties with you in every detail and aided none against you. So fulfill your treaties with them to the end of their term; for Allah loves the righteous.”(Qur'an;9:1-4), “But when the forbidden months are past then fight and slay the idolaters wherever you find them and seize them beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.”(Qur'an;9:5), “If anyone from the idolaters ask you for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then escort him to the place of safety: this should be done because these

people do not know the truth.”(Qur’an;9:6). “How can you trust them? If they prevail against you, they respect neither treaty nor ties of relationship. They just flatter you with their tongues, but their hearts reject you, and most of them are transgressors.”(Qur’an;9:8). “Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and humiliate them. He will grant you victory over them and soothe the hearts of a believing people.”(Qur’an;9:14)

The part of verse (Qur’an;9:5); “fight and slay the idolaters wherever ye find them,” if quoted separately would give different meanings to what is actually intended. Therefore if complete verses (Qur’an;9:1-6) are read together the context and meanings are self evident: The emphasis is on the first clause; it is only when the four months of grace are past, and the other party show no signs of desisting from their treacherous designs by right conduct, that the state of war supervenes-between Faith and Unfaith. When war becomes inevitable, it must be prosecuted with vigour. The fighting may take the form of killing, capture, or siege, or ambush and other stratagems of war. But even

then there is room for repentance and amendment on the part of the guilty party, and if that takes place, then the duty is forgiveness and the establishment of peace. The repentance must be sincere, and that is shown by conduct—a religious spirit of true prayer and charity. In that case the gate against the repentant should not be barred. On the contrary Muslims must do all they can to make their way easy, remembering that Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. Even among the enemies of Islam, actively fighting against Islam, there may be individuals who may be in a position to require protection. Full asylum is to be given to them, and opportunities provided for hearing the Word of Allah. If they accept the Word, they become Muslims and brethren, and no further question arises. If they do not see their way to accept Islam, they will require double protection: (1) from the Islamic forces openly fighting against their people, and (2) from their own people, as they detached themselves from them. Both kinds of protection should be ensured for them, and they should be safely escorted to a place where they can be safe. Such persons only err through ignorance, and

there may be much good in them. These verses contain excellent rules for conduct of war, which are so humane that never in the history of mankind one can find grant of privileges and rights to the fallen enemies.

Renowned scholar Muhammad Asad in his commentary on Qur'an has strongly refuted misconception of deducing any justification for forced conversion or killing of unbelievers: It may be kept in view that every verse of Qur'an must be interpreted against the background of Qur'an as a whole. The verse (Qur'an;9:5) which speaks of a possible conversion of pagan to Islam with whom the believers are at war, must therefore, be considered in conjunction with several fundamental Qur'anic ordinances. One of them: "there will be no coercion in matters of faith"(Qur'an;2:256), lays down categorically that any attempt at a forcible conversion of unbelievers is prohibited.-which precludes the possibility of the Muslims 'demanding or expectation that a defeated enemy should embrace Islam as the price of immunity. Secondly, the Qur'an ordains, "Fight in the cause of Allah with those who fight

against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah does not like transgressors.”(Qur’an;2:190) ); and, if they do not let you be , and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them wherever you come upon them: and it is against these that We have clearly empowered you (to make war)”(Qur’an;4:91). “if they desist –behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace”(Qur’an;2:192), and, “if they desist, all hostility should cease except against the oppressors.”(Qur’an;2:193). As far as the enemy’s conversion to Islam –expressed in the words; “if they repent, and establish prayer and pay Zakat”, is no more that one, and by no means the only, way of their “desisting for hostility”; and the reference to it in verses 9:5 & 9:11 certainly does not imply an alternative of “conversion or death” as some critics of Islam (as well as some ill informed scholars) choose to assume. The verse 9:4 and 9:6 give a further elucidation of the attitude which the believers are enjoined to adopt towards such of the unbelievers as are not hostile to them: “Except (this proclamation of war does not apply to) those pagans who honored their

treaties with you in every detail and aided none against you. So fulfill your treaties with them to the end of their term; for Allah loves the righteous.”(Qur’an;9:4). It is further clarified in Qur’an: “Allah does not forbid you to be kind and EQUITABLE to those who had neither fought against your faith nor driven you out of your homes. In fact Allah loves the equitable. Allah only forbids you to make friendship with those who fought you on account of your faith and drove you out of your homes and backed up others in your expulsion. Those who will take them for friends are indeed the wrongdoers.”(Qur’an;60:8-9).

