

Religion Causes Military Action

By

Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

Religion is one of the oldest institutions that govern the social as well as personal behavior of man. It provides guidelines, laws and principles relating to man's interaction with his fellow man and his God. In most religious teachings, those who fail to follow the rules, laws, guidelines and principles must pay penance or penalty. Some believe that disaster will fall on the whole society, not just the individual, if religious rules are not followed. It is these beliefs, carried to the extreme, that have resulted in confrontation. Throughout history, governments have mobilized their military in the name of religion. Extremist organizations have organized themselves as military units and carried out violence. There is convincing evidence that military action in the name of religion will continue.

Religious violence is not a new phenomenon. James A. Haught describes much of the violence that has occurred throughout the centuries in his book: *Holy Horrors: An Illustrated History of Religious Murder and Madness*. The First Crusade started in 1095 with the battle cry, "God wills it." Gathering Crusaders in Germany first fell on the Jews in the Rhine Valley. Thousands of Jews were hacked to death or burned alive. The religious armies plundered their way 2,000 miles to Jerusalem, where they killed virtually every inhabitant. The "Thirty Years' War," produced the largest religious death toll of all time. It began in 1618 when Protestant leaders threw two Catholic Emissaries out of a Prague window into a dung heap. War flared between Catholic and Protestant Princedoms, drawing in supportive religious armies from Germany, Spain, England, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, France and Italy. After three decades of combat, Germany's population dropped from 18 million to 4 million. Haught's descriptions show that the history of religion is a history of violence.

Religious violence is not limited to Europeans. When India finally won independence from Britain in 1947, Mahatma Gandhi was not able to prevent Hindus and Muslims from turning on one another in a killing "frenzy." The confrontation between Hindus and Muslims took perhaps one million lives. Confrontation between Muslims and Jews in Palestine dates back to the first wave of Jewish immigrants in the late 1800s. Violence in the Middle East continues to this day as fundamentalists assert their views.

Fundamentalists have surfaced in every religion. They want to drag religion to the political center stage. Some fear that freedom and liberty will wipe out religion. This fear has caused them to lash out violently against non-secular governments. When other social, political and national variables mix with religion, violence often follows. History shows that intense beliefs produce intense hostility. When people believe so strongly that they must convert others to their way of thinking, abuse follows.

Fundamentalism is on the rise within many religions and presents an increasing challenge to the security of nations. Many nations feel threatened by the violent acts of extremist organizations.

As long as there are intense religious beliefs, military action undertaken in the name of religion will continue.