

The Causes of War

Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that “for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict.”^{1} Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, “Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today.”^{2} Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, “theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today.”^{3}

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.

This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults “see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree.”^{4}

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to

another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted

them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth century."[\[5\]](#)

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation."[{6}](#) Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods."[{7}](#) Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.[{8}](#)

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a

legitimizing device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans." [\[9\]](#) It wasn't until Christianity became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence."[{10}](#)

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'" [{11}](#) Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a "just war" view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but "there cannot be a pacifist state, merely a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it."[{12}](#) Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from

misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that “a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate.”[{13}](#)

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, “war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions.”[{14}](#)

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let’s consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, “be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process.”[{15}](#) Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, "If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is."[\[16\]](#)

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. *Ibid.*, 15.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 31.
6. *Ibid.*, 53.
7. *Ibid.*, 54.
8. *Ibid.*, 55.
9. *Ibid.*, 134.
10. *Ibid.*, 58.
11. *Ibid.*, 59.
12. *Ibid.*, 173.
13. *Ibid.*, 175.
14. *Ibid.*, 173.
15. *Ibid.*, 180.
16. *Ibid.*

The Just War Tradition in the Present Crisis

Is it ever right to go to war? Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese provides understanding of just war tradition from a biblical perspective.

Searching for Answers

Recent events have prompted Christians to ask moral questions concerning the legitimacy of war. How far should we go in punishing evil? Can torture ever be justified? On what basis are these actions premised? These problems remain especially acute for those who claim the Christian faith. Fortunately, we are not the first generation to face these questions. The use of force and violence has always troubled the Christian conscience. Jesus Christ gave his life freely without resisting. But does Christ's nonviolent approach deny government the prerogative to maintain order and establish peace through some measure of force? All government action operates on the premise of force. To deny all force, to be a dedicated pacifist, leads no less to a condition of anarchy than if one were a religious fascist. Extremes have the tendency to meet. In the past, Christians attempted to negotiate through the extremes and seek a limited and prescribed use of force in what has been called the Just War Tradition.



The Just War Tradition finds its source in several streams of Western thought: biblical teaching, law, theology, philosophy, military strategy, and common sense. Just War thinking integrates this wide variety of thought through

providing Christians with a general orientation on the issues of war and peace. This tradition transcends denominational barriers and attempts to supply workable answers and solutions to very difficult moral problems. Just War has its origins in Greco-Roman thinking as well as Christian theology: Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin have all contributed to its development.[\[1\]](#)

Just War thinking does not provide sure-fire ways of fighting guilt-free wars, or offer blanket acceptance of government action. It often condemns acts of war as well as condones. Just War presents critical criteria malleable enough to address a wide assortment of circumstances. It does not give easy answers to difficult questions; instead, it provides a broad moral consensus concerning problems of justifying and controlling war. It presents a living tradition that furnishes a stock of wisdom consisting of doctrines, theories, and philosophies. Mechanical application in following Just War teachings cannot replace critical thinking, genius, and moral circumspection in ever changing circumstances. Just War attempts to approximate justice in the temporal realm in order to achieve a temporal but lasting peace. It does not make pretensions in claiming infinite or absolute justice, which remain ephemeral and unattainable goals. Only God provides infinite justice and judgment in eternity through his own means. “‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30).

The Clash of Civilizations

To apply Just War criteria we must first have a reasonable assessment of current circumstances. The Cold War era witnessed a bipolar world consisting of two colossal opponents. The end of the Cold War has brought the demise of strict ideological battles and has propelled the advent of cultural divisions in a multi-polar world. Present and future conflicts exist across cultural lines. The “Clash of

Civilizations” paradigm replaces the old model of East vs. West.^{2} People are more inclined to identify with their religious and ethnic heritage than the old ideology. The West has emerged as the global leader, leaving the rest of the world to struggle either to free itself from the West or to catch it economically and technologically. The triumph of the West—or modernized, secular, and materialist society—has created a backlash in Islamic Fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism does not represent ancient living traditions but a modern recreation of ancient beliefs with a particular emphasis on political conquest. Fundamentalists do not hesitate to enter into battle or holy war (jihad) with the enemies of God at a political and military level. The tragic events of 9/11 and the continual struggle against terrorism traces back to the hostility Islamic fundamentalists feel towards the triumph of the West. They perceive Western global hegemony [ed. note: leadership or predominant influence] as a threat and challenge to their religious beliefs and traditions, as most Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals feel threatened by the invincible advance of modern secular society. The error of fundamentalism lies in thinking it can recreate the past and enforce those beliefs and conditions on the modern world. Coercion remains at the heart of fundamentalist practice, constituting a threat potentially worse than modern secular society.

This cultural divide causes Christians to reconsider the basis of warfare premised on the responsibilities of the state to defend civil society against the encroachments of religious extremism that fights in the name of God and for a holy cause or crusade.

This may sound strange at first to theological ears, but an absolute principle of Just War states that Christians never fight for “God and Country,” but only for “Country.” There is only a secular and civil but necessary task to be accomplished in war, never a higher mandate to inaugurate God’s kingdom. In

this sense Just War thinking attempts to secularize war by which it hopes to limit its horrendous effects.

Holy War or Just War

An essential distinction divides Just War from holy war. Just War does not claim to fight in the name of God or even for eternal causes. It strictly concerns temporal and political reasons. Roland Bainton sums up this position: "War is more humane when God is left out of it." [\[3\]](#) This does not embrace atheism but a Christian recognition concerning the value, place, and responsibilities of government. The state is not God or absolute, but plays a vital role in maintaining order and peace (Matt. 22:21). The Epistles repeat this sentiment (Rom.13; 1 Peter 2: 13-17; 1 Tim.2; Titus 3:1). Government does not act as the organ or defender through which God establishes his kingdom (John 18: 36).

Government does not have the authority to enforce God's will on unwilling subjects except within a prescribed and restricted civil realm that maintains the minimum civil order for the purpose of peace. Government protects the good and punishes the evil. Government serves strictly temporal purposes "in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (2 Tim. 2:2). God establishes civil authorities for humanity's sake, not his own. Therefore, holy war that claims to fight in the name of God and for eternal truths constitutes demonic corruption of divinely sanctioned civil authority.

The following distinctions separate holy war and Just War beliefs. Holy war fights for divine causes in Crusades and Jihads to punish infidels and heretics and promote a particular faith; Just War fights for political causes to defend liberty and religious freedom. Holy war fights by divine command issuing from clerics and religious leaders; Just War fights through moral sanction. Holy war employs a

heavenly mandate, Just War a state mandate. Holy war is unlimited or total; anything goes, and the enemy must be eradicated in genocide or brought to submission. The Holy War slogan is “kill ‘em all and let God sort them out!” Holy war accepts one group’s claim to absolute justice and goodness, which causes them to regard the other as absolutely evil. Just War practices limited war; it seeks to achieve limited temporal objectives and uses only necessary force to accomplish its task. Just War rejects genocide as a legitimate goal. Holy war fights out of unconditional obedience to faith. Just War fights out of obedience to the state, which is never incontestable. Holy war fights offensive wars of conquest; Just War fights defensive wars, generally responding to provocation. Holy war battles for God to enforce belief and compel submission. Just War defends humanity in protecting civil society, which despite its transitory and mundane role in the eternal scheme of things plays an essential part in preserving humanity from barbarism and allows for everything else in history to exist.