On the expiry of warning period, the pagans who had violated the treaty, could either accept Islam by choice, leave the holy places, or face war, yet those pagans who had not previously taken the Message seriously and seek asylum were to be taken to the place of safety and provided protection to ponder and make their decision to accept Islam by free choice. The war orders (Qur’an;9:5) to kill the pagans were issued for the State of War, it is erroneous to assume that pagans be killed where ever found



even in the normal state of peace, as evident in verses (Qur'an;9:4, 9:6 & 60:8-9) above. History is witness to the fact that the non believers have been living peacefully under Muslim rule for centuries and still continue to live in the countries with majority Muslim population.

The world was much different from the present, wherein as per international law every human being is free to adopt and practice any faith, (at least in theory) but this was not the case 1400 years ago. The great Roman (Christian) and Persian (Zoroastrian) imperialist Empires were the biggest hindrances in conveying the message of Islam to their population. They were to be prevented from thrusting forcibly their disbelief upon their subjects and the future generations hence the conflict with them was inevitable. By the period of Caliph Omar bin Khattab (634-644 C.E), not only Arabia was purged of non believers but other areas as far as Afghanistan and Egypt were also brought under the folds of Muslim rule. The message of Islam reached peacefully as far as China, Far East [Indonesia, the most populous Muslim

country was never attacked by Muslims] Africa and all around the world.

[More “Jihad, Myth & Reality” at <http://aftabkhan.blog.com>]

## **Bible on Warfare:**

There are verses supporting peace:

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mathew;5:9)*

*“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:21–23)*

*“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel” (James 4:1–2)*

However warfare was also permissible in the previous scriptures under certain

circumstances. As regards actual 'fighting with the sword' there has been some difference in theological theories at different times, but very little in the practice of those who framed those theories.

The Jewish wars were ruthless wars of extermination; the Old Testament does not mince words: "And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword." (Leviticus;26:7-8). "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm;149:6-9). Moses ordered the killing of Jews, guilty of idol worship; (Exodus;32:26-28.).

"Now therefore Kill every male among the little ones, and Kill every woman (female) that hath known man by lying (having sex) with him. "But

keep Alive for yourselves all the Girls and all the women who are Virgins." (Numbers;31:17-18). The Jews salvaged for themselves; "and thirty-two thousand persons in all, women who had not known man by lying with him."(Numbers; 31:35). "But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance, (O' Jews) you shall save alive nothing that breathes,(Deuteronomy;20:16). 'And they (the Jews) Utterly Destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep, and Ass, with the edge of the sword"(Joshua;6:21),"He (Joshua) let None remain alive." (Joshua;10:28).

In the New Testament the Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) says: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."(Luke; 9:27). Saint. Paul, in commending the worthy fruits of Faith, mentions the warriors of the Old Testament as his ideals: "And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets -- who through faith

conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” (Hebrews; 11: 32-34).

**The monkish morality of the Gospels in their present form has never been followed by any self-respecting Christian or other nation in history.** Pope Urban II (1088-99 C.E) coined the phrase ‘Holy War’, launched the Crusades movement which was subsequently vigorously supported by his followers for two centuries(1095-1291 C.E), causing death and destruction to millions besides sowing seeds of hatred and enmity among the followers of two great civilizations which still haunts the humanity. The association of Missionaries with Crusades posed a moral theological problem that troubled medieval Christian thinkers. Thirteenth-century Christian theologians held that conversion could not be forced, but most agreed that force could legitimately be used to preserve a situation in which peaceful propaganda was possible, and they continued

to support the Crusade. Furthermore, Europe's fear was such that the Crusade idea persisted well into the 17th century, and the conviction that, in certain circumstances, war might be just became more deeply enrooted in the conscience of the West. Along with the now generally accepted use of the word 'Crusade' to denote any 'Common Endeavour in a Worthy Cause' (Christian Jihad), this is one of the most enduring results of the movement. After the bloodstained conversions in South America, the colonization of most of the free world by diplomacy, intimidation aggression and coercion took place. Pope Pius XII was obliged, under the pressures of World War II, to clarify and redefine the church's teachings on war and peace as well as to work out a strategy of survival. Pope Pius XII , tacitly condoned the Nazi holocaust. The deadly wars and large scale killings of people among weaker nations mostly Muslim which goes unabated on the pretext of war against terror lead by the American Evangelist and Neocons, the claim of love and peace by the Western (Christian) world appears to be hollow. They have forgotten the saying of Jesus (peace be upon

him):“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”(Mathew; 7:5).

