

**HITCHENS VS BLAIR, IS RELIGION A FORCE FOR GOOD IN THE WORLD? THE MUNK DEBATE, BLACK SWAN, LONDON, 2011**

Based on the Hitchens vs Blair debate: Is Religion a Force for Good in the World?

Christopher Hitchens engages in a debate with arch-hypocrite and war-monger and liar Tony Blair, ex-prime minister of the United Kingdom. Hitchens gives the case for religion being at least potentially harmful and being an unjustifiable risk. He was probably aware that to say that religion is a force for good puts pressure on people not to criticise it and thus it is enabled to take power and spread its errors everywhere. Blair was probably aware of that too - didn't stop him bending over backwards to defend religion. Blair is proof of how a politician applies his lies and double-speak to religion not just politics. He is an example of what all politicians do in a country where religion is influential and has power.

Page 8 Cardinal John Henry Newman is quoted by Christopher Hitchens. Here is the quote, "The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die in extremist agony, than that one soul, I will not say, will be lost, but should commit one venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one farthing without excuse".

Hitchens comments on that page that that is essential fanaticism. It implies that we are part of God's cruel experiment in which he makes us morally sick and commands us to be well.

I would add that The Catechism of Christian Doctrine proves Newman's interpretation right for it says that sin, which it defines as an offence against God, is the greatest of all evils. I would add that those who ask, "It would be a sin for millions to die in extreme agony so how could that be better than even one small sin?" fail to see that Newman is saying that it is better for evils we have not caused ourselves to befall us than for us to sin slightly.

Jesus said that we must love God as Lord with all our potential - not some of it. This is another way of saying that disobeying the Lord or Boss is the worst sin. If God comes first then failing to love him accordingly is the worst sin and not murder. Religion lamely says that this is not true for murder is sinful and evil because it is failing to love God. But that is an admission that my deduction is right. Moreover, murder and failing to love God are not the same thing.

I would add that if there is an all-good and all-perfect God, it is automatically true that offending him or disobeying him is the worst evil. Hurting people is not the worst evil - the disobedience is the problem.

The believer however religious often does not have the guts to become a paragon of religious evil. Many believers delude themselves and remain good despite embracing evil doctrine.

Hitchens should have said that the majesty of atheism is rooted in the fact that the atheist considers people dying in agony to be a worse evil than any moral defect.

Hitchens said that religion makes incredible claims and fails to match them with incredible evidence. He said religion fails to provide even ordinary evidence (page 9). It often happens though that a religion provides some evidence but the problem is that the evidence is not very convincing. Religion because of its poor record on evidence leads smart people to say stupid things and lures good people into doing evil things. Hitchens says on page 10 that you need religion in order to change good people into bad people.

Hitchens points to the failure of Muslims and Jews to live in peace and compromise as proof that religion can be bad. They refuse to make peace out of a sense of loyalty to God.

On page 11 he succinctly relays Catholic teaching that AIDS is bad but using condoms is worse!

Tony Blair then responded to Hitchens' points.

Blair simply ignored the points Hitchens made about Catholic doctrine being essential fanaticism and religion's lack of concern for evidence for its claims. Hitchens was good enough to express them and Blair in his craftiness rudely refused to deal with them. Blair just shrugged them off because he knew he couldn't deal with them.

Blair said that it is true that people have done terrible things in the name of religion.

My comment at this point would be that he is refusing to admit they do it because of religion. He is giving the impression that those who do evil are doing it in the name of religion and not because of it. To say its done in the name of religion implies nothing more than that you say - be it true or false - that its done for your religion. Anybody could say that. Jack the Ripper could say he murdered in the name of Islam even if he never met a Muslim in his life or thinks the Islamic faith is rubbish. Blair is craftily denying that religion ever does harm!

Blair then pointed out that Christian and Islamic and Jewish relief organisations do great work.