Why Go to War?

Just War thinking uses two major categories to measure the legitimacy of war. The first is called *jus ad bellum* [Latin for “justice to war”]: the proper recourse to war or judging the reasons for war. This category asks questions to be answered before going to war. It has three major criteria: just authority, just cause, and just intent.

Just authority serves as the presupposition for the rest of the criteria. It requires that only recognized state authorities use force to punish evil (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2). Just War thinking does not validate individual actions against opponents, which would be terrorism, nor does it allow for paramilitary groups to take matters in their own hands. Just authority requires a formal declaration. War must be declared by a legitimate governmental authority. In the USA, Congress

holds the right of formal declaration, but the President executes the war. Congressional authorization in the last sixty years has substituted for formal declaration.

Just cause is the most difficult standard to determine in a pluralistic society. Whose justice do we serve? Just War asserts the notion of comparative or limited justice. No one party has claim to absolute justice; there exists either more or less just cause on each side. Therefore, Just War thinking maintains the right to dissent. Those who believe a war immoral must not be compelled against their wills to participate. Just War thinking recognizes individual conscientious objection.

Just cause breaks down to four other considerations. First, it requires that the state *perform all its duties*. Its first duty requires self-defense and defense of the innocent. A second duty entails recovery of lost land or property, and the third is to punish criminals and evil doers.

Second, just cause requires *proportionality*. This means that the positive results of war must outweigh its probable destructive effects. The force applied should not create greater evil than that resisted.

Third, one judges the *probability of success*. It asks, is the war winnable? Some expectation of reasonable success should exist before engaging in war. Open-ended campaigns are suspect. Clear objectives and goals must be outlined from the beginning. Warfare in the latter twentieth century abandoned objectives in favor of police action and attrition, which leads to interminable warfare.

Fourth, *last resort* means all alternative measures for resolving conflict must be exhausted before using force. However, preemptive strikes are justified if the current climate suggests an imminent attack or invasion. Last resort does not have to wait for the opponent to draw "first blood."

Just intent judges the motives and ends of war. It asks, why go to war? and, what is the end result? Motives must originate from love or at least some minimum concern for others with the end result of peace. This rules out all revenge. The goals of war aim at establishing peace and reconciliation.

The Means of War

The proper conduct in war or judging the means of war is *jus in bello* [Latin for "justice in war"], the second category used to measure conflict. It has two primary standards: proportionality and discrimination.

Proportionality maintains that the employed necessary force not outweigh its objectives. It measures the means according to the ends and condemns all overkill. One should not use a bomb where a bullet will do.

Discrimination basically means non-combatant immunity. A "combatant" is anyone who by reasonable standard is actively engaged in an attempt to destroy you. POW's, civilians, chaplains, medics, and children are all non-combatants and therefore exempt from targeting. Buildings such as hospitals, museums, places of worship and landmarks share the same status. However, those previously thought to be non-combatants may forfeit immunity if they participate in fighting. If a place of worship becomes a stash for weapons and a safe-house for opponents, it loses its non-combatant status.

A proper understanding of discrimination does not mean that non-combatants may never be killed, but only that they are never intentionally targeted. The tragic reality of every war is that non-combatants will be killed. Discrimination attempts to minimize these incidents so they become the exception rather than the rule.

Killing innocent lives in war may be justified under the principle of *double effect*. This rule allows for the death of

non-combatants if they were unintended and accidental. Their deaths equal the collateral effects of just intent. Double effect states that each action has more than one effect, even though only one effect was intentional, the other accidental. Self-defense therefore intends to save one's life or that of another but has the accidental effect of the death of the third party.

The double effect principle is the most controversial aspect of the Just War criteria and will be subject to abuse. Therefore, it must adhere to its own criteria. Certain conditions apply before invoking double effect. First, the act should be good. It should qualify as a legitimate act of war. Second, a good effect must be intended. Third, the evil effect cannot act as an end in itself, and must be minimized with risk to the acting party. Lastly, the good effect always outweighs the evil effect.

Given the ferocity of war, it is understandable that many will scoff at the notion of Just War. However, Just War thinking accepts war and force as part of the human condition (Matt. 24:6) and hopes to arrive at the goal of peace through realistic yet morally appropriate methods. It does not promote war but seeks to mitigate its dreadful effects. Just War thinking morally informs Western culture to limit its acts of war and not to exploit its full technological capability, which could only result in genocide and total war.

Notes

1. The following books are helpful sources on Just War thinking: Robert G. Clouse, ed. *War: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall the Modern War be Conducted Justly?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1961); Lawrence J. Terlizzese, "The Just War Tradition and Nuclear Weapons in the Post Cold War Era" (Master's Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1994).

2. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

3. Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 49.

© 2011 Probe Ministries

If Christ isn't in the name, how will I know it's Christian?

July 22, 2011

Recently, long-standing evangelism non-profit [Campus Crusade for Christ](#) officially announced its plan to change its name to Cru. I admit the over-priced wine bar with mediocre cheeseboards was the first thing I thought of when I heard the news. But the second thing I thought was, *Naturally, that's what people call it anyway.* So I didn't think anything of it. I wasn't freaked out because Christ is no longer in the name. For heaven's sake, Christ himself said, "[Be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves](#);" not, "Subtlety is a sin. Be as obvious and explicit as you can be because that's how people will know you belong to me." No. He said, "[They will know you are my followers by your love for one another.](#)" But yet again, people only see Christians calling their brothers and sisters names like "coward" and "repulsive" and griping at each other. That's just great. (You can read more about how Christians are going to the mattresses here on [Fox News's report.](#))

I agree with Cru: they needed to drop “crusade” from the name. It certainly does recall The Crusades, an awful, dark, embarrassing time in Christianity, or at least medieval Christendom... I’ll let my historian colleagues correct my armchair claims here; but that is all the more to the point: popular perception matters; words have baggage, and it is naive to think we can simply plow through it. I will say, it does make it a bit ironic that crusade is the one word they’re keeping, even if it is a shortened version of it. Nonetheless, Campus Crusade for Christ is a dated (and long) name; hence why people commonly shortened it to Cru even before the official name change.