So there is plenty of stuff in the Holy Scriptures which is interpreted by the warmongers to justify warfare and violence.

### **Confucianism:**

Confucianism does not explicitly encourage war due to its emphasis on humanity. This, however, may be overlooked. However confucianism should take some, if not primary, blame for the vicious circles of China's war and chaos for more than two millennia. From a ruler's point of view, a czar has a moral obligation to maintain world peace by force if necessary, whereas from the people's point of view, war is a necessary means to remove non-ren (or atrocious) kings. Since Confucianism is the cardinal philosophy in the second half of Chinese history plus the interaction of its two momentums (or readings), it is not too hard to realize that it could easily sustain war. If so, it makes no sense to say that Confucianism

should not bear any responsibility for the vicious circles of war and chaos in the second half.

## **Indian Religions:**

In Hinduism in some of its writings “ahimsa” has been considered the highest duty from the beginning of time. Jainism also grew out of Hinduism; Jainists believe that the practice of ahimsa is an essential step on the way to personal salvation. The Hindu scripture 'Bhagavad Gita' the idea of a Just War is represented:

‘Even without you, all the soldiers standing armed for battle will not stay alive. Their death is foreordained.’ Bhagavad Gita 11:32-3.

Sikhism, though talks of peace but sword [kerpan] is part of kit.

## **Buddhism and violence:**

Buddhism also advocates peace, but Buddhism, like the other great faiths, has not always lived up to its principles - there are numerous examples of Buddhists engaging in violence and even war. In the 14th century



Buddhist fighters led the uprising that evicted the Mongols from China. In Japan, Buddhist monks trained Samurai warriors in meditation that made them better fighters. In the twentieth century Japanese Zen masters wrote in support of Japan's wars of aggression. Violence against Muslims in Burma [Myanmar] which is also growing up in Sri Lanka which fought against Tamils.

### **Atheism:**

Atheists proved to be no less violent than any one else. Mass killings occurred under some Communist regimes during the twentieth century with an estimated death toll numbering between 85 and 100 million. The highest death tolls that have been documented in communist states occurred in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, in the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong, and in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. The estimates of the number of non-combatants killed by these three regimes alone range from a low of 21 million to a high of 70 million. There have also been killings on a smaller scale in North Korea,

Vietnam, and some Eastern European and African countries.



Stalin, an atheist followed the position that religion was an opiate that needed to be removed in order to construct the ideal communist society. His government promoted atheism through special atheistic education in schools, anti-religious propaganda, the antireligious work of public institutions (Society

of the Godless), discriminatory laws, and a terror campaign against religious believers. By the late 1930s it had become dangerous to be publicly associated with religion. Recent counts indicate over 2.9 million deaths.

### **Humanism:**

Some humanists would accept the 'Golden Rule', a term first used by Confucius: 'Do as you would be done by', or 'Treat others as you would wish them to treat you'. Some see the natural or logical conclusion of such a principle to be the rejection of all war and violence. Others, who have reservations about pacifism, argue for 'Just War' rules similar to those based on religious law.

### **Religious Wars - History:**

In order to analyse the role of religion in warfare, one has to look at the history. Philip and Axelrod in the "Encyclopaedia of Wars" has tabulated around 1,763 major wars recorded in the history. Of those wars, the authors categorize 123 wars as religious in nature, which is an astonishingly low 6.98% of all wars. Moreover the number of people killed in these

conflicts amounts to only two percent. This means that even when wars have been fought over religious disputes, they tend to be less bloody than when they are fought for other reasons.

