

A CHRISTIAN'S FEEBLE ANSWERS TO HOW RELIGION MANIPULATES PEOPLE INTO VIOLENCE

Keith Ward wrote *Is Religion Irrational?* Written from a Christian viewpoint, it says that one sign of irrationality would be religious violence being caused by faith. He denies religion leads to violence.

Ward tells us on page 129, that atheists and unbelievers understand religion as a major force for evil in the world and according to them it breeds division and conflict and that the surer the religion is that it is the truth the more intolerant and vicious it can be. He says he does not believe that religion is necessarily that bad. To say it is not necessarily that bad implies that it can be that bad.

Religion means to bind or to obligate people to believe in certain things. The religious person, though he or she may dialogue with other religions, is not allowed to be open to the possibility of admitting the other religion is right and not allowed to consider converting. True tolerance recognises the right and freedom of a person to cross over from one faith to another. Religion is intrinsically intolerant.

When I do evil, I am attracted by the good I see in it. If I am a religious person, I will see this good as part of God. We all disagree on what is good or not. Thus my God will differ from yours in the most important matters - good and evil. It is not true that Catholics have one religion. Each person is his or her own religion and they all pretend to be one religion.

Ward rejects the view that even if a Christian is not mad, his or her beliefs certainly are mad (page 130). Even from this study alone we can see that the beliefs are crazy.

Ward claims he does not mind being told his beliefs are false and that the evidence is weak but he does mind being told they are ridiculous and gruesome (page 131). But if the evidence is weak then what else can they be but ridiculous? And the Christian notion of a God writing a Bible that commands murder in the name of religion is gruesome. What about his command that men must be circumcised?

Ward says that the world wars were not down to religion and that the desire for sex and money and power are the big motivations behind violence (page 132). He says religion can contribute to this violence but its role when it does is small. He says religion is not necessarily intolerant.

World War II was caused by a man religious in his own way - Hitler. This was not about sex or money. It was about a man who knew that true power is to be found through religion so he created his Nazi religion. If you want power, you have to start a religion and religion is based on the notion of thought-crimes. Religion helps to control people through controlling their hearts.

Pope Pius XII did nothing about the genocide of non-Roman Catholics in Yugoslavia. Religion tends to let the state do its dirty work for it. That is even worse than going and doing the dirty stuff itself.

Ward says that militant Islam is not violent and intolerant on religious grounds. It is a reaction to how Muslims are treated by non-Muslim nations (page 132, 133). He then claims he condemns terrorist forms of Islam absolutely.

Then why do they quote the Koran to justify their actions? If religion had nothing to do with it, they would simply make the case for a just war and leave the Koran out of it unless they pick out the bits where the Koran may be benevolent.

A person who seeks to obscure or distort the fact that religion's do have gods and scriptures that endorse violence is desensitised to that violence and becomes part of the problem of religiously motivated violence. He is helping those who wish to make war for he lulls society into a false sense of security. He by implication will have those who tell the truth that gods and Bibles endorse harm silenced while those who lie that religions are all about peace get all the airtime.

Ward says he believes in Christianity and that it is faith that is possibly true. Like an agnostic, he would say that it is possible that prayer works and makes one closer to God. Some agnostics say prayer is reasonable even though they say they do not judge if there is a God or not. They argue that this is every bit as reasonable as a man stranded on a desert island who yells for help though he may never be heard. Giving thanks to a God who may not be there would be just as important. But God does not have senses or feelings. Thus the cry for God to take pity or the desire to give him thanks is misplaced. It would be insane to be thankful to a God who is so unlike us that he has no feelings or no body.

Atheist Sam Harris's declared that insofar as a Muslim considers Islam to be the only viable way to God and that the Koran explains this way correctly they will view anybody who doubts Islam with contempt. Ward criticises this view (page 134). He claims that the Koran says non-Muslims such as Jesus and Mary must be revered so this is not true. He says that Muslims regard Christianity and Judaism as paths to God and Islam teaches that each nation has its own prophet. He then says that if there is only one revealed way to God, that is not a permit to despise those who do not have the way. The reason he gives is that God wants to be freely followed and will not compel anybody for he loves everybody.

Ward tells some lies here.

The Muslim will certainly regard the sceptic as at best and unwitting opponent of the truth and of God. Contempt is around the corner. And what about the person who thinks they know Islam is true and they still oppose it and encourage doubt? The Muslims should or will regard at least some doubters with contempt.

And the claim that each nation has its own prophet is irrelevant to today's Muslims who say that Muhammad was the last of the prophets.

Ward quotes the Quran as saying that he who kills a person unless the person is a murderer or spreading mischief in the land is as bad as a person who has killed the whole world. This is supposed to prove, according to him, that Islam does not believe in killing unbelievers. But the text DOES permit killing. And surely some unbelievers in Islam are spreading mischief in the form of a false religion and can be killed?