I agree entirely with Cru vice president Steve Sellers when he said it is “more important that the organization is effective at proclaiming Jesus than it is important to have the name of Jesus in the name of the organization.” The fact that people are chalking this up to succumbing to political correctness is evidence that they care more about the outside than the inside; more about appearances than heart; more about rhetorical positions than actually taking a stand. This kind of attitude common among Christians is sad. It isn’t a witness to the world, as Cru has been and continues to be; and it isn’t worthy of the calling we have received in Christ. It reminds me of how many Christians understand “Christian art.” But that’s another blog post for another day.

Part of thinking through our Christianity includes thinking before reacting, perhaps especially on social networking sites where we feel emboldened by our anonymity amid the mob and where instant gratification is part of the point. It also includes being mindful of passages like Matthew 10 and 1 Peter 3 when quoting Romans 1:16.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/07/22/if-christ-isnt-in-the-name-how-will-i-know-its-christian/

“I Don’t Believe in Jesus, But What If. . .”

I was raised into a liberal, and yet Protestant family. As a child I went to church like any other, and even within the past five years I’ve attended the occasional session. Often people will tell me, “All you have to do is ask God to forgive your sins.”

The problem with this, and one that I’ve seldom been able to ask without feeling alienated, is that within my heart I don’t believe in Jesus. And so even assuming I repented and following the Bible to the word, I wouldn’t have what is called true faith. This is difficult to explain, but while I want to be a part of this religion if it’s real, several parts of it have ill logic. Logic that I can’t convince myself to ignore. Here are some comments and questions that I’d appreciate feedback on.

1. If Christianity is such a good thing, then why has it caused so much death in the past? The Crusades are only one example.

2. When the world is so full of grey, then how can there be a strict set of guidelines that clearly defines right and wrong? If you follow these rules, you’ll go to Heaven where everything’s inexplicably perfect. If you don’t, then you burn in eternal fire. It all sounds a little stretched to me.

3. I’ve been to sermons, and it’s emphasized there that if you don’t stay true to His word, then you’ll burn in Hell. Doesn’t it feel a little selfish to be praying and worshipping a supreme being specifically so that you aren’t punished forever? In a few scriptures, there’s an implication that you

must be concerned with anything but yourself. An oxymoron?

4. Gay people are often criticized for their actions in the world, especially by Christians. I have homosexual friends, and several of them take to it rather naturally. Being hetero myself, I could never have sexual relations with another man and like it. I find it highly unlikely that something like this could be anything but real. Especially given the constant state of harrassment that many of them live in.

5. I've never felt the presence of Jesus Christ in my life. I went to church for years, and the closest thing to divineness for me was hearing women mumble in what I heard as jibberish. Ultimately I would like to believe, but at this point I have absolutely no reason to.

On the other hand, I'm going to tell you why I can't let myself shake the idea that there is no immortal entity.

Christianity has had such a huge influence on so many of the past. The United States of America was founded upon this religion. It's grown to have countless followers now. I inquire to myself, "How could they all have it wrong?"

There are plenty of creative freethinkers who've enveloped themselves deeply into your faith. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Adolf Hitler (his own perception of it anyway), etc.

Sometimes when I'm thinking about life and how I got here, I become increasingly afraid of what'll happen when I finally die. Possibly because deep down, I know that there's something I need to fulfill that I've yet to. Whether this is knowing God or something else, I have no idea at this point. I'm hoping that you might have some insight to my questions.

I was raised into a liberal, and yet Protestant family. As a child I went to church like any other, and even within the past five years I've attended the occasional session. Often people will tell me "All you have to do is ask God to forgive

your sins."

Sounds like a rather simplistic formula, doesn't it? And there's something in your intellect that rebels that surely, *something* must be missing. And you would be right.

Because true, biblical Christianity is about a personal relationship with a personal God. It's about two beings communicating with each other, and loving each other. It's more than a simple "forgiveness transaction." There are a lot of people who see God as some kind of cosmic vending machine; we put in our coin of "belief" and out comes forgiveness? How hokey is that?

The problem with this, and one that I've seldom been able to ask without feeling alienated, is that within my heart I don't believe in Jesus. And so even assuming I repented and following the Bible to the word, I wouldn't have what is called true faith.

I honor you for your intellectual integrity to admit the truth. You are in good company; there are a lot of people who have come into a personal relationship with God through Jesus, who discovered along their journey that the Jesus they didn't believe in was a false Jesus—a too-small Jesus. So I am suggesting that you investigate the REAL Jesus and not the stereotype you may have been exposed to.

This is difficult to explain, but while I want to be a part of this religion if it's real, several parts of it have ill logic. Logic that I can't convince myself to ignore. Here are some comments and questions that I'd appreciate feedback on.

1. If Christianity is such a good thing, then why has it caused so much death in the past? The Crusades are only one example.

Great question. First, please consider that true Christianity is not a belief system or a religion like the rest of the world religions, but a relationship with Jesus. And every single follower of Jesus is a sinful, fallen, imperfect person who is going to follow Him in varying degrees of sinfulness, fallenness, and imperfection. The validity of Christianity is not the weakness of us Christ-followers, but the strength and truthfulness of Jesus Christ himself.

Many horrible things that were done in the name of Jesus Christ, such as the Inquisition and the excesses of the Crusades, were inflicted by people who were not his followers. Many people have done evil in the name of Jesus, but in the end he will tell them, "Away from me—I never knew you."

While there are mortifying blots on history, I think it's also important to realize that people who understand how to view life and the world from a biblical perspective were world changers. The Christian influence is responsible for the invention and development of hospitals and orphanages. Many schools were founded by Christians. The abolition of slavery and the very foundation of modern science are both based on Christian principles. So I think it's important to see a balance of good and evil, and this is exactly what we would expect from fallen, sinful people trying to live out the principles rooted in the character of a good, loving God.

2. When the world is so full of grey, then how can there be a strict set of guidelines that clearly defines right and wrong? If you follow these rules, you'll go to Heaven where everything's inexplicably perfect. If you don't, then you burn in eternal fire. It all sounds a little stretched to me.

Let's visit the "back story" that explains why it is we live in a world so full of grey. The world God originally created was perfect and sinless, but man made a choice that plunged us into shades of murkiness. You've probably heard the phrase

“the fall of man,” but it truly was a fall of gigantic proportions. One of the things that fell when Adam sinned was our intellect, our reason. We no longer apprehend things correctly or accurately.

When God speaks truth to us, when he communicates his set of guidelines that explain how to make life work according to his design, there is now a problem. Two, actually. First, our fallen intellect doesn't grasp what he says as well as it would have before the fall. Second, another thing that fell was our will, and we are all rebellious, stiff-necked people who insist on having our own way and being god of our own lives. So between fuzzy minds and rebellious hearts, it can sure seem like the world is full of grey!