### Major Religious Wars-List

| Lowest estimate | Highest estimate | Event                     | Location              | From | To   | Religions involved          | Percentage of the world population |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|------|------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 3,000,000       | 11,500,000       | Thirty Years' War         | Holy Roman Empire     | 1618 | 1648 | Protestants and Catholics   | 0.5%–2.1%                          |
| 2,000,000       | 4,000,000        | French Wars of Religion   | France                | 1562 | 1598 | Protestants and Catholics   | 0.4%–0.8%                          |
| 1,000,000       | 3,000,000        | Nigerian Civil War        | Nigeria               | 1967 | 1970 | Islam and Christian         | 0.03%–0.09%                        |
| 1,000,000       | 2,000,000        | Second Sudanese Civil War | Sudan                 | 1983 | 2005 | Islam and Christian         | 0.02%                              |
| 1,000,000       | 3,000,000        | Crusades                  | Holy Land, Europe     | 1095 | 1291 | Islam and Christian         | 0.3%–2.3%                          |
| 130,000         | 250,000          | Lebanese Civil War        | Lebanon               | 1975 | 1990 | Sunni, Shiite and Christian |                                    |
| 132,000         |                  | Iraq/Afghan               | Iraq/Afghan /Pakistan | 2011 | 2014 | Christians, Muslims         |                                    |

William T. Cavanaugh in his *Myth of Religious Violence* (2009) argues that what is termed "religious wars" is a largely "Western dichotomy", arguing that all wars that are classed as "religious" have secular (economic or political) ramifications. Similar opinions were expressed as early as the 1760s, during the Seven Years' War, widely recognized to be "religious" in motivation, noting that the warring

factions were not necessarily split along confessional lines as much as along secular interests.

It is evident that religion as one aspect of a people's cultural heritage may serve as a cultural marker or ideological rationalisation for a conflict that has deeper ethnic and cultural differences.



This has been specifically argued for the case of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, often portrayed as a religious conflict of a Catholic vs. a Protestant faction, while the more fundamental cause of the conflict was in fact ethnic or nationalistic rather than religious in nature. Since the native Irish were mostly Catholic and the later British-sponsored

immigrants were mainly Protestant, the terms become shorthand for the two cultures, but it is inaccurate to describe the conflict as a religious one.

The Taliban, predominantly Pushtunes are waging war against Pakistan on the pretext of Islam, but their version of Islam is based upon mostly on their cultural traditions not acceptable to the majority Muslims. This has tribal, ethnic, racial, cultural, economic and political dimensions with religious fervour supported by foreign powers to achieve their strategic goals.

The permanent hatred between the Israelis and the Palestinians... do they fight because one side is mainly Jewish, and the other side overwhelmingly Muslim? Or do they fight because they both want control of the same little wedge of land, which both claim as their birthright? Because they both want the Promised Land, neither side is willing to give it up, and they're not willing to share? The orthodox Jews do not support the creation of Israel against the scripture.

The Taiping Rebellion in China was a war of independence, in which one side happened to

be Christian. The Dungan Revolt in China and the Second Sudanese Civil War were fights between an oppressed minority and a tyrannical majority, one of which happened to be Muslim.

The Crusades, like the Saracen incursions into Europe that preceded them, were a series of land grabs, in which one side happened to be Christian, and the other side happened to be Muslim.

The French Wars of Religion, and the Thirty Years' War that followed like a bad movie sequel, were little more than a series of retaliatory strikes by disgruntled citizens, interspersed with opportunistic attacks by mercenary armies. Nonetheless, they appear to be the only conflicts on the list that truly constitute religious wars, in that religious differences colored the principal grievances. However, on a deeper level, the underlying cause was the preservation of the status quo for Catholic nobles against an increasingly Protestant populace, rather than a loyalty to any religious doctrine. Catholic France, for purely political reasons, fought on the side of the Protestants. Other groups made alliances with

the Muslim Turks, whom European Christians had feared for a millennium as the worst infidels of all.

