

## **Talk – ‘Hot Topic’: Does Religion cause Violence?**

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### **Handout**

#### **Addendum: Does Religion cause Violence?**

A brief look at history will sadly provide many instances where violence has been motivated by particular religious groups – and each religion has committed its share. For example:

- Christianity - think the Spanish inquisition, the ‘Holy’ Wars, and the establishment (and later abolition) of the African slave trade.
- Buddhism & Shintoism – lead to a totalitarian Japanese Empire which gave shape to World War II.
- Islam – think September 11, the Madrid and London train bombings, the Bali bombings, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the emergence of ISIS.
- Hinduism – consider the bloody strikes around India on Christians churches and Muslim Mosques.
- Judaism – think of the longstanding middle east conflict on the west bank with Muslims (both Judaism and Islam share responsibility for this violence)

It is very difficult to suggest that religion does NOT cause violence – at least in some way.

- In the interest of balance - It is equally not right, to say that violence is only the result of religion.
- We can be way too reductionistic about this issue.
- Communist Russia, the Chinese, the Cambodian regimes have all rejected organised religion.
- The French revolution (celebrated in Les Mis) rejected traditional religion for human reason.
- Yet in these societies, which champion rational thought and secularism – they too have each produced massive violence against their own people.
- The Marxists made the state absolute. The Nazis made race absolute. The Chinese made the empire absolute. And in the name of each, terrible acts of violence have been carried out.

Violence in the name of religion is a terrible reality. Violence in the name of secularism is as much a reality.

So how do we even begin to think about this issue?

#### **Wrong Information & Faulty Assumptions**

This is a big topic, in the interests of time, what follows are two factors which muddy our discussion. I state them here to acknowledge the way they colour our thinking about religion and violence.

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First, *violence is fuelled at times by wrong or biased information.*

We can be very thankful for the news services that we have here in Australia, but it is worth noting that the very nature of news reporting makes ‘normal’ what is actually the ‘abnormal’.

Newspapers and subscriptions sell, when there is something that catches people’s interest and many of those things are the extreme cases of any event. We don’t hear as much about the diplomatic wins, the peaceful resolutions, the respectful dialogue between leaders of state or religion that in many cases sit behind the good outcomes achieved around the world. Instead we hear about the killings, the hate, the violence – because those more ‘abnormal’ acts are more newsworthy.

Fuelled by each news account, we have more reason to see wrong in most religious or political views. This leads to a cynicism or agnosticism or atheism as the facts behind the circumstance remain hidden or unstated.

It is easier to hold to a false or exaggerated view than it is to prove a true one.

In thinking about this issue, we don’t want to minimise the tragedies that have occurred, but we need also to make sure we recognise that there is a larger story. And if we don’t, then we are at risk of thinking about this issue only through the lens of fear or emotion.

Second, when thinking about this issue, *it is helpful to acknowledge a faulty assumption.*

It is not a fair treatment to lump all religions into the same box when none of the religions agree on the fundamentals of belief.

If you consider Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity (the big 5) they differ on just about all the core issues: God, Sin, Salvation, Works, Justice, Death and Life after death, Judgement, Discipleship and the list goes on. And, in regards to our topic, those religions also disagree on the question of violence.

To say that all religions are the same is, at best - lazy or ignorant, and at worst - untrue.

To say the all religions lead to violence, lumps all religions into a box that makes it very difficult to recognise any of the distinctions that exist and therefore understand any of the causes which may lie behind an action performed in the name of faith.

It is not a fair treatment to ignore the fact, that in all religions, there are non-violent and peaceful *people*.

It is also not a fair treatment to ignore the fact that in all religions there are non-violent and peaceful *ideologies* which drive them to seek the good of the ‘god’ they strive to serve and the people they represent.

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So how do we begin to think about this issue? Let’s recognise that there are many valid factors and perspectives. Yet, there is one perspective which should above all shape this discussion - What does God think about the violence that he sees in the World?

Let’s look into his word and see what we can find.

*Go to [churchcentralonline.com](http://churchcentralonline.com) and search for ‘Does Religion cause Violence’ for the Bible Talk which addresses this ‘Hot Topic’.*