

William Tyler | The Role of Religion and Politics Historically Good or Bad

– Thank you very much Wendy, and hello to everyone who's joined us this evening. This is a one-off talk that I was asked to do on religion and politics. Now obviously in an hour, I can't cover everything, so I've made a choice of how to present this, and I hope you'll find it interesting, and I hope there'll be some things that you disagree with, and some things you agree with. And maybe it's the sort of thing that you can take into discussion groups, synagogue groups, church groups, any groups that you belong to, and continue the discussion there. I've also put some books on my blog, so you can see, there aren't many, they're just the ones I've used.

Now I want to begin by reading an extract from The Times newspaper, of events last week reported from China. Now, I don't know how many of you read this, and indeed, whether it was reported outside of Britain, and it goes like this, it's quite a big piece. I hold up the piece of paper, it's quite a big piece. I'm not reading it all, it's headlined, "Catholic Cardinal, 90, put on trial over Hong Kong protesters fund. A 90 year old Catholic cardinal who criticised China's crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong and Beijing's ties to the Vatican, appeared in court yesterday, accused of financing the territory's protest movement. Joseph Zen, the former bishop of Hong Kong, was arrested in May over his trusteeship of a humanitarian fund set up to help demonstrators who took part in pro-democracy protests in 2019. In the opening of the trial, the Chinese prosecutor said, quote, 'The goal of the fund was to raise the political demands of the anti-extradition bill protests to the international level.'" The Times says, "The arrests and trial has shed light on Pope Francis's drive to strike a deal with China over jointly appointing Chinese bishops, under which Beijing recommends clerics, who are then approved and appointed by the Pope. Zen has openly criticised the Vatican's deal with China, calling it a sellout of China's underground Catholics who are loyal to the Vatican." and The Times then finally adds, "There are 12 million Catholics in China, who are split between the underground church, which recognises the pope, and those who attend state-sanctioned churches controlled by the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association."

Well, that story was a new one to me, I've not caught a whiff of this story before, and it seemed to me to raise a number of questions pertinent to this evening and I thought, well, I would begin with that and try and pull out some of the issues that that story has revealed. It's how a secular, an anti-religious communist political system like China's, deals with the topic of religion and religious belief. Firstly, by accusing it of politically acting against the state, Bishop Zen was accused of supporting financially, a humanitarian organisation which had political, well, clear political connections, given that it was involved in the demonstrations against Beijing in

Hong Kong. Secondly, it shows that the Chinese government sought to control religion directly by establishing a government, a communist-organized Catholic Church. Now, just let that sink in. A communist-organized Catholic Church, the so-called Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. And then thirdly, it seeks to control religion indirectly. That is by doing a deal with the Vatican, in which the Chinese government selects who should be a bishop or an archbishop, and the Vatican simply rubber-stamps it. Now that raises all sorts of issues. If any of you listening happen to be Catholic, then that raises most important issues indeed, about the complicity of the Vatican with the communist regime in China. Now that isn't all. We also know, and have known for years, the other aspect of Chinese communist government dealing with religion. And that is to the Muslim Uyghurs, U-Y-G-H-U-R-S, in Xinjiang, formerly known as Chinese Turkmenistan, up there in northwest China. China has been accused by many organisations such as, for example, Amnesty International, and indeed, and Human Rights Watch, and indeed by the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom amongst others, of actually committing genocide against Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Human rights groups believe that China has detained more than 1 million Muslim Uyghurs against their will over the past few years in a large network of what China itself calls "re-education camps," but we might describe as concentration camps. China maintains that this is for the good of the region, and for the good of the people themselves. And it points to the large amount of money China has spent in infrastructure. What it doesn't tell you, is that China has also organised a mass immigration into, into what was Chinese Turkmenistan, Xinjiang, of Chinese ethnic majority of Han Chinese, thus changing the balance of the population. So there are various tools available to secular, and indeed, communist governments, in dealing with religion. Whether in this case, Christianity, Catholic Christianity, or indeed, Islam. So from that sort of brief introduction, let me begin to tease out some of the more important definitions and relationships between religion and politics. Frank Sinatra, you may remember, famously sang "Love and Marriage." I'm not going to sing, don't worry, don't worry, don't turn the sound off. "Love and marriage. Love and marriage, they go together like a horse and carriage. This, I tell you bro, you can't have one without the other." Western liberal democracies largely echo Sinatra's words when it comes to Judeo-Christian values, underpinning the core values of such liberal democracies. Whether it be America or whether it be Britain, or whether it be France, Germany, or wherever you like to look. Western liberal democracy is underpinned by Judeo-Christian values. Some societies have gone further and recognised a state religion. In European terms, we can look at Britain itself, or indeed at England, where the established church is the Church of England. And when we say established church, it means there are bishops and archbishops who sit in the upper house of our Houses of Parliament, in the House of Lords, take part and vote in legislation. That's quite extraordinary. It's like Iran, and very unlike anywhere else in Europe. And although there are other clergy, for example, Jewish