Nonetheless, God was never unclear about his intentions for his creation, and he communicated his set of guidelines very clearly. Interestingly, the same set of written-down laws in the Ten Commandments, are also written on the hearts of all people in all places at all times. We all intrinsically know it's wrong to murder and steal and lie and disrespect God.

The rules are clear—it's our hearts that want to excuse them and find loopholes to justify our bad behavior.

The thing is, no one can follow the rules. Nobody. If we break one, we've broken the set. There isn't a single person who is good enough to go to heaven. Rebellious, sinful, wayward people (and that is every one of us), left on our own, will enter life as enemies of God and stay that way. If God hadn't intervened, NO ONE would be in heaven.

But he did.

He reaches out to us and offers us one way, the only way, to have a restored relationship with him. Someone had to pay the penalty for our sins, so he sent Jesus from heaven to live a perfect life, showing us what God is like, and then die on the cross in our place. He was perfect and sinless, so he didn't

die for his own sins—but for ours instead. Three days later God raised him from the dead to give his life back, and it's that new, resurrected kind of life Jesus offers to those who trust in him.

Heaven isn't a reward for those who did "good enough" to get there, since no one qualifies. It is a place to enjoy an intimate personal relationship with God. A relationship that is entered into as a gift we don't earn and never could.

Hell isn't the place where people go who didn't do enough good to cancel out their bad. When people have spent their life saying "no" to God (and "yes" to doing life their own way, worshiping themselves, or others, or things), it's where God lets them have their own rebellious way forever.

3. I've been to sermons, and it's emphasized there that if you don't stay true to His word, then you'll burn in Hell. Doesn't it feel a little selfish to be praying and worshiping a supreme being specifically so that you aren't punished forever? In a few scriptures, there's an implication that you must be concerned with anything but yourself. An oxymoron?

All of us here at Probe would disagree with those sermons. There are many people who believe God puts people on a performance standard, requiring us to stay on "the straight and narrow" or we get zapped. It not only overestimates our ability to be good, since we are fallen people, but it underestimates God's ability to hold onto us. When we receive his gift of eternal life by trusting in what Christ did for us, God gives us a new heart and a new source of power to live a life pleasing to him. But He also understands that change is a process and a journey, and as the Bible says, "He knows that we are but dust." He knows how incredibly frail and weak we are. Good thing he is strong and powerful, not to mention amazingly loving! The Bible actually says that we can KNOW we have eternal life, and that God will complete what he starts.

We disagree strongly that what God gets started in us, we have the power to wreck forever.

The Bible says that our relationship with God is like that of a lover and his bride. We are God's beloved, and he delights in us. I don't know if you are married, but I hope if you are, you know what it is for your beloved to have adoring eyes for you. That's the kind of love we receive from God, and when one is loved like that, it's easy and natural to love him back and worship him with joy and surrender.

The idea of praying to and worshiping a supreme being for the sole purpose of avoiding eternal punishment is a cruel hoax and a horrible counterfeit of the real thing. Which is why I suggest you find out who the REAL Jesus is, since apparently the one you've been hearing about is a gross caricature.

4. Gay people are often criticized for their actions in the world, especially by Christians. I have homosexual friends, and several of them take to it rather naturally. Being hetero myself, I could never have sexual relations with another man and like it. I find it highly unlikely that something like this could be anything but real. Especially given the constant state of harrassment that many of them live in.

Their attractions are real, but not chosen. What is not real is the contention that they were born gay, or that God made them gay. There are certain patterns that show up in the lives of those who experience same-sex attractions: a relational deficit with the same-sex parent and with same-sex peers, a sense of gender insecurity, often the ridicule and rejection of peers. Everyone is created with the need to connect in a deep and lasting way with our same-sex parent and peers, and if that need goes unmet, it can become sexualized with the onset of adolescence. Everybody wants to be loved and accepted, but those who are attracted to those of their same sex didn't get the kind of affirmation that would have allowed

them to move on to the next step of emotional development, which is connection with the opposite sex.

5. I've never felt the presence of Jesus Christ in my life. I went to church for years, and the closest thing to divineness for me was hearing women mumble in what I heard as gibberish. Ultimately I would like to believe, but at this point I have absolutely no reason to.

I can well imagine why, given what you have experienced and were taught!

I want to recommend to you a couple of books I think you will find satisfying and challenging. Lee Strobel is a former journalist (he used to be a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*) and atheist, who tracked down credible sources to answer his questions about Jesus and Christianity. *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ* are both really excellent books. A third book, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, would also probably appeal to you.

On the other hand, I'm going to tell you why I can't let myself shake the idea that there is no immortal entity.

Christianity has had such a huge influence on so many of the past. The United States of America was founded upon this religion. It's grown to have countless followers now. I inquire to myself, "How could they all have it wrong?"

There are plenty of creative freethinkers who've enveloped themselves deeply into your faith. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Adolf Hitler (his own perception of it anyway), etc.

Sometimes when I'm thinking about life and how I got here, I become increasingly afraid of what'll happen when I finally die. Possibly because deep down, I know that there's something I need to fulfill that I've yet to. Whether this is knowing God or something else, I have no idea at this point.

I'm hoping that you might have some insight to my questions.

The Bible intriguingly says in one place, "God has set eternity in our hearts." I think this is what you're experiencing, _____. God made you for a purpose, and he made you to have a relationship with him that is more deeply satisfying than you could possibly imagine. But first you need to find the true God and not the little-bitty false god that is worth rejecting.

I truly respect your position and your intellectual integrity, and I am so glad there are real answers for your important questions.

I do hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

© 2005 Probe Ministries

The Crusades

Introduction

At the Council of Clermont in 1095 Pope Urban II called upon Christians in Europe to respond to an urgent plea for help from Byzantine Christians in the East. Muslims were threatening to conquer this remnant of the Roman Empire for Allah. The threat was real; most of the Middle East, including the Holy Land where Christ had walked, had already been vanquished. Thus began the era of the Crusades, taken from the

Latin word *crux* or cross. Committed to saving Christianity, the Crusaders left family and jobs to take up the cause. Depending on how one counts (either by the number of actual crusading armies or by the duration of the conflict), there were six Crusades between 1095 and 1270. But the crusading spirit would continue on for centuries, until Islam was no longer a menace to Europe.

There is a genuine difficulty for us to view the Crusades through anything but the eyes of a 21st century American. The notion of defending Christianity or the birthplace of Christ via military action is difficult to imagine or to support from Scripture, but perhaps a bit easier since the events of September 11th.

So when Christians today think about the Crusades, it may be with remorse or embarrassment. Church leaders, including the Pope, have recently made the news by apologizing to Muslims, and everyone else, for the events surrounding the Crusades. In the minds of many, the Crusades were an ill-advised fiasco that didn't accomplish the goals of permanently reclaiming Jerusalem and the Holy Lands.

