

## When believers kill over perceived threats to their religious identity

Identity is what you think you are mainly or only or partly about and it helps say something about you. It is about you feeling connected to yourself and to some others but not all. So there is something divisive about it. The lowest form of it is when you just take a label and turn it into your identity when in fact the label is not descriptive of you at all. Imagine a 100% straight person claiming to be gay! Or an atheist claiming to be a devout Catholic. Devout Catholic is a label too!

Many feel that religion is a verb not a noun. Others feel it is both. If it is a verb then a Catholic who does little in the way of Catholic is not acting Catholic and is not Catholic. The idea that religion is a verb is the preferred one in the world. That shows that there is a lot of play-acting and lies surrounding religious identity. Somebody dipped in a Catholic christening bowl will use the Catholic label - they want to be entitled to it even if they do nothing to be entitled and the Church itself does not consider them entitled. If you have to do something to be counted as a member of a religion at the very least you have to find a way to believe. Belief is doing and belief is more powerful than any other influence on you so belief should give rise to enough action to show that you are a real member of that religion. Somebody doing something to you without your express and informed permission is superstition then not religion. Religion is about your doing, nobody else's.

Religious affiliation should be sincere which essentially means that there should be no deliberate cherry-picking. Religious affiliation should be an individual right and choice. It is not something that may be taken lightly. Otherwise it becomes treated as and seen as an inherited trait. That leads to things such as bigotry and opposition to anybody who criticises it. It leads to a misplaced sense of entitlement. It stops you being a friend of truth while all the time you are not a true friend to your religion either.

Ideology is an addiction to an idea or set of ideas. Cherry picking or being selective with facts is the core ingredient. The person who deliberately supports a false religion cannot be condemned while the cherry picker is equally an enemy of truth and of people for people need truth gets away with it.

It can be argued that a religion that is about habit, culture or an ideology is not a religion. Cultural Catholicism cares only about rites and shows and not commitment or spirituality and thus defies the spiritual rights of children in particular who are turned out for first communion and confirmation and never see the church again until their own funeral. Such "religion" can be worse than the real deal and discriminates against the real deal.

Each person defines herself or himself. Too many let others define them but that means nothing for you know you best. An imposed definition is not a definition. Nobody can define you. You cannot define custard as tea - so an imposed definition is worthless and if it matches the right definition that is not because of any merit in imposing definitions but down to luck. Imposing definitions is inherently disrespectful.

How does one define oneself in the world?

First is it in terms of what you think/believe or like?

Second or in terms of what you do not think/believe or like?

In fact you will try to make it the first but you are wrong. To accept anything is to reject everything that is contrary to it. And there is only one possibility accepted out of many perhaps countless ones. So you are more defined by what you reject (or ignore or consider unimportant which are rejection in a sense) than by what you accept.

You define yourself in terms of religion when you take on a religious identity. If the religion is not really right for you will impose the definition on yourself which is not good.

Many know fine well that the Bible and Quran teach violence and regard the violence endorsed by God and his prophets as something to be celebrated. So they think that by telling Christians and Muslims that they are beautiful religions of peace that they can sweet-talk them into being non-violent and staying that way.

When religion or people who carry the label of a religion commit acts of terror and cruelty, people can be too eager to deny that they have a religious motivation for what they are doing. Some in the religion will say, "They are only calling themselves Christian or whatever but they are in fact not really Christian."

Some say that though dangerous religious faiths such as ISIS, base themselves on violent scriptures such as the Quran, that it does not follow that the holy texts are to blame. They say the problem is how they see themselves as fighting for their

religious identity against threats to it. The man in ISIS will see Christian decadence as a threat to being a Muslim as he understands it. He sees other religious identities as threats.

Also, some in ISIS, if not most, are inspired by the violence in the Quran. Some say they are and attempt to provide passages from it to prove it. So, many in an evil religion will say they are only doing the evil commanded in their holy books by God, others will not do so in case they put prospective converts off. They are motivated by the books but do not want to admit it.

It is impossible to use the holy books as an excuse for doing evil if there is nothing in them that has ever condoned violence. Now it is clear that Christian and Muslim holy texts are to blame in the sense that they do not actually say violence is wrong. They enable the problem. But the Bible and the Quran do more than that. They actually glorify violence and say that God has endorsed and commanded it. Jesus said the Jewish Bible had no errors and called it God's Word and he would have known its God demanded that homosexuals be stoned to death without pity.