Exclusively Religion did not play major role in the big wars that have resulted in heavy loss of human life. Here is a list of nine most deadly wars of history, none has religious motivation:

### **Most Deadly Wars:**

Three of the ten most costly wars, in terms of loss of life, have been waged in the last century. These are of course the two World Wars, then followed by the Second Sino-Japanese War (which is sometimes considered part of World War II, or overlapping with that war). Most of the others involved China or neighboring peoples. The death toll of World War II, being 60 million plus, surpasses all other war-death-tolls. This may be due to significant recent advances in weapons technologies, as well as recent increases in the overall human population.



| NINE MOST DEADLY WARS OF HISTORY |                   |              |                                            |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                  | Deaths (millions) | Date         | War                                        |
| 1                                | 60.7–84.6         | 1939–1945    | World War II                               |
| 2                                | 60                | 13th century | Mongol Conquests                           |
| 3                                | 40                | 1850–1864    | Taiiping Rebellion                         |
| 4                                | 39                | 1914–1918    | World War I                                |
| 5                                | 36                | 755–763      | An Shi Rebellion                           |
| 6                                | 20                | 1937–1945    | Second Sino-Japanese War                   |
| 7                                | 20                | 1370–1405    | Conquests of Tamerlane                     |
| 8                                | 16                | 1862–1877    | Dungan revolt                              |
| 9                                | 5–9               | 1917–1922    | Russian Civil War and Foreign Intervention |

The truth is, non-religious motivations and naturalistic philosophies bear the blame for nearly all of humankind's wars. Lives lost during religious conflict pales in comparison to those experienced during the regimes who wanted nothing to do with the idea of God – something

showcased in R. J. Rummel's work "Lethal Politics and Death by Government" he writes:

"Almost 170 million men, women and children have been shot, beaten, tortured, knifed, burned, starved, frozen, crushed or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hung, bombed or killed in any other of a myriad of ways governments have inflicted death on unarmed, helpless citizens and foreigners. The dead could conceivably be nearly 360 million people. It is though our species has been devastated by a modern Black Plague. And indeed it has, but a plague of Power, not germs."

Jack Perry has presented one list of non-religious wars, as follows:

1. The Seven Years' War (Britain & France)
2. The American Revolution
3. The French Revolution
4. The Napoleonic Wars (France & Europe)
5. The Revolutions in the Americas
6. The Wars to create and preserve the British Empire (Boer War, Irish Revolution, and the

Great Game with Russia would all be examples)

7. The American Civil War
8. The Crimean War
9. The Spanish-American War
10. The Great War, The War to End All Wars, or World War I
11. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia
12. The Spanish Civil War
13. Stalin's invasions of Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland
14. World War II
15. The Chinese Revolution
16. The Cold War, including but not limited to the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the American intervention in Grenada, and the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan
17. The Cultural Revolution in China (may not be called war)
18. Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge Revolution

19. The Falklands War
20. The Persian Gulf War between Iran & Iraq
21. The Persian Gulf War between the United Nations and Iraq
22. The Breakup of Yugoslavia (beginning with Slovenia).

Obviously, the above list could not count very significant the Reign of Terror (French), which followed the French Revolution, as it was not, technically, a war, per se. Still, it is a point worth serious consideration.

Some maintain Robespierre (who presided over the Reign of Terror) was actually religious, and an oppressor of atheists. Nevertheless, the fact remains that: “The French Revolution eradicated the Church root and branch. The Jacobin state was officially atheist, although Robespierre attempted to cover this fact with the fig leaf of ‘the Supreme Being’, which convinced nobody except maybe Robespierre himself. Although the people of France were supposed to be fervent Catholics, religion practically disappeared in France after the

Revolution (except in the most backward and reactionary districts like the Vendée).”

### **Dawkins Retort:**

The prejudice that wars are fought over ideology has a long pedigree. In 1726 Jonathan Swift’s masterpiece of satire, *Gulliver’s Travels*, paid tribute to the idea by depicting two nations fighting over what end of their eggs to break open. More recently the refrain was picked up, perhaps most vocally, by the super-atheist Richard Dawkins. (The following quotes are from *The God Delusion* [Bantam Press/Transworld Publishers] 2006.) First poo-hooing the idea that wars are fought for any reason other than religion: “...We have a pusillanimous reluctance to use religious names for warring factions. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants are euphemized to ‘Nationalists’ and ‘Loyalists’ respectively.” (p.21)

He later backtracks, admitting: “... There really are genuine grievances and injustices, and these seem to have little to do with religion; except that — and this is important and widely overlooked — without religion there would be

no labels by which to decide whom to oppress and whom to avenge....” (p.259)

This statement is absurd on its face. During the civil war in Dawkins’ England, the Roundheads and Cavaliers could be distinguished by the length of their hair. The Hutu and Tutsi tribes of Rwanda would appear identical to an outsider, but in their civil war that destroyed more than ten percent of the population, they had no difficulty telling each other apart. “Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition ....” (Preface p.1). He goes on like this. Four hundred years ago (once again, in China) thousands of people were massacred because they refused to get a haircut. In a world where people kill for reasons as petty as skin color, poverty, education, and national origin, he appears to believe that a world without religion would be a world without hatred. For all his obvious intelligence, Professor Dawkins falls victim to the most basic of errors — failing to detect his own bias.