Are history books correct when they portray the Crusades as an invasion of Muslim territories by marauding Europeans whose primary motive was to plunder new lands? What is often left out of the text is that most of the Islamic Empire had been Christian and had been militarily conquered by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Islam had suddenly risen out of nowhere to become a threat to all of Christian Europe, and although it had shown some restraint in its treatment of conquered Christians, it had exhibited remarkable cruelty as well. At minimum, Islam enforced economic and religious discrimination against those it controlled, making Jews and Christians second-class citizens. In some cases, Muslim leaders went further. An event that may have sparked the initial Crusade in 1095 was the

destruction of the Holy Sepulchre by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim.[\[1\]](#) In fact, many Christians at the time considered al-Hakim to be the Antichrist.

We want black and white answers to troubling questions, but the Crusades present us with a complex collection of events, motivations, and results that make simple answers difficult to find. In this article we'll consider the origins and impact of this centuries-long struggle between the followers of Muhammad and the followers of Christ.

The Causes

Historian Paul Johnson writes that the terrorist attacks of September 11th can be seen as an extension of the centuries-long struggle between the Islamic East and the Christian West. Johnson writes,

The Crusades, far from being an outrageous prototype of Western imperialism, as is taught in most of our schools, were a mere episode in a struggle that has lasted 1,400 years, and were one of the few occasions when Christians took the offensive to regain the "occupied territories" of the Holy Land.[\[2\]](#)

Islam had exploded on the map by conquering territories that had been primarily Christian. The cities of Antioch, Alexandria, and Carthage had been the centers of Christian thought and theological inquiry for centuries before being taken by Muslim armies in their jihad to spread Islam worldwide. Starting in 1095 and continuing for over four hundred years, the crusading spirit that pervaded much of Europe can be seen as an act of cultural self-preservation, much as Americans now see the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

One motivation for the Crusade in 1095 was the request for help made by the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I. Much of the

Byzantine Empire had been conquered by the Seljuk Turks and Constantinople, the greatest Christian city in the world, was also being threatened. Pope Urban knew that the sacrifices involved with the call to fight the Turks needed more than just coming to the rescue of Eastern Christendom. To motivate his followers he added a new goal to free Jerusalem and the birthplace of Christ.

At the personal level, the Pope added the possibility of remission of sins. Since the idea of a pilgrim's vow was widespread in medieval Europe, crusaders, noblemen and peasant alike, vowed to reach the Holy Sepulcher in return for the church's pardon for sins they had committed. The church also promised to protect properties left behind by noblemen during travels east.

The Pope might launch a Crusade, but he had little control over it once it began. The Crusaders promised God, not the Pope to complete the task. Once on its way, the Crusading army was held together by "feudal obligations, family ties, friendship, or fear."[3](#)

Unlike Islam, Christianity had not yet developed the notion of a holy war. In the fifth century Augustine described what constituted a *just war* but excluded the practice of battle for the purpose of religious conversion or to destroy heretical religious ideas. Leaders of nations might decide to go to war for just reasons, but war was not to be a tool of the church.[4](#) Unfortunately, using Augustine's *just war* language, Popes and Crusaders saw themselves as warriors for Christ rather than as a people seeking justice in the face of an encroaching enemy threat.

The Events

The history books our children read typically emphasize the atrocities committed by Crusaders and the tolerance of the Muslims. It is true that the Crusaders slaughtered Jews and

Muslims in the sacking of Jerusalem and later laid siege to the Christian city of Constantinople. Records indicate that Crusaders were even fighting among themselves as they fought Muslims. But a closer examination of the Crusades shows the real story is more complex than the public's perception or what is found in history books. The fact is that both Muslims and Christians committed considerable carnage and internal warfare and political struggles often divided both sides.

Muslims could be, and frequently were, barbaric in their treatment of Christians and Jews. One example is how the Turks dealt with German and French prisoners captured early in the First Crusade prior to the sacking of Jerusalem. Those who renounced Christ and converted to Islam were sent to the East; the rest were slaughtered. Even Saladin, the re-conqueror of Jerusalem was not always merciful. After defeating a large Latin army on July 3, 1187, he ordered the mass execution of all Hospitallers and Templars left alive, and he personally beheaded the nobleman Reynald of Chatillon. Saladin's secretary noted that:

He ordered that they should be beheaded, choosing to have them dead rather than in prison. With him was a whole band of scholars and Sufis . . . [and] each begged to be allowed to kill one of them, and drew his sword and rolled back his sleeve. Saladin, his face joyful, was sitting on his dais; the unbelievers showed black despair.[{5}](#)

In fact, Saladin had planned to massacre all of the Christians in Jerusalem after taking it back from the Crusaders, but when the commander of the Jerusalem garrison threatened to destroy the city and kill all of the Muslims inside the walls, Saladin allowed them to buy their freedom or be sold into slavery instead.[{6}](#)

The treachery shown by the Crusaders against other Christians is a reflection of the times. At the height of the crusading

spirit in Europe, Frederick Barbarossa assembled a large force of Germans for what is now known as the third Crusade. To ease his way, he negotiated treaties for safe passage through Europe and Anatolia, even getting permission from Muslim Turks to pass unhampered. On the other hand, the Christian Emperor of Byzantium, Isaac II, secretly agreed with Saladin to harass Frederick's crusaders through his territory. When it was deemed helpful, both Muslim and Christian made pacts with anyone who might further their own cause. At one point the sultan of Egypt offered to help the Crusaders in their struggle with the Muslim Turks, and the Turks failed to come to the rescue of the Shi'ite Fatimid Muslims who controlled Palestine.

Human treachery and sinfulness was evident on both sides of the conflict.

The Results

On May 29, 1453 the city of Constantinople fell to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II. With it the 2,206-year-old Roman Empire came to an end and the greatest Christian church in the world, the Hagia Sophia, was turned into a mosque. Some argue that this disaster was a direct result of the Crusaders' misguided efforts, and that anything positive they might have accomplished was fleeting.

Looking back at the Crusades, we are inclined to think of them as a burst of short-lived, failed efforts by misguided Europeans. Actually, the crusading spirit lasted for hundreds of years and the Latin kingdom that was established in 1098, during the first Crusade, endured for almost 200 years. Jerusalem remained in European hands for eighty-eight years, a period greater than the survival of many modern nations.

Given the fact that the Latin kingdom and Jerusalem eventually fell back into Muslim hands, did the Crusaders accomplish anything significant? It can be argued that the movement of

large European armies into Muslim held territories slowed down the advance of Islam westward. The presence of a Latin kingdom in Palestine acted as a buffer zone between the Byzantine Empire and Muslim powers and also motivated Muslim leaders to focus their attention on defense rather than offense at least for a period of time.

Psychologically, the Crusades resulted in a culture of chivalry based on both legendary and factual exploits of European rulers. The crusading kings Richard the Lionheart and Louis IX were admired even by their enemies as men of integrity and valor. Both saw themselves as acting on God's behalf in their quest to free Jerusalem from Muslim oppression. For centuries, European rulers looked to the Crusader kings as models of how to integrate Christianity and the obligations of knighthood.