If you are an atheist or have leanings towards atheism, you may want to help others. Atheism has not got the global social structure or network that those religions have. Blair is trying to make out that those good people are necessarily Christians or Muslims or Jews. You can be sure that many of them are only pretending to have faith and so are not true members of the religions. Some of them will be atheists. You need to help others to make yourself happy. The fact that you have a good heart makes you trusting of others in general. Your happiness improves. The atheist then who does not believe in life after death SHOULD BE MORE inclined to have quality of life here and now which means he or she SHOULD BE A BETTER PERSON than the religious believer.

The next point Blair makes is to blatantly lie that all faiths agree that we must love and serve God through serving and loving others. But to love others for God is really loving God only. To love another person is not to love God. Its a lie to say it is. There are such things as terrorist religions. Mormonism was a vicious persecutor in Utah. Some sects thrive on fear and members whip themselves until the blood runs. Does Scientology love anybody who leaves its ranks?

Take the Roman Catholic Church. It is incorrect to call it the Roman Catholic faith. Many who claim to be Roman Catholic do not recognise papal teaching authority. Every person has his own faith based on Roman Catholicism - that is the reality. And one Catholic may endorse beliefs that are seen as evil and dangerous by another. There are as many Catholic faiths as there are Catholics and not all of them really care about loving and serving God. What about Catholics who use magic prayers to manipulate God?

A terrorist religion is still a religion. It does not help to pretend that its not a religion but just an excuse for people getting together to plot and execute evil. Some deny that evil sects that claim to be Christian or Muslim really are Christian or Muslim. The plot here is to keep Christianity and Islam looking good. ISIS is a religious denomination that claims to be Islamic. It is a Muslim religion. Some say that it is not THE Muslim religion! But who says that mainstream moderate Muslims (do they really exist?) understand Islam and ISIS does not? So it could be THE Muslim religion.

Some make a distinction between bad religion and good religion. Others, a bit more realistically, speak of better and worse religion. To say a religion is not a religion just because it is a terrorist religion implies that if say Islam is more damaging than Christianity, it follows that it is less of a religion than Christianity!

Is it really right to say that there is bad religion and good? Religion is just religion like electricity is just electricity. Religion in a nutshell is an allegiance of worship and service to a supernatural power or powers. The whole point of that is so that social and moral rules can be preached, sanctioned and enforced in the name of the supernatural. Its about control. Thus religion is intrinsically manipulative.

Blair knows that in the Jewish scriptures, the Hebrews were to love other Hebrews as themselves and keep away from other nations and consider themselves the chosen race. Its not true that every religion is all about love and service. The religions disagree often completely on how people must love and serve.

Blair then approvingly spoke of Rabbi Hillel's lie that the Law of God in the Torah was all about treating others as you would like to be treated. And that coming from a man who knew that the Torah God laid out instructions for the cruel elimination of certain sinners. Adulteresses had to be dealt with by stoning.

Blair then argued that science and faith are compatible because science is about the physical world and how it works while faith is about what values we should have in relation to science and the world.

Again that is a lie. He knows fine well that Christianity says that if you can sin all you want and turn to God for mercy on your deathbed you will go to Heaven.

Blair said on page 14 that if religion vanishes, the religious fanatics will be gone but there will still be fanatics.

This is a very weak argument. If religion can be fanatical, then we cannot say we must encourage religion as there will always be fanatics anyway. If religion is gone there will be no religious fanatics and that can only be a good thing. There will be enough fanaticism around without religion churning out its own version of it.

On page 14 he claimed that he did not deny that religion can be a force for evil. Then he claimed that anybody doing bad in the name or religion was following a perversion of religious faith. But he contradicts himself here. To say religion can be a force for evil is to reject the view, "Its not religion that is bad but perversions of it."

Hitchens replied that religion undermines women's rights and because it does not empower women or give them fertility rights it promotes poverty.

Hitchens argued that the giving of money to charity by Catholics was conscience money. His point was that if you are part of a faith that promotes preferring AIDS to using condoms among the poor, then you will give those people help just to ease your guilt.