rabbis who can be elected, or made into lords by the politicians, and therefore sit, the bishops and archbishops are there by right, and that raises all sorts of problems for Britain. But there's something else that's interesting. We, on both sides of the Atlantic and wider, have been fascinated by the issue of monarchy since the Queen's death, and the accession of Charles as king. And next June, there will be a coronation of Charles, and the Church of England will play a major role in that coronation with the Archbishop of Canterbury, a category putting the crown on Charles's head, in a service, which is an Anglican Church of England's service including holy communion.

Now Charles has said, he doesn't want to be known as Defender of Faith, the title given Henry VIII by the Pope, in a paper because Henry VIII wrote a paper against Luther, but he wants to be known as Defender of Faiths. Now we don't know what faiths, and how that will play out in the coronation service. But what we do know is he will be crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, by the head of the Anglican Church in England of the established church. And there is one part of the ceremony which is odd, well, anachronistic, maybe. Odd. During the coronation service, Charles will be anointed, he will be anointed under a canopy, which will hide the anointing, from the sight of the congregation, and the sight of the television cameras. In 1953, when the queen was crowned for the first time, because Prince Philip insisted, whilst Churchill did not think it a good idea, the coronation was televised. Now a report of the coronation, 1953, I read, "In the middle of this television coronation, a section of the service was conducted in secrecy. The act of consecration is the most magical aspect of an English coronation, so extraordinary that history decreed it, that the history that decreed it must remain out of sight. The Queen was disrobe of her crimson cloak, her jewellery was removed, and the young Elizabeth was seated in King Edward's chair, clothed in a dress of purest white. It was a moment of high theatre. A golden canopy held by four Knights of the Garter was suspended above and around the monarch. With the abbey almost silent, the Archbishop of Canterbury was handed the ampulla, a flask in the shape of an eagle, wrought in solid gold. A spoon was also passed to the Archbishop that had," well, it actually remarkably survive the civil war. Most of our Crown jewels were lost in the civil war. This spoon dates back either to Henry II, or to Richard I and is still used. It's the oldest thing. "From the flask, the archbishop poured blessed oil," usually called actually, holy oil, "Of orange, roses, cinnamon, musk, and ambergris, and anointed the Queen in the form of cross, on the palms of her hand, on the breast, and on the crown of our head. As he did so he whispered, 'Be thy head anointed with holy oil. As kings, priests, and prophets, were anointed, and as Solomon was anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, so be you anointed, blessed and consecrated queen over the peoples, whom the Lord, thy God had given thee to rule and govern.'" And it's that moment, which in the past, people would've believed was the moment that the sovereign became almost divine. It's very strange that we should still be doing it. We