Harris stated that religion brings out our power to be incredibly brutal. To this Ward says, that only thinking or feeling that others are less human than us, thinking or feeling that they are dangerously irrational and stupid, or thinking or feeling that only the fittest should survive makes us violent brutes. He thinks religion does not do it for it says all are equal and precious (page 135). On page 136, Ward says that given the chance most human beings have been intolerant when they got the power to repress others. Religious people may feel they are repressing and controlling us by prayer so in principle they are no better than dictators.

I like Ward's definition of a liberal society as one that allows free expression of beliefs and ideas that do no obvious harm to others (page 136). But I would add there is a risk of non-obvious harm. That is why liberal society must not shy away from checking out the disadvantages of the beliefs.

But Ward is hypocritical. Jesus himself preached about the horrors of Hell a lot and this would have disturbed children. Also, it's a worry for a Christian child if a beloved parent won't turn to God. The child will fear her or him going to Hell.

Page 138 deals with Sam Harris's assertion that to say our intuitions about right and wrong in relation to the wellbeing of others and ourselves are sourced in religion is absurd. Ward takes this to mean that Harris is opposing those who say that we have got the truths from Heaven and we must not think about them at all but just accept them. Ward says that we must only believe in revelation from God if the revelation is kind and morally blameless.

Ward is contradicting Jesus' teaching that the main commandment is to love the one true God of Israel with all one's heart and soul and strength and mind. If we decide what is good then if we start to think that God agrees with us then clearly God is not being put first. We are putting ourselves first and using God to hide that. Also, the commandment appeared in the context of commanding us to obey the Torah or Law of Moses in the Bible which contained many brutal revelations. God wanted two men caught having sex stoned to death.

Page 140 accuses atheists of holding that morality is a human invention. Ward says we need to hold that God sees what is really good for us and tells us so we do not invent morality but learn about it from him. He says atheists have a morality but it is not a morality about anything being objectively right or objectively wrong. This is nonsense. Torturing a baby to death for no reason and when there is no justification is undeniably bad for it causes great suffering and takes a life. You don't need a God to tell you that you shouldn't do it. And if you do then what does that say about you?

Christians accusing atheists of treating morality as a human invention suggests they think that atheists should not be tolerated. The person who is against morality is necessarily against the law of the land too. The law is based on morality.

Christianity is lying that you need to believe in God to believe in morality. You can believe in God and not know right and wrong very well.

Belief in God does not necessarily mean you are not inventing your morality. Ward would have to agree that cults such as Mormonism invent morality despite believing in a kind of God. His argument seems to imply that you need to believe in God as he has revealed himself to the real Christian religion. Belief alone will not help. One needs to know what one believes in and revelation is needed for that.

Page 141 mentions Harris's declaration that Christians lie and distort the facts in order to avoid having to endorse the Bible God's commands that we exterminate certain people for the glory of God.

Ward denies this but it is true. Even Christians saying those rules were made by God but he changed them since are saying that in principle God can command genocide. They are saying they would get involved if they were transported to the times before the changes in a Time Machine. They claim the right to honour such evil as the will of God thus they cannot complain if some prophet comes along saying the rule has been reinstated.

Page 154 states that Harris and atheists are right to declare that blind faith without evidence is dangerous and irrational. But what is not said is that religious blind faith is the worst of the lot.

Page 169 says that religion is not dangerous though there are dangers in religion. This seems to be saying that the dangers exist because of the abuse of religion and they are not religion's fault. But if the dangers are in the abuse of religion how can you say the dangers are in religion? Ward is a soft-soaper.

We tend to be irrational in many ways and rational in others in all our relationships. Birds die every day. We let our cats kill them. We eat the more intelligent birds for dinner. Yet despite this we can love our canaries. We can be devastated when they die. This seems irrational. If a bird is valuable it is not valuable because it is your pet but because it is a bird. So all birds dying should devastate us. In fact our love for one bird is akin to idolatry - it denies other birds the same value in our hearts. It is not their fault they are not our pets and we demean them. Do not say, "It is not that we demean them! It is just that we think our bird is special." But that proves the point and denial of our darkness just makes us worse. Our irrationality makes our relationship to God suspect. Is it really God we intend to serve or love as he is or are we pretending to care a lot about God as he is? Belief in God is not a good thing for most if not all are fake worshippers. We are so good at pretending that we care about good as it is. No we care about what we want it to be. Because of this problem, the genuine believer in religion or God will study and be open to changing their religion if it turns out that it is not the one true faith and therefore hindrance to truth. There are few who even care!

The lesson in this that our service of God and belief in him needs to be as rational as possible and nearly completely rational. Suppose there is a God. God is not like us and will not need us to feel love for him - he is a God for whom action matters not feelings or sentiments.

Conclusion

Keith Ward errs or lies on every major point. His distortion fools no one. He has persuaded us that religion is indeed violently irrational.

The Cambridge Companion to Atheism, edited by Michael Martin, Cambridge, New York, 2007
Is Religion Irrational? Keith Ward, Lion Books, Oxford, 2011