Hitchens pointed out that the harm done by religion is not cancelled out by the good that it does. He said the good is nothing in comparison to the harm. I'd add that today the world is wrecked due to the popularity of moral relativism. Religion though it condemns it has led to it. People do not like to say if a religion is true or false so they settle for saying, "All religions are true for those who accept them. There is no religion truer than another." And they do that out of fear for they know in this nuclear age that religion could cause unrest and spark off the final world war. So they try to get everybody to airbrush the badness in the name of tolerance. Religion leading to relativism is a clear example of how it does harm. And the harm only escalates the longer time goes on.

An example, that comes to mind now is how the Catholic Church requires the belief that the human race sprang from two sinful parents and dismisses the DNA proof that this cannot be true. The Bible is preferred to science and this lie about the two parents, Adam and Eve, is promoted to children and the vulnerable in school.

Blair on page 18 spoke of people who didn't have religious faith who did good works.

Blair said about the nuns doing good work among AIDS victims in Africa. He said they might have been as good without religious faith but he said their faith motivated them to do good.

I want to explore this.

The notion that religion is altruistic is bizarre considering it has no problem with people becoming hermits and religion gives you beliefs that incite a need for sacrificing yourself that would not be needed or beneficial at all if religion is false. And your self-sacrifice will have to affect others. There is no getting away from that.

It is an insult to say that they might have been as good without religion. If you are good you will not need religion to motivate you. Is it necessarily their faith that motivates them? We all have an inbuilt programming to do some good for others.

If you are bad and need religion as a prop to make you good, then is the goodness real? If you are shy and use drink to make you talkative, then the chatty you is not really you. If religion is about hiding our badness then religion is intrinsically dangerous. It is bad no matter how much good it seems to produce.

Blair pleaded that we must not condemn all religious people because of the evil and bigotry of some religious people (page 19).

But we can condemn them for deliberately revering evil books as the word of God. That reverence is evil and bigotry.

If there are good people in religion, they will be still good people if religion vanishes. If they cease to be good without religion then they were not really good in the first place. If people are good they will be good religion or not. It is not religion then that is the cause of their goodness. Religion then should be condemned for its evil but it cannot be praised for its good. It is never religion that is good but the people who think they are part of it.

Suppose there is such a thing as good religion. The test of a good religion is not in what it teaches or how good its teaching is but in how good its members become. But we see nothing special about any religion's followers. While it is true that we cannot blame all religious people for the villainy some religious people engage in, we can argue that it is wrong to have religion when it doesn't really do anything for its members. They are to blame for keeping a religious system going that gives people a reason or excuse for violence and cruelty.

Hitchens points on page 20 how religious people were against Sebastiao Salgado for curing polio in Afghanistan to name one holy country. They said it was against God's design and a sin.

Timothy Dwight, President of Yale College, said it was a sin to take injections to cure your smallpox.

Blair responded on page 22 that one's assessment will be based on what their experience has been. He then recounted his experience of the care given by people of faith in Africa.

Hitchens pointed out how Judaism in its original form claimed to be God's tribe and thus excluded other people (page 27). This was to show that religion can be divisive and exclusivist.

Blair unsurprisingly ignored this assertion.

Blair "replied" that the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland reaching out across the divide to make peace refutes the exclusivism (page 26). He said that true religion is not about excluding a person because they are different. The hypocrisy of that coming from a man who joined the Roman Catholic Church that bans Protestants from receiving communion in its Churches is vulgar.

Hitchens responded that the Northern Ireland example was inadequate as there was division for hundreds of years and it resulted in stupidity and violence and unemployment and poverty and the Churches only reached out across the divide because everybody was sick of the problems (page 28).

Page 27 carries the extraordinary declaration by Blair that after Muhammad's death, Islam, gave "proper rights" to women.

Hitchens points out on page 37 that George W Bush's sense of being chosen by God is slightly sinister.

Pity he didn't explain what he meant. And its more than slightly sinister.

Hitchens points out on page 40 that the Bible has caused a lot of bloodshed and war over its declaration that God gave Israel to the Jews and its their land and nobody else's. He also pointed out how the Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, called in archaeologists to help find evidence for the Bible's claims so that he could prove it belonged to Judaism. No evidence at all was found.

