

16 So much evil has been done in the name of Jesus, just look at Northern Ireland, the Crusades etc

So much evil has been done in the name of Jesus, just look at Northern Ireland, the Crusades and so on. You've heard that said I'm sure.

It can't be denied that when Christians get power they misuse it like any other group. Human beings have fought over every conceivable concept, worldview and belief ever invented. There's even been a small war caused by the results of a football match! Anything good can be used and twisted for evil and religious belief is no different.

Anything that creates difference can be used as a reason for wickedness, including the differences between Christians and non-Christians or even, as in Northern Ireland, the differences between Christians themselves.

Can anything really evil be actually done 'in the name of Jesus'? Whoever does evil has separated themselves from Jesus and dishonoured his name. Their action doesn't fit the bill of Colossians 3:17: *'whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him'* (Colossians 3:17). The Bible makes clear elsewhere that there is no cause to thank God for bigotry, terrorism or murder.

Genocide against Muslims or Orthodox Christians during the Crusades or sectarian killings by Catholics or Protestants in Ireland - these religious atrocities completely go against the bible and the example of Jesus himself. *'Do not resist an evildoer'* He said. *'But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also'* (Matthew 5:39). Violence was something Jesus suffered for our sake, never something he wanted used in his name.

There was just motivation in some of the Crusades to stop genocide of Christians by Muslims in Jerusalem. Tragically these fraternal motives were eclipsed by the un-fraternal sacking by Western Christians of Constantinople, capital of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. During the Crusades there were many greedy profiteers - but there were also men like St. Francis who travelled to the Holy Land to bless his Muslim neighbour.

At the height of the troubles in Northern Ireland the name of Jesus was honoured by men like Gordon Wilson who forgave the IRA for murdering his daughter at Inniskillen.

It's right to counter the claim that Christianity only does evil by pointing to good things that have been done by Christians in the name of Jesus throughout history.

Hospitals grew in England from the church's healing ministry, schools from her teaching ministry and the legal system as we know it grew out of the Christian vision for justice. Social reformers like William Wilberforce and Elizabeth Fry were impelled by a Christian vision to counter slavery and child labour respectively. Christian women like Dame Cicely Saunders and Mother

Teresa and were influenced by their faith in helping raise up care for the dying at home and abroad.

So much evil has been done in the name of Jesus, just look at Northern Ireland, the Crusades. Look instead at the fall of the Berlin Wall which was achieved by Christians as much as anyone else, Christians in Poland and East Germany with the courage of their convictions. Look at the bringing down of apartheid by the churches in South Africa.

When Christianity came to South America there were forced conversions. There were also servant hearted Christians who challenged this like Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566). Las Casas worked to uphold the dignity of the indigenous people and laid a foundation being built on to this day. As in the founding of Trades Unions in Britain it is Christian faith that is motivating exploited poor people in South America to work together against unjust structures of land ownership and of employment.

There are always counter arguments when it comes to interpreting history.

It is arguable that the regimes that did most damage in the twentieth century were godless Nazism and atheistic communism. It was no religious philosophy that underlay the mass extermination of the Jews. Anti-Semitism is recognised as a distortion of true religion. The atheistic Soviet system helped people to lose faith in both God and human dignity through the enormities of the labour camps.

Fearless Christianity shone out in both these dark societies. Men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alexander Solzhenitsyn remained free men even in prison because they would only bow down to Jesus. Their fearless witness infected others and ultimately triumphed over tyranny.

Even if some believers have let the side down there is plentiful evidence of good they've done often at great cost to themselves.

John Twisleton 13.8.08