## **For God's Sake:**

Before conclusion here is an interesting edited Extract from "For God's Sake: An Atheist, A Jew, a Christian and a Muslim Debate Religion. They respond to the question: Doesn't religion cause most of the conflict in the world? It was Published July 2013 by Pan Macmillan.

### **Rachel Woodlock (Muslim)**

Religion is powerfully motivating and belligerent humans fight over it. Heck, religion has caused conflict even in my diverse and tolerant family. Taking our daughter to visit her Irish-Catholic relatives, I asked my husband to make sure they didn't give her any pork. Like Jews, Muslims steer clear of anything with an oink. My gentle, peaceable mate, wanting to avoid one of those conversations, said: "Mam, Yazzy doesn't like pork so don't give her any." A few days later, my beaming mother-in-law proudly announced: "She does like pork. I gave her some sausages and she ate them right up!" It took a few days for my blood pressure to return to normal.

Then again, humans also fight over small bits of compressed carbon, tracts of dirt, addictive mind-altering substances and soccer matches. It's not just religious ideology that causes problems – state-imposed atheism was a defining feature of brutal 20th century regimes led by Stalin, Tito, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot among others, which resulted in the suffering and murder of millions. Tens of thousands of Russian Christians alone were executed for their beliefs by atheists intent on purging religion from the Soviet Union.

Yet it's true, religion has been a major feature in some historical conflicts and the most recent wave of modern terrorism. Religion has taken on extra significance today because globalisation is challenging and changing everything. Religious identity not only survives but can take on heightened significance when national and political alliances break apart, as happened in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, when Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs were divided along Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim fault lines.

The Qur'an recognises the human propensity



for conflict and gives permission for defensive warfare. Muslim scholars developed a just-war theory although admittedly in the ensuing centuries jihad was also used to further the territorial ambitions of ruthless leaders, just as today it's distorted to justify terrorist bombings. Like both law and politics, religion can be used to defend the oppressed and to oppress the defenceless.

The problem of corrupt religion has attracted the criticism of many prophets and saints. The Qur'an censures religious hypocrites:

“Among the people there is he whose discourse on the life of the world pleases you, and he calls on God as witness to what is in his heart, yet he is an unyielding and antagonistic adversary. When he turns and leaves, he walks about corrupting the earth, destroying crops and livestock – God loves not corruption” (Quran;2:204–205).

The verse could well apply to Saddam Hussein, who made a show of praying on television, but gassed and bombed Kurds and was a tyrannical dictator. Religion, unfortunately, provides a useful cover and powerful motivator

for the evil-hearted. **That religion can be so markedly different in the hands of the power-hungry, as opposed to the altruistic and virtuous, really says more about human psychology than it does about religion. That's why so many human conflicts unfortunately involve religion.**

### **Antony Loewenstein (Jew)**

Alain de Botton, philosopher and author of *Religion for Atheists*, is worried about fundamentalism. "To say something along the lines of 'I'm an atheist: I think religions are not all bad' has become a dramatically peculiar thing to say," he told British journalist Bryan Appleyard in 2012. "If you do say it on the internet you will get savage messages calling you a fascist, an idiot or a fool. This is a very odd moment in our culture."

Neo-atheism, the belief that science is the only path to truth and all religions are equally deluded and destructive, has taken hold in much of the debate over atheism. The movement, whose key figures include Richard Dawkins, the late Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett, is an ideology that

arrogantly celebrates an understanding of everything through supposed reason and proof. It allows little doubt or questioning about the unknown. It also happens that some of these key figures, including Ayaan Hirsi Ali, are backers of state violence against Muslim countries since 11 September 2001.