If you suspect your evil religion is going against God in endorsing violence, the fact remains that if God has commanded terrible things in its holy book, that you will reason, indeed you should reason, "God has commanded brutal things in the past. It does not follow that he approves of what we are doing now. But if we are wrong he will understand. It is no huge deal if we are wrong for he has sanctioned violence that is as bad or worse in the past. We are only following our conscience."

And if all in ISIS were not even looking at the Quran at all, they certainly feel that though war is hugely crazy and dangerous even for them that something is protecting them. They still have faith that the sacrifices are God's will so that those who die in the cause of ISIS are part of God's plan for its triumph. They will impute the protection to Allah. The teaching that God lets us to evil when he can bring out of it means that even if your warmongering is wrong he can still protect you.

We critics of religion and the bloodshed it causes can forget that religion is often far more a matter of identity than it is a matter of beliefs and practices. The phrase "I am a Muslim," "I am a Christian," "I am a Jew" and the like is, often, not so much a description of what a person believes or what rituals he or she follows, as a simple statement of identity, of how the speaker views her or his place in the world. No religious believer or religion lives in a vacuum. Not all believers get their values principally from the scriptures or sacred writings. People often make a lens based on how they look at their own culture, country, nation and politics and view the Quran or the Bible through the lens. If so, devotion to scriptures is more about how people can mould and shape them to suit themselves than about the scriptures claiming to be the very truth of God and to be written by God. They can prefer the nice commands to the bad ones or vice versa.

From this we can work some things out,

- The religious identity can lead to violence as much as religious beliefs and scriptures can

- indeed without the label to create the us and them there is no them for religious belief to turn you against

- Violent scriptures can inspire religionists to become violent even though there is no proof that the scriptures approve of it in the current circumstances

- Violent scriptures are still to blame for this violence for their authors would have known what human nature was like and how it likes to see things through a lens and not as they are. If God wrote them through the authors then he is to blame.

- If a scripture contradicts itself on violence, it is still to blame. An example of this is when the Quran says that killing one person is the same as killing all humankind (5:32) but that does not stop it commanding Muhammad's followers to seek out idolaters and slay them (9:5). How this conflict will be dealt with depends on every believer. That scriptures want it to depend on the believer makes them to blame for risking turning the believer violent. And even the nice statement that to kill one is to kill all is actually nasty. To kill one is not the same as killing everybody and it is hate speech to say it is. Is it any wonder it has not stopped Islamic murdering?

- A religion and scripture that creates a disconnect from reality and has people dismissing evidence and facts that don't fit the religion, is to blame if violence ensues even if it does not command or endorse it. To disconnect people from reality is violence and violence breeds violence. It seeks to take away your perception and that may have you perceiving that violence is not violence.

- The claim made by some that violent Muslim groups that call themselves Muslim and claim an Islamic identity cannot be used to make a logical statement about Islam as a global religion is spurious. So we are not to generalise about Islam based on the actions of some Islamic sects. The fact remains that the sects are not excommunicated by mainstream Islam or

considered non-Muslim. They are Muslim. It may be protested that the groups kill Muslims so they are not Muslims. But that is irrelevant. It is an example, of how they may see the Muslims as not being Muslims or that killing them is tragic but the lesser evil in the scheme of things. It could be an example of how devotees of a religious label may refuse to ascribe that label to other people in order to dehumanise them and kill them. It could be a testament to how terrible labelling can be.

- The argument that IS is not Islamic is stupid for a bad Muslim is still a Muslim. And IS does use the violent texts of the Koran to justify itself. The reality is that even if its interpretation is mistaken, a faith that regards violent revelations from God as authentic is responsible as a faith and is the sea in which the bad fish swim in. The same goes for Christianity which simply has no right at all to declare the more nasty fulminations of Jesus and his support for the divine inspiration of the violent Old Testament to be of God. If you hate violence you do not revere or promote violent books. Period. Even if IS were not Islamic it is still proof of what a religion or faith can turn into - a death cult.

A religious identity and a religious label are related but not the same. When you take on a religion as an identity you take the good baggage and the bad. If you take on the religious label as an identity you cannot really claim the good baggage but you definitely can claim the bad. A label has nothing to do with anybody being good so it has everything to do with them being bad.