took off a king's head nearly 400 years ago, the first Charles, because he believed in the divine right of kings. But we had this magic ceremony. Originally, the holy oil came from the Holy Land, some say the holy oil of Moses. But when James II was crowned, after the death of his Protestant brother, and he was crowned as a Catholic, he refused to use the oil that we had got from the Holy Land, that could be used all the way through for a long time. And he therefore got holy oil from the Holy Land which the King of France had. So he borrowed some, or used some. Today, we don't seem to do that, and I can't find out when we stopped doing that. I imagine with George I, in 1714, crowned in 1715, I imagine that it was at that point that we get this concoction, which is kept by the dean of Westminster. So we've still got the concoction made for the Queen, although, I suspect it may not be quite usable for Charles's coronation, but it'll be remade. The second odd story, is during the coronation of Queen Victoria. the Archbishop of Canterbury, She was young, you remember. Very young, she's a teenager. The Archbishop of Canterbury went forward to consecrate her. Well, he was all right with the hands he could do that, he was all right with the forehead, or the crown, but he was not all right with the breasts, and he couldn't bring himself to go anywhere near Victoria's breasts. So she was never anointed on the breast, the present queen, we understand, mind you, nobody could see it, but we understand the present queen was anointed on the breast. It causes lesser a problem, obviously, with a king. But it's an oddity terms of religion and politics. Charles is head of state, but he's also head of the Church of England, and he's going to be anointed, in the way that Solomon was anointed. Maybe very good for Jewish-Christian relations, if Charles is to make a point of it, but, should we have that link between religion, and a religion that most of us would find, or the act, this magical act, to make him almost divine, unacceptable? I'm not sure. Well, I think I am sure, although, I'm rather as a folklorist and historian, I rather like the idea of it happening. Will it happen? I think almost certainly, it will happen. So just keep an eye out for that if you will.

But the range of countries that recognise a state religion, of course, is wider than just in England, with the Church of England as the established church. In Israel, although Judaism is not recognised as a state religion, the Constitution states that Israel is a Jewish state. So, clearly there it is, but they don't highlight it in such a manner. And it does not have the links in terms of Church of England in England to the head of state. But it clearly is a Jewish state. It says so. Turkey is another example where a secular state established at the end of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I by Ataturk. Ataturk had two principles. Turkish nationalism and Turkish secularism. And secularism implied that Islam would not be allowed to have any significant political role. But today, Islam in Turkey is increasing. It's what one writer has described, one journalist, "Today's Turkey, in today's Turkey, one can observe that the soft Islamization is in progress." And he gives some examples. "The

increasing number of state-sponsored religious schools, sanitising the national education system by excluding things like the Darwinian theory of evolution," that has a, I'm sure that has a reverberation to those of you listening in the United States, "Discouraging alcohol consumption with extreme high taxes on alcoholic beverages, and banning their advertising and promotion, and imposing what these called quote, 'National and spiritual values' unquote, on mass media, to the grip of the Radio and Television Supreme Council." So, so much for a secular Turkey, it is getting increasingly Islamized. So much for Israel, not having a state religion, when the Constitution says it is a Jewish state, and so much for Britain being a secular society, and a very multicultural, multi-religious society, and despite Charles saying, he wants to be Defender of Faiths, we have this extraordinary coronation service. And more importantly, we have this bizarre situation, of bishops and archbishops sitting in the House of Lords. I think we can therefore say, that relations between religion and politics are vastly different across the world today. There is no set pattern. And now I must mention those states that are theocracies, that is states where the church is the political power, not where the political power embraces the church, but where the church embraces and controls political power, we immediately think of Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen for example, or we can think of Mauritania in Africa. But here's a question for any quiz that you might have to organise, which, European state is a theocracy? And the answer of course, is Vatican City, that small piece of land in the middle of Rome, controlled by the Vatican. That is a theocracy. The Muslim theocracies mainly in the Middle East and Asia, have regimes which are the very antithesis of Western liberal democracy. With little regard, for example, to the rule of law, to women's rights, to the rights and freedoms of non-Muslims. And that's going to be an issue later coming up, when the World Cup is held in Qatar, over issues of LGBTQ+ rights. We already know that Denmark has one kit where its shirts are black to show its disapproval of Qatar's policy. And we know the Netherlands are doing something similar. There will be trouble in Qatar. The two cultures, Western European, American, Western liberal cultures, and, Islamic fundamentalist cultures, are a gulf apart, in the same way that Western liberal democratic cultures are a gulf apart from Chinese communist culture. And in all of that, religion is modelled in.