It's clearly an exaggeration to suggest atheists are rampaging through the streets demanding the end of religious belief but the last decade has seen an ever-increasing number of atheists feeling the need to ridicule or damn people who do believe in a god.

Dawkins, at a dinner with de Botton and others in London in 2012, recounted a conversation he'd had with Hitchens. "Do you ever worry," Dawkins asked, "that if we win and, so to speak, destroy Christianity, that vacuum would be filled with Islam?"

It's a curious question that reflects both the vicious hatred of Muslims by many so-called new atheists but also a creepy utopian nightmare that is apparently idealised by them. Destroy Christianity? Because the Catholic Church has committed innumerable crimes,

opposes abortion and birth control, refuses to accept female priests and hides sex offenders in its midst? To be sure, the institution is dysfunctional, but wishing for its disintegration reflects a savagery that will only inflame, not reduce tensions.

None of this is to excuse the undeniable barbarity unleashed by religionists over the centuries. The misogyny, beheadings, terrorism, killings, beatings and cruelty are real. They continue. Today we see a growing battle in the Middle East between Shi'ite and Sunni; a Jewish state unleashing militancy against Christian and Muslim Palestinians. I've been guilty of claiming religion is the source of the world's evils, but it's a careless comment. It's far too easy to blame the Muslim faith for honour killings. **I'm under no illusion about the fact that religion is routinely used to justify the more heinous crimes.** But the 20th century is filled with examples, namely Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China, that didn't need God as an excuse to commit genocide against a state's own people.

## Jane Caro (Atheist)

As 14 year-old Malala Yousafzai sat on a bus in the grounds of her school in Pakistan's Swat Valley, a gunman shot her in the head. After proudly claiming responsibility, the Taliban told the world that the teenage education activist's work represented "a new chapter of obscenity, and we have to finish this chapter". The "obscenity" was the education of girls. The Taliban felt no shame. They know that what they have done is right because their god tells them so. **Gods have been used to justify almost any cruelty, from burning heretics and stoning adulterers to crucifying Jesus himself.**

On the other side of the world, Anders Behring Breivik slaughtered 77 Norwegians. Breivik seems to have seen his murderous spree as a way of getting rid of Muslims, yet his 1,500-page manifesto revealed, at best, a weak attachment to religious belief. To Breivik, Christianity seems important mainly because he sees it as white. Breivik, like the devoutly religious Taliban, also appears to feel no shame.

**The men who flew planes into buildings on 9/11, the terrorists who went on a murderous rampage in Mumbai and the Bali bombers, all killed as many people as they could in the name of their religion. Breivik did it in the name of his race. Timothy McVeigh, who killed 168 people and wounded 800, hated the government. All saw their mass murder as a political act of protest and all felt justified.**

Atheists like Mao or Pol Pot have murdered millions in the name of political totalitarianism. Hitler used a quasi-mystical racist philosophy to exploit the ancient hatred of the Jews by Christians. I heard somewhere (I've never been able to discover where) that terrorism occurs when you combine a sense of military and economic inferiority with a sense of moral superiority. Religion is very good at conferring a sense of moral superiority on its followers.

Indeed, while the religious have murdered throughout history in the name of their god, I've been unable to find any evidence of atheists killing anyone in the name of atheism. Atheists are no more or less capable of evil than anyone

else, but it seems that murder, particularly mass murder and war, is a sin of commission. In other words, human beings are generally only prepared to fight and kill in the name of something. It can be a god, but it can also be a political philosophy – like Nazism or communism. Many fight for patriotism: for country, tribe or race. Some kill because they're psychologically disturbed, but none – so far – in the name of atheism.

So, while I don't agree that only religion causes conflict, I'd argue that all mass murder and war are fought in the name of a bigger-than-self philosophy or idea. Atheism, simply lack of belief in a god, has not yet proved compelling enough to motivate murder. So far no one has gone into a crowded public space and blown themselves up while shouting, "No god is great!".

**[Comments:** The League of Militant Atheists, Society of the Godless Union of the Godless, was an atheistic and antireligious organization of workers and intelligentsia that developed in Soviet Russia under the influence of the ideological and cultural views and policies of

the Soviet Communist Party. Atheists while in power proved to be no less violent than any one else. Mass killings occurred under some Communist regimes during the twentieth century with an estimated death toll numbering between 85 and 100 million.]

