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The Crusades: Religious or Political Violence

Many people have heard about the crusades, those that have heard of them known that they were a religious group wagging war. But the question that is unanswered is why was a religious group fighting, and who where they fighting against?

The crusades were military expeditions, founded in the late 11th century (1095) by Pope Urban II. The crusades originated from Western Christians, commonly known as the Roman Catholic Church as a way to counter the rapid expansion of the Islam religion, specifically Muslims. “Their objectives were to check the spread of Islam, to retake control of the Holy Land, to conquer pagan areas, and to recapture formerly Christian territories; they were seen by many of their participants as a means of redemption and expiation for sins” (Baldwin, Dickson, Madden, 2015).

The Crusades was first launched after two-thirds of the Christian world had been taken by Muslims. The Crusades initially experienced success and used Palestine and Syria to set up Christian states but the growth of Islamic states pushed back until the Christian kingdom in Syria fell in 1291. Crusades continued to occur for several more centuries but after the decline of papal authority and the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Crusading rapidly declined (Baldwin, Dickson, Madden, 2015).
The Crusades were sparked by the vast religious beliefs of the time. Many religious stories during the late 11th century focused on signs and wonder while speculating that all natural disasters were due to supernatural forces. While it may seem contradictory that the church would advocate war, the reasoning was that the Crusades were to protect those in distress. In fact, there was a peace movement, called the Peace of God and the Truce of God, “designed to halt or at least limit warfare and assaults during certain days of the week and times of the year and to protect the lives of clergy, travelers, women, and cattle and others unable to defend themselves against brigandage” (Baldwin, Dickson, Madden, 2015). These assaults against Islamic states were considered a justifiable undertaking, labeled as holy work that was pleasing to God.

The Crusades are an extremely important part of the world’s history when violence is considered. Modern world violence is typically fought between two different countries over what seems to be political disagreement between the governments. In reality, the violence goes deeper than just the political aspects. Wars almost always contain a religious component. Take World War II for example. Germany took and killed thousands of Jews. While Jewish may be a race, Jewish is also a religion, and whether the individual was Jewish by race or religion they were still taken to a concentration camp. The evaluation of the current War on Terror is another prime example of religion being involved in war. The 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center is the main reason for the war and the government’s desire to defend our country and send a message to terrorist groups that we will not allow our country to be attacked without retaliation. However, much of the war is centered on the difference in beliefs between Christian America and Muslim Middle East. Americans see Muslims as horrible, despicable, beings that kill for
their own personal gains. In the Middle East, Muslims see their religion as the superior religion and also have a belief that they are committing these acts because Allah wants them to.

When countries wage wars, it usually isn’t solely about political beliefs and disagreements. There is usually some element regarding religions of the two countries involved. There is a video on the internet entitled “Why I love Jesus, but Hate Religion.” The man who created this video talks about how wars are usually a result of religious differences. That is why the framers of the constitution created the bill of rights and added it to the constitution. They knew that if people weren’t allowed to practice the religion of their choosing as well as have the ability to accept that others had the same right, even if they practice a different religion, there would be civil wars all the time, everywhere in this country of people fighting over whose religion is correct and what everyone should believe. When people are allowed to practice whatever religion they want, it helps to prevent some of the religious violence. However, in addition to practicing any religion, people must also be open minded and willing to learn and discuss the beliefs of other religions. Too often people are too close minded about other religions and are not willing to consider the teachings of another religion, and then they attempt to make everyone accept their own religion and listen to only what they believe. This is part of what creates religious violence. The world needs to take a step back and take a moment to understand other religion’s beliefs and traditions. When that happens, we may be able to move towards a more compassionate world with more understanding and open-mindedness. That could be the beginning of true world peace.
References

