

religious violence

KARL
FAASE

The late Christopher Hitchens wrote a book called 'God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything'. And yet this flies in the face of the 20th century where between three men and three nations – Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Mao-Tse Tung – 100 million people lost their lives, and they were not motivated by religion.

The church caters for sinners as well as for saints and there are many within the fold of the church who have inadequately understood or inadequately reacted to the foundation teaching of Jesus on this matter.

RICHARD
SWINBURNE

JOHN
DICKSON

I feel ashamed. I own up to the fact that Christians have done terrible things and they've done them in the name of Christ. There's no avoiding that and part of the problem with being a student of history is that I probably know more about the bad stuff than most people!

The first thing is that not everything recorded by the Bible is approved of by the Bible. For example when the Bible is being written and a rape is recorded, people look at that and say, 'Look at this violent, horrible book.' Well, the Bible is not condoning rape in that context. This is a historical document which is recording what happened.

AMY
ORR-EWING

STANLEY
HAUERWAS

One of the great things about Israel and the Jews is that she gave us a scripture that doesn't try to make Israel out to be better than they were. So scripture turns out to be about God, not Israel.

I would say it's undeniable that religion is often associated with war and with violent activity. Since most human beings over history have been religious it would be weird if it wasn't associated with war in some way. But the idea that it's caused (war), that's a little bit more difficult to establish. Often religion is a pretext for galvanizing a country behind a certain agenda that a politician or a King might have. Or it might be that we as a group of people want to establish our identity against the other nations and so we use religion in order to do that dirty work really.

MICHAEL
JENSEN

JOHN
LENNOX

There was a religious element to it (the Northern Ireland conflict). The problem was that you have two extreme groups who by their behaviour show they hadn't a clue what Christianity is about but they used religion as a very convenient way of stirring up the temperature of the trouble.

Now if he (Christopher Hitchens) is going to come back and say, 'Well belief in God poisons everything,' I would want to take him to visit Mother Teresa in Calcutta and see what belief in God has motivated a woman like that to do. Or introduce him to a historical figure like Wilberforce who, motivated by what he read in the Bible, was inspired to see an end to slavery, the buying and selling of human beings. Or we could come up with countless other examples like Martin Luther King, motivated by what he read in the Bible, to pursue a Civil Rights agenda. So in the face of that I think it's quite hard to argue that belief in the Christian God poisons everything. It doesn't poison everything. It might poison some people.

▶ AMY
ORR-EWING

JOHN
LENNOX

▶ I think if you ask me directly of what I feel about it, the first thing I'd want to say to you I'm utterly ashamed of it, utterly ashamed that the name of Christ was ever associated with religious violence. But I think it's very important to explain why I'm ashamed of it. Because people who take up weapons, whatever they are, to defend Christ or his message are not following or obeying him. They're disobeying him.

Just because you claim you are doesn't mean you are. You have to look beyond that initial claim to the reality behind it. And I think it's undoubtedly the case that for many people, Christianity is a label they've grown up with and assumed even though there's no reality behind it. And I think that is confusing for people who wouldn't claim to be Christian at all.

▶ MICHAEL
RAMSDEN

JOHN
DICKSON

▶ And then if you start to think about the history of charity in the Western world, no responsible historian could deny that the West enjoys widespread charitable services and enjoys the spirit of charity and care for the poor entirely because of the influence of Jesus on Western culture. These things did not exist in ancient Rome or ancient Greece. They were gifts of early Christianity to Western culture. And now, thank God, athiests can do just as good things as Christians. That's fantastic!

▶ NOTES