Unfortunately, valor and the ability to conduct warfare took precedent over all other qualities, perhaps because it was a holdover from Frankish pagan roots and the worship of Odin the warrior god. These Germanic people may have converted to Christianity, but they still had a place in their hearts for the gallant warrior's paradise, Valhalla.[{7}](#) As one scholar writes:

But the descendants of those worshippers of Odin still had the love of a warrior god in their blood, a god of warriors whose ultimate symbol was war.[{8}](#)

The Crusades temporarily protected some Christians from having to live under Muslim rule as second-class citizens. Called the *dhimmi*, this legal code enforced the superiority of Muslims and humiliated all who refused to give up other religious beliefs.

It is also argued that the crusading spirit is what eventually sent the Europeans off to the New World. The voyage of Columbus just happens to coincide with the removal of Muslim

rule from Spain. The exploration of the New World eventually encouraged an economic explosion that the Muslim world could not match.

Summary

Muslims still point to the Crusades as an example of injustice perpetrated by the West on Islam. An interesting question might be, "Had the situation been reversed, would Muslims have felt justified in going to war against Christians?" In other words, would the rules in the Qur'an and the Hadith (the holy books of Islam) warrant a conflict similar to what the Crusaders conducted?

You have probably heard the term *jihad*, or struggle, discussed in the news. The word denotes different kinds of striving within the Muslim faith. At one level, it speaks of personal striving for righteousness. However, there are numerous uses of the term within Islam where it explicitly refers to warfare.

First, the Qur'an permits fighting to defend individual Muslims and the religion of Islam from attack.[{9}](#) In fact, all able bodied Muslims are commanded to assist in defending the community of believers. Muslims are also given permission to remove treacherous people from power, even if they have previously agreed to a treaty with them.[{10}](#)

Muslims are encouraged to use armed struggle for the general purpose of spreading the message of Islam.[{11}](#) The Qur'an specifically says, "Fighting is a grave offense, but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque. . ."[{12}](#) Warfare is also justified for the purpose of purging a people from the bondage of idolatry or the association of anything with God. This gives the Muslim a theological reason to go to war against Christians, since the Qur'an teaches that the doctrine of the Trinity is a form of idolatry. Had the

situation been reversed, the religion of Islam provides multiple rationalizations for the actions of the Crusaders.

But is there a Christian justification for the Crusades? The only example of a Christian fighting in the New Testament is the apostle Peter when he drew his sword to protect Jesus from the Roman soldiers. Jesus told him to put the sword away. Then He said, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" The kingdom that Jesus had established would not be built on the blood of the unbeliever, but on the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

The Crusader's actions should be defended using Augustine's "just war" language rather than a holy war vocabulary. Although they did not always live up to the dictates of "just war" ideals, such as the immunity of noncombatants, the Crusades were a last resort defensive war that sought peace for its people who had been under constant assault for many years.

If one of the functions of a God-ordained government is to restrain evil and promote justice, then it follows that rulers of nations where Christians dwell may need to conduct a *just war* in order to protect their people from invasion.

Notes

1. John Esposito, ed. *The Oxford History of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), 335.
2. Paul Johnson, *National Review*, <http://www.nationalreview.com/15oct01/johnson101501.shtml>.
3. Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999), 10.

4. Ibid., 2.
5. Ibid., 78.
6. Ibid., 80.
7. Zoe Oldenbourg, *The Crusades*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 33.
8. Ibid, 32.
9. Qur'an 2:190, 193.
10. Ibid, 8:58.
11. Ibid, 2:217 (also see www.irshad.org/islam/iiie/iiie_18.htm published by The Institute of Islamic Information & Education, P.O. Box 41129, Chicago, IL 60641-0129).
12. Qur'an 2:217.

©2002 Probe Ministries.

“What Do We Do When Critics Point to the Atrocities of the Crusades?”

This is a great website. I have benefited from the strong biblical perspectives you provide here and on AFR Radio station KAMA in Sioux City, Iowa.

What I am looking for is accurate info regarding the Crusades.

Everywhere I turn, some “bible basher” is criticizing Christianity for all the people it has murdered in the name of religion. . .the Crusades is ONE of those examples that is thrown in our faces. We want to know how to intelligently respond with FACTS.

What do you have that could help?

Dear _____:

Thank you for your recent e-mail regarding the Crusades. Let me see if I can give you some help on this.

To begin with, a Christian response to charges like this one must be honest with the facts of history. The truth of the matter is that the historical, institutional Church and true, Biblical Christianity have not always been synonymous. There is no way that we should try to defend or excuse those times and incidents where the Church has erred from her calling and failed to emulate and model the teachings of its Founder. In short, the Christian Church, in all of its forms—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant—has a “checkered” past. Where the church has failed, we must agree with our critics. The Pope’s recent apology in Jerusalem for the Church’s failure to take the lead in preventing the Holocaust is a current example.

But we should also know our history, and the Crusades is a good case in point. Most critics of our faith make sweeping generalizations about the Church’s failure in a certain issue or event (like the Crusades) and assign to her *all* the blame. Another tactic is to just ignore other factors which might interfere with the case they are trying to make against Christianity.

This is not a new problem. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers (c.200 A.D.) complained that whether the Tiber flooded, or there was an earthquake, or a famine, etc., Rome’s answer was, “The Christians to the Lions!”

It is important for us in historical analysis to make a clear distinction between the ideals, teachings, and practices of Our Lord and the lives, and often questionable behavior, of all professing Christians—be they ecclesiastical bodies, “Christian” nations, or individuals. In short:

*Renaissance popes are **not** Christianity; St. Francis of Assisi **is**.*

*Pizarro and Cortez are **not** Christianity; Bartolome de Las Casas **is**.*

*Captain Ball, a Yankee Slaver, is **not** Christianity; William Wilberforce **is**.*

And when we come to the Crusaders, we find we are faced with a “mixed multitude.” First, we have the Pope, who, along with his colleagues, thought it shameful the Holy Land was possessed by the infidel. Secondly, we have genuine parishioners, from peasants to nobles, who sincerely desired to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. These tens of thousands went with a true spiritual purpose (many died on the way) and are not guilty of the charge above. And third, we have a large contingent of men who were motivated by two primary things: economic gain, and the automatic promise from the Church that they could “skip” Purgatory” and be assured of heaven if they “took up the Cross” and died fighting in their mission to reclaim the Holy Land for Christianity. This Christian “*Jihad*” could be said to have promised “All this, and heaven too!”

If you want a good book about this, I would recommend a readable volume simply entitled *The Crusades* by Zoe Oldenbourg. You should be able to get it in any library. It was published in 1966 by Pantheon Books. Oldenbourg is a Russian Jewess who lived much of her life in Paris.

