

Religion and Civil War

By religion we mean organised religion. Unorganised religion is best referred to by the word spirituality.

The Catholic and Protestant faiths caused civil war in Ireland.

They played a huge role in the civil wars. But was this religious input the precipitating cause - that is to say, the principle reason for the war? Is there such a thing as religious war or are there wars with a religious dimension?

The Catholic and Protestant faiths teach that we must love one another and even our enemies. Does that put them in the clear? No. They teach this love as a religious principle revealed to them by God. Thus it follows that correct religious belief is the foundation of religious morality. That is to say, correct belief - defined as believing what your religion requires you to believe - matters more than doing good. Good becomes a side-effect of correct belief. This attitude is the seed of religious hatred and conflict. They argue as well that if your belief is incorrect, then you will only imagine you do good. You are a well-meaning trouble-maker. There are plenty of examples of people who make great sacrifices for what they know must be religious lies. During the Easter Vigil Mass, Catholics are unperturbed at references to a God who kills the Egyptians and then asks the people to sing a hymn of praise for his evil. And even worse there is a prayer asking that the whole world will become children of Abraham (Christian) and enjoy the inheritance of Israel. The inheritance in the Bible is a political one. Many of those people read all that creepy stuff and pray those ugly prayers and still suffer for the Church. This is fanaticism in essence even if the fanaticism does not spill out in a violent way.

The Mormons were viciously persecuted on every level. That did not stop the whole persecuted leadership of the Church in 1835 lying about revelations that Joseph Smith received. He altered his own revelations to produce a new fake book of scripture called Doctrine and Covenants.

If a man can make great sacrifices to become wealthy even though he knows he will not live long enough to get any enjoyment out of it and is now ready to burst open with stress, then a man can sacrifice foolishly for God. Both men devote themselves to something that is good but they devote themselves in a perverted way. The whole point of devotion to God is claimed to be down to the fact that it is good to do so. A man then can be a fool for good and whether that good is God or money is irrelevant. People do great harm willingly in the name of good. The avaricious monster does it so that his family may have material security. He's still a believer in good. The point is, belief in God makes no difference to a person's behaviour. It cannot. The person changes themselves if they turn from harming others to helping them. The emphasis put on God by religion is just superstition.

Those who abhor the conflicts will nevertheless say, "God works through human error and sin to bring people to the faith he has revealed." In other words, as bad as the conflicts are they are not all bad and are about a distorted support for religious truth as opposed to religious error. They will judge that some good will come. That is their judgement on the human level. But then they bring God into it. They say he will use the conflict to promote the truth. To see some good on the human level is fine but to bring God into it means that if there is no God, they are EXAGGERATING the good that will come. That is dangerous. It is very Pollyanna. It is vulgar.

The doctrine that you have to be nice to people and educate them in religion to bring them to God contradicts the Bible teaching that only God converts people by working inside them. Faith is seen as a supernatural gift from God. Such a teaching is no help when religions fight each other.

Religious conflicts primarily about doctrine can and do happen. Zwingli and Knox the reformers wanted Catholic priests put to death. Brigham Young butchered certain sinners to make their blood flow to atone their sins. Moses and Jesus agreed that the law of God was right to demand that certain people be stoned to death. Jesus agreed with it in principle as even his treatment of the adulteress shows. He said its okay for non-sinners to stone her to death.

Also, religions do tell lies on each other and hate each other even though they may not take up arms.

Wars can start off just because of little things. For example, Irish society has the tendency to label people Catholic or Protestant. A person who was not baptised but who is considered a Catholic by accident will be labelled Catholic though in Church doctrine she is not Catholic. And those who call themselves Protestants while believing in nothing in the Bible will be accepted as Protestants. The label is where the sectarianism starts. Its a tiny thing but the consequences are huge. People vote along sectarian lines. Catholics live in one housing estate and Protestants in another. They won't mix. The label is about putting people into boxes to make divisions among them and has no concern for how their beliefs, whatever they are, give them their identity. The Catholic who believes all Luther wrote is given a Lutheran identity by his faith. The label does not respect what he truly is. It cares little for genuine religious freedom.

Religion claims that God made us all to have a relationship with him and each other in his true and holy religion. Those who reject that relationship are therefore not as valuable as those who accept. If religion is nice to them, it is because it tolerates them and treats them as potential friends of God. Thus the "concern" is manipulative.

If religion has a role in a conflict then the conflict will be harder to resolve.

A person may see her religion as her identity. She is the religion and the religion is her. To insult it or question it is to insult or question her. This sense of religious identity is made even stronger if there are close ties between her religion and the state. It is like the Irish perception that if you are not Catholic you are not really Irish even if you speak Irish and worship all that is Irish and were born in Ireland and are a model citizen.

One religion has a worldview and another has a different one. A world view is a huge thing - it is about how you see the world and see life. Different worldviews mean that people will have real difficulties in understanding each other. The risk of misinterpreting actions and statements is very high.

Negotiations will be very hard and they could be fragile. They will fail unless a heroic effort is made to help the religions build relationships and understand each other so that conflict can be resolved or prevented from escalating.

Some religions preach that members of other religions will die and go to Hell to suffer forever. It is tempting to take the line that they mean well but underestimate the psychological damage this can do and the anger leading to conflict it can engender. It is tempting because it seems a friendlier assessment of them. It is feared that condemning them as bad could make them worse. It is more accurate to say that they will use the condemning as an excuse for becoming worse. It's their responsibility assuming they are not completely programmed or brainwashed. Also, we all know that something we think is minor could bring devastation to another person. For example, ingratitude to a child can damage the child forever. And the hellfire preachers don't actually need to tell people about Hell. They could encourage people to see through and shun the sins that lead to Hell. Telling them is about trying to hurt them and control them. The preachers NEVER mean well. It is improper and irrational and presumptuous to hold that one form of abuse is more damaging than another. It depends on the person. A child who is told that if he masturbates and dies he will rot in Hell forever could suffer far more because of that teaching than he might over being sexually molested at 7 years of age.

When a religion says that you will be damned forever in Hell unless you join it, it is waging war on you. It might not be a war like on earth but its a war they hope will happen in the afterlife.

Arguing that religion is about peace does not help. It is irresponsible to encourage such an error. If religion can cause war, it helps nobody to pretend that it does not. Religion can be used to justify violence as easily as it can peace. If religion is made, man is violent and we can expect violence in religion.

If each man were his own religion instead of being part of a sect or denomination there would be no trouble. Organised religion is sectarian by default. If a Catholic held that his cat was turned into Jesus Christ without any visible change such as in the Mass he would not be respected. Yet the Catholics want respect for their notion that the bread and wine at Mass become Jesus' body and blood.

The seeds of civil war are in religion.