He pointed out that Muslims believe in holy lands that belong to them too and feel that if they let anybody have them they are letting God down.

Blair refused to deal with this and do what an honest person would do: admit that faith in the Bible is dangerous.

Blair says on page 49 that he does not to any degree claim that a person of faith is in any way better than a person without faith in terms of being good and doing good works. He says that religion however gives many people an impulse to do good that they would not have otherwise. A total contradiction! Its very judgemental and arrogant for him to claim that he knows they would not have otherwise done the good! Very insulting to atheists!

To those who say that people who are good would be equally inspired to do so by humanism or atheism, Blair replies that believers sense something bigger than themselves and that gives them humility (page 48). But that is not necessarily true! We all know very religious people whose arrogance is astonishing! And to avoid anger against God, the holy person has to give God permission and consent to do whatever he wants in the person's life - be it nice or be it horrendous. The person then manages to keep feeling in control - it is control to consent to God doing whatever he wills. The person reasons, "I will only make my life feel worse if I refuse to accept the things I cannot change." It is not about humility. What on earth would Blair know about humility?

Hitchens had pointed out earlier that there is a human need not to take all the credit for what we do. I'd say that if we fear making mistakes we will not want to be put on a pedestal by others. Hitchen's was pointing out that the human need inclines us to want to believe in a God who is the real doer of the good we do.

In his response, page 42, Blair says that Hitchens strongest argument that religion is bad is that the scriptures of a religion command harm in the name of divine authority. Blair's argument was that the scriptures were speaking of past circumstances and that the essence of scripture is love expressed through Jesus Christ. He then concludes by saying that the argument is difficult to answer but he thinks there is an answer to it.

Thinking there is an answer is not good enough. You need a clear and confident answer. Blair cannot expect people to accept his peaceable interpretation when its only his opinion. And to point to the good in the Bible only makes the book worse not better for then there is no excuse at all for the nasty bits. And Blair cannot give us any Bible verses to justify his interpretation. And if there is a God, there is no doubt he can have the right to tell us to liquidate another nation. If he has rights over life, then he can delegate that right to human beings.

And as for the essence of scripture being love as expressed through Jesus, the Old Testament - despite attempts to distort it - does not prepare for the coming of Jesus and it is not concerned about any Messiah or Christ never mind Jesus. And Jesus was abusive in Matthew 23 and called a suffering girl a dog. He never did anything normal to help the poor and the suffering. Like a rich man giving out of his abundance because it was easy for him and he had nothing to lose, Jesus only helped people with magic and miracles. Clearly its a case of a man who was useless socially and so the Church had to invent miracles about him to make him seem to be different from the temple-rioting sociopath he actually was. And we know today that punishment is not about helping the criminal or bad person but about teaching them new ways to do evil. Jesus endorsed punishment. He even spoke of eternal punishment. Blair is only taking advantage of the fact that many Christians know little about their godman Jesus and that they think he must have been wonderful.

Blair said that the scriptures were speaking of past circumstances and that the essence of scripture is love. If he means that the violence commanded by God in the Bible was justified and was loving for the circumstances were so extremely bad that violence became the only way to to treat them then he is just an evil person who holds that divine revelation endorsing violence is to be obeyed. The Israelites were told by God to keep away from the other nations surrounding them and they had to take God's word for it that they had to cruelly liquidate them. So the Israelites did not know if the corruption of the other nations was bad enough to justify such an attack. And those Christians who bomb abortion clinics are influenced by scriptures such as those. In fact, what the Christians do makes more sense than say the Israelites slaughtering the Canaanites. At least its a direct attack against a perceived evil. And if Canaan was sacrificing children to its gods, what about the children slain during the war with Israel?

Blair's knowledge of the nastiness of the Bible and his willingness to desensitise us to it makes us ask if the Bible encouraged him in the unjust war against Iraq? Iraq was a non-Christian nation. Was that why he felt it was okay to attack it on the basis that it had weapons of mass destruction that it never had? His partner in war-mongering Bush the US President like Blair was also Christian ....