This book almost reads like a novel and is fascinating.. Before she begins her account she gives a marvelous description of what western Europe was like at the time of the

Crusades. Conditions were, at the time, just the opposite from what they are today. Now, the wealth and industry is in the West, while the Middle East is blighted and "third-worldish" (excepting huge wealth in the East held by the few who control vast oil holdings), then, it was the West that was blighted and primitive, while the Middle East possessed vast wealth and contained great, opulent cities.

Many of the Crusading Knights who joined the Crusades were second and third sons, who were not entitled to an inheritance because of the practice of *primogeniture*—the exclusive right of the first born to a Father's Estate. From the "get-go" these men demonstrated their prime motive for joining the Crusade: economic gain.

From beginning to end, the Crusades are truly a trail of tears. . .from the (1) pogroms in various cities where thousands of Jews died at the hands of the Crusaders as they journeyed East toward the Holy Land, to the (2) "peeling off" of many knights as the great cities of the Levant were reached [Edessa, Tarsus, Aleppo, Damascus, Antioch, Acre. Some of them never even got to Jerusalem! Greedily, they captured a city by force, put themselves in charge, and lived in new-found luxury], to (3) the capture of Jerusalem and the complete massacre of all its inhabitants—both Jews and Muslims, to the (4) other sorry Crusades that followed, the last of which, when the Crusaders found themselves at the gates of Constantinople, decided to just attack and sack *it* instead!

Other "black marks" which critics pounce on include: (1) virulent anti-Semitism, practiced by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and even Protestant (including Martin Luther himself), (2) the Inquisition, (3) the torture and burning of heretics and witches, (4) the practice of slavery, (5) the treatment and destruction of native populations [the Irish, the Indians of the Americas, the African Tribes, the island populations in both Oceans], (6) treatment of women, and (7) all "Religious" wars.

Here again we cannot defend the actions of “Christian” people. We must quickly agree with our critics. At the same time, we must press home the idea *that the Church is **not** our model. . . Jesus is.* Where His teachings and His personal example have been followed many positive things have helped to change society in such ways that much of the world is still benefiting from His impact. Even the critics have to recognize this.

I will close with these quotes written by three eminent historians, R.R. Palmer, Roland H. Bainton, and W.E.H Lecky:

“It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity. It brought with it, for one thing, an altogether new sense of human life. For the Greeks had shown man his mind; but the Christians showed him his soul. They taught that in the sight of God, all souls were equal, that every human life was sacrosanct and inviolate. Where the Greeks had identified the beautiful and the good, had thought ugliness to be bad, had shrunk from disease and imperfection and from everything misshapen, horrible, and repulsive, the Christian sought out the diseased, the crippled, the mutilated, to give them help. Love for the ancient Greek, was never quite distinguished from Venus. For the Christians who held that God was love, it took on deep overtones of sacrifice and compassion.” (Palmer)

“The history of Christianity is inseparable from the history of Western culture and of Western society. For almost a score of centuries Christian beliefs, principles, and ideals have colored the thoughts and feelings of Western man. The traditions and practices have left an indelible impression not only on developments of purely religious interest, but on virtually the total endeavor of man. This has been manifest in art and literature, science and law, politics and economics, and, as well, in love and war. Indeed, the indirect and unconscious influence Christianity has often exercised in avowedly secular matters—social, intellectual,

and institutional—affords striking proof of the dynamic forces that have been generated by the faith over the millenniums. Even those who have contested its claims and rejected its tenets have been affected by what they opposed. Whatever our beliefs, all of us today are inevitable heirs to this abundant legacy; and it is impossible to understand the cultural heritage that sustains and conditions our lives without considering the contributions of Christianity.

“Since the death of Christ, his followers have known vicissitudes as well as glory and authority. The Christian religion has suffered periods of persecution and critical divisions within its own ranks. It has been the cause and the victim of war and strife. It has assumed forms of astonishing variety. It has been confronted by revolutionary changes in human and social outlooks and subjected to searching criticism. The culture of our own time, indeed has been termed the most completely secularized form of culture the world has ever known. We live in what some have called the post-Christian age. Yet wherever we turn to enrich our lives, we continue to encounter the lasting historical realities of Christian experience and tradition.” (Bainton).

“. . . [T]he greatest religious change in the history of mankind took place under the eyes of a brilliant galaxy of philosophers and historians who disregard as contemptible powerful moral lever that has ever been applied to the affairs of men.” (Lecky, History of European Morals).

Hope this helps answer your question, _____.

Jimmy Williams
Founder, Probe Ministries

P.S. I'll have to dig out the reference sources for Palmer and Bainton, but wanted to get this to you now.

Christians to Muslims and Jews: “Crusades Were Wrong”

Written by Rusty Wright

Why would modern Christians retrace the steps of the eleventh-century Crusaders? To apologize for the atrocities of their ancestors.

Their “Reconciliation Walk,” which ends this summer in Jerusalem on the 900th anniversary of the Crusaders’ storming of the city, has garnered intriguing response across Europe and the Middle East. Representatives of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Judaism, Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy will attend the July 15 Jerusalem event.

The Crusades’ outrages have long seemed one of history’s ugly abscesses. The thought of killing to reclaim a “holy land” in “the name of Christ” seems a sick farce.

The Crusaders’ committed horrible atrocities, raping, murdering and plundering Jews, Muslims and other Christians en route to Palestine. When they reached Jerusalem in 1099, blood flowed freely. Jews fled to a synagogue and Muslims to a mosque. Crusaders burned the synagogue, killing about 6,000 Jews, and stormed the mosque, butchering an estimated 30,000 Muslims. They left a legacy of fear and contempt in the Muslim world.

That’s why when Reconciliation Walk leader Lynn Green entered a Muslim gathering at a Turkish mosque in Cologne, Germany on Easter 1996, he didn’t know what to expect. He was in the city where the medieval Crusades began in 1096 with other Christians determined to retrace the steps of the eleventh-

century Crusaders and apologize to Muslims and Jews for the horrors committed against their forebears in the name of Christ.

The Imam's (leading teacher's) public response was startling. "When I heard the nature of your message," he told the crowd, "I was astonished and filled with hope. I thought to myself, 'Whoever had this idea must have had an epiphany.'" In further conversation, the Imam told Green that many Muslims were starting to examine their sins against Christians and Jews but haven't known what to do, and that the Christians' apology was a good example for Muslims to follow.

125 Christians formally presented the "Reconciliation Walk" statement of apology in Turkish, German and English to about 200 Muslim disciples at the Cologne mosque. Loud, sustained applause followed. The Imam, the most senior imam in Europe, sent copies of the statement to 600 mosques throughout Europe. The Walk was off to a promising start.