### **Simon Smart (Christianity):**



Religion has been implicated in all sorts of conflict and violence throughout human history. There is blood on the hands of the faithful, and no avoiding the fact that in the service of the wrong people, religion can be a force of great harm. This includes Christianity. If we consider the sins of the Christian past critics have plenty



to work with – witch-hunts, the Crusades, Christian support of slavery.

But the picture is much more complex than is often implied. Take the Inquisition. Dinner party guests are likely to nod in agreement when someone mentions the "millions killed" at the hands of the church but historians now suggest around 5,000 – 6,000 over a 350-year period. That's less than 18 a year. One a year is terrible, but the reality appears a long way from what we are often served up.

**Likewise the idea that most of the wars of history have been caused by religion is demonstrably false. The vast majority of wars have been conducted in the pursuit of profits or power, or waged for territory or tribal supremacy, even if religion has been caught up in those pursuits. But there is a very real sense in which religion can moderate those forces. David Hart notes that, "Religious conviction often provides the sole compelling reason for refusing to kill ... or for seeking peace ... the truth is that religion and irreligion are cultural variables, but killing is a human constant".**

Of course millions were killed at the hands of Mao, Stalin and Pol Pot. To say their murderous totalitarianism had nothing to do with their atheism is to completely misunderstand them and the ideologies on which their actions rested. Yale theologian Miroslav Volf argues that as far as Christianity goes, it will only be violent if it is stripped of its content— thinned out - and infused with a different set of values. The story of Jesus gives absolutely no warrant for violence. Any believer behaving that way is disobeying the one they claim to be following.

The answer, Volf argues, to violence perpetrated in the name of the Cross, is not less Christianity but more – Christianity that is not depleted of its meaning but full of its original moral content, which is at its heart non-violent and a force for good: (*Mathew;5:9, Mark 7:21–23, James 4:1–2*).

When Martin Luther King Jr confronted racism in the white church in the South he called on those churches not to become more secular, but more Christian. King knew that the answer to racism and violence was not less Christianity

but a deeper and truer Christianity. King gained his inspiration from the one who said that those who follow him must turn the other cheek, love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them. His leadership of the civil rights struggle remains a fine example of love triumphing over hate; of costly and courageous resistance of evil and of religiously inspired social action that made the kind of difference that everyone can appreciate.

### **Conclusion:**

The bloodiest wars, like practically every war one may name, were fought for more tangible reasons than theological differences of opinion. Some are fought for territory, or national sovereignty or defence against aggression. Some are fought for natural resources, such as gold, slaves, and now oil. In fact, the bloodiest wars have always been fought, and continue to be fought, for Power & Real Estate. Out of 1,763 major wars recorded in the history, 123 wars are considered as religious in nature, which is an astonishingly low 6.98% of all wars. Moreover the number of people killed in these conflicts amounts to only two percent. In all of

the so-called religious wars, religion has merely been a very easy way to take the two sides apart.

The non religious people like communists employed brute force to oppress the opponents, religious or non religious resulting in to death of millions. Hence it is absurd to blame religion alone for the wars. Wars are inevitable due to diversity and conflicts among human race, religion however try to make it more humane by laying down principles and ethnics for its conduct. Misuse of religion to justify unjust wars by few heretics does not justify blaming religion. It can be avoided by more education and awareness. Quran is explicit on this when it is declared:

*“There shall be no coercion in matters of faith”.*(Quran;2:256)

*“.. whoever kills a human being, unless it is in the course of justice for murder or bloody crimes on the earth, it shall be as if he killed all mankind. And whoever saves one life it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.”*(Quran,5:32)

Tony Blair, the former British PM, was criticised for his role in Iraq war on false pretext of WMD, he seems to be realistic now. He thinks that the issue of extremism is not limited to Islam. There are also many examples the world over where Muslims are the victims of religiously motivated violence from those of other religious faiths. So the challenge is clear. And it is one that could define the nature of peace and conflict in the first half of the 21st century. The battles of this century are less likely to be the product of extreme political ideology – like those of the 20th century – but they could easily be fought around the questions of cultural or religious difference. The answer is to promote views that are open-minded and tolerant towards those who are different, and to fight the formal, informal and internet propagation of closed-minded intolerance. In the 21st century, education is a security issue.

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