The 2000-mile, three-year walk across Europe, through the Balkans and Turkey and south to Jerusalem has sought to build bridges of understanding and to turn back over 900 years of animosity among the world's three major religions. Response has been surprisingly warm. Audiences at synagogues and mosques have lauded the gesture, often in tears, and encouraged its proclamation. Nationwide press coverage and government protective escorts in Turkey brought crowds into the village streets to receive the walkers enthusiastically.

The Reconciliation Walk Message says the Crusaders "betrayed the name of Christ by conducting themselves in a manner contrary to His wishes and character. ... (By lifting up the Cross) they corrupted its true meaning of reconciliation, forgiveness and selfless love." The messengers "deeply regret the atrocities committed in the name of Christ by our predecessors. We are simple followers of Jesus Christ who have found forgiveness from sin and life in Him," they explain. "We

renounce greed, hatred and fear, and condemn all violence done in the name of Jesus Christ.”

The walkers cite Jesus’ biblical affirmation that He came to “proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.”

Observers have found the Walk absorbing. International School of Theology church history professor Dr. J. Raymond Albrektson called it “a commendable and necessary venture, and better late than never.”

Duke University Professor of Religion Eric Meyers, who is Jewish, commented, “Reconciliation between Christianity and the Jewish people or Christianity and the Islamic world is certainly a laudable and noble aim.” Meyers hoped that what he called “God’s universalistic vision” would not be overlooked.

George Washington University Professor of Islamic Studies Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Muslim, remarked, “Every effort by both sides to bring Christians and Muslims closer together and to unify them before the formidable forces of irreligion and secularism which wield inordinate power today must be supported by people of faith in both worlds.”

Apologizing for 900-year-old sins won’t restore the lives lost. But in a modern world where religious differences can prompt turf wars and ethnic cleansing, maybe it can provide an inspiring example to emulate.

© 1999 Rusty Wright. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Christians Retrace Crusaders' Steps

Written by Rusty Wright

Lynn Green entered with apprehension a Muslim gathering at a Turkish mosque in Cologne, Germany, on Easter.

In one of the cities where the medieval Crusades began in 1096, the veteran Youth with a Mission staffer was accompanied by other Christians determined to retrace the steps of the eleventh-century Crusaders and to apologize to Muslims and Jews for the atrocities committed against their forebears.

The Muslim imam's public response startled Green and the others. "When I heard the nature of your message, I was astonished and filled with hope," he told the crowd. "I thought to myself, 'Whoever had this idea must have had an epiphany.'" In further conversation, the imam told Green that many Muslims had begun examining their sins against Christians and Jews but have been unclear about what they should do. The repentance offered by Christians because of the Crusades has set an example of apologizing for Muslims to follow, the imam said.

The effort is being called the "Reconciliation Walk." And the 2,000-mile, three-year walk across Europe, through the Balkans and Turkey, then south to Jerusalem, seeks to build bridges of understanding and to reverse a legacy of animosity among three of the world's most prominent religions.

In Cologne, loud, sustained applause followed as 125 Christians formally presented the Reconciliation Walk declaration of apology in Turkish, German, and English to about 200 Muslim disciples. The imam, the most senior Muslim teacher in Europe, sent copies of the statement to the 600 mosques throughout the continent. With this achievement, the

walk had a promising beginning in April.

REMOVING ENMITY

Green says the purpose of the walk, an independent initiative involving many Christian groups, is to remove enmity and mistrust.

Now, 900 years after the first Crusade, some Muslims and Jews still harbor ill feelings toward Christianity because of the atrocities committed. In turn, many evangelical Christians have disowned the Crusades as a dark chapter of pre-Reformational Christian history, finding it has little to do with their beliefs or practice.

In the eleventh century, Christendom witnessed a feud between the bishop of Rome (the pope) and the patriarch of Constantinople (modern Istanbul). Divided over doctrine, culture, politics, and turf, each excommunicated the other in 1054.

In the meantime, the aggressive Muslim Seljuk Turks advanced on the Constantinople-based Byzantine Empire, ambushing Christian pilgrimages to Palestine. When Byzantine emperor Alexius I appealed to Rome for help, Pope Urban II called in 1095 for a Crusade to wrest the Holy Land from Muslim control. Thousands marched, many convinced their efforts would help them gain eternal life.

However, the zealots committed the equivalent of modern-day ethnic cleansing, murdering Jews and warring against Muslims en route to Palestine. In 1099, when they reached Jerusalem, blood flowed freely. Crusaders burned a synagogue into which thousands of Jews had fled and stormed a mosque, slaughtering thousands of Muslims.

BETRAYING CHRIST

Participants in the reconciliation walk are focused on dissolving the ancient divides between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The reconciliation walk message says the Crusaders “betrayed the name of Christ by conducting themselves in a manner contrary to his wishes and character.”

By lifting the Cross, “they corrupted its true meaning of reconciliation, forgiveness, and selfless love.” The messengers “deeply regret the atrocities committed in the name of Christ by our predecessors.”

“We are simple followers of Jesus Christ who have found forgiveness from sin and life in him,” they explain. “We renounce greed, hatred, and fear, and condemn all violence done in the name of Jesus Christ.” They hope to share their message face to face with 2 million Muslims.

The walk also is designed to heal rifts in Christendom. In Istanbul, an advance team focused on atrocities committed during the fourth crusade, praying for forgiveness at Hagia Sophia and the Galata Tower. The destruction in Istanbul has been a barrier between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

Green says response has been universally positive among the intended audience, although some Christians question the theological basis for contemporary Christians confessing to contemporary Muslims the sins of long-deceased predecessors. When Christians see these results, Green says the theological and historical debates, albeit important, become secondary.

Duke University religion professor Eric Meyers, who is Jewish, says, “Reconciliation between Christianity and the Jewish people or Christianity and the Islamic world is certainly a laudable and noble aim.”

Meyers says, “In their fervor to bring the ‘true’ message of Christianity to Jews and Muslims, namely, ‘reconciliation,

forgiveness, and selfless love,' I sincerely hope that the participants will not lose track of the import of God's universalistic vision implicit in Luke (4:18-19) and at the very core of Old Testament eschatology."

George Washington University Islamic Studies professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Muslim, says, "Every effort by both sides to bring Christians and Muslims closer together and to unify them before the formidable forces of irreligion and secularism, which wield inordinate power today, must be supported by people of faith in both worlds."

Organizers are inviting church groups across North America to join the walk. Small groups of a dozen or fewer will go for a week or more to declare the message.

The walk aims to reach Jerusalem in July 1999, the nine-hundredth anniversary of the Crusaders' invasion of the Holy City.

This article first appeared in the Oct. 7, 1996 issue of *Christianity Today* (Vol. 40, No. II, Page 90).

©1996 by Christianity Today International/CHRISTIANITY TODAY.
Used by permission of Rusty Wright.