Now, before I leave this area of discussion, I'd like to turn to the case of revolutionary France in the late 18th century. Now, there was trouble. The Republicans were anxious, or some of them were anxious to get rid of the Catholic Church. Others thought it could be quite dangerous, that people must be given some alternative. And it was in Robespierre's rule during the Reign of Terror, that he came up with the idea of the Cult of the Supreme Being. It was established to provide an alternative, or if you like, a replacement for French Roman Catholicism. The Cult of Reason. When Robespierre fell, so did the Cult of the Supreme Being. It had no history, it didn't make any sense. A secular state make sense. But it's interesting, you see in

the time of the French Revolution, they weren't thinking in secular terms. In 1917, in the Marxist Bolshevik revolution in Russia, of course they were, you got rid of Christianity. But in France, they didn't, they weren't, in the time it happened, they wanted to get rid of Catholicism, but they didn't have the concept of a secular state in the way that communism was. So they created this Cult of the Supreme Being, the headquarters of which was in Notre Dame, interestingly. In 1794, in the May, the National Convention in France established this worship of the Supreme Being. And in this act of the National Convention, we read, "The French people recognise the existence of the Supreme Being, and the immortality of the soul." Well, the immortality of the soul is straightforward Christianity. Two, they declare that the best service of the Supreme Being is the practise of man's duties. Oh yes, you do what the state tells you to do. Thirdly, they set among the most important of these duties, the detestation of bad faith and tyranny by punishing tyrants and traitors. Well, given that Robespierre was the man that introduced it, that does sound, slightly odd. By caring for the unfortunate, Christianity, Judaism, whatever, respecting the weak, Judeo-Christianity, defending the oppressed, doing unto others all the good one can, straightforward Judeo-Christianity, and not being unjust towards anyone. They had a date for the, inauguration of the Cult of the Supreme Being, which was the 8th of June, 1794. And it was going to be celebrated right across France, and it was going to be celebrated on that day, every year. In France. it was a big festival on the Champ de Mars, which was, they built a manmade mountain. It was an extraordinary thing. And Robespierre made a speech, declaring, that this was the answer. The answer to what? Well, to people's desire for something quote-unquote "divine," without mentioning God. When he fell, it fell. That was a dead end. What wasn't a dead end was secularism. And the secularism, which arose first of all, following the Enlightenment of the 18th century in the challenge to the church. But the biggest challenge of all to the church came later. It came in 1914 with the First World War. But I want to stop at this point. We know that when diplomacy fails, it leads to war. Politics and war are inextricably mixed, but so is religion and war. Now that is one of the great mysteries of humankind, that the great religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, preach peace, but also practise war. Now, there are some in all three religions, who remain 100% pacifists, and refuse to accept war under any conditions whatsoever.

So how do the religions, justify going to war? How is this circle squared? And the answer is, by adopting various theories of a holy or just war. A holy war or just war. In the present day, a holy war, would be what the Islamic extremist would call a jihad, which in the Middle Ages, the Christians would call a crusade, a holy war, a war conducted on behalf of your God and your religion. Now that is I think a definition of holy war. Although holy war can be an internal division, Shi'a, fighting, for Iran, against Iraq. Iraq's Sunnis. Shi'a and Sunnis fighting with religion. Or in Northern Ireland,

between Catholic and Protestant, or in the wars of religion in 16th century France, between Catholics and Protestants, or in the Thirty Years' War in Northern Europe between Catholics and Protestants, or indeed as an element in the British Civil Wars of the 1640s, between Protestants and extreme Protestants. So you can have wars within a single religion as a holy war. You only need to read in the context of the British Civil Wars, how both sides felt that God was on their side, and they were fighting for the truth, unwilling to accept that the other side might have any truth at all. But there's also a just war. And a just war is where religion blesses a political war. So a country decides to go to war, and the church preaches that this is a legitimate war. So if we take ancient Israel, the war against Roman conquest, this is a legitimate war for Jews to fight for their independence, for their God, against the barbarian Romans. You can take examples all the way through history, of where religion bolsters, the political judgement. They bless, the clergy, the rabbis the imams, Bless a war as a just war. The politicians are right to fight, and because God will be with them. We don't really think about holy war, except if we think in terms of the jihad, in order to understand it, but we do think in terms of a just war, In terms of a just war today, think of, think of Iraq, and British and American involvement. The political leadership has to tell the people this, "We are right to go to war and kill people." Now, the purpose of the just war theory, which goes right back, the early Egyptians had a just war theory. The early Israelites had just war theories. The Greeks and Romans had just war theories. In fact, we have a quotation from Aristotle. Aristotle in his book on politics writes, "The cultivation of a military is necessary and good for the purpose of self-defense, not for conquering, the proper object of practising military training is not in order that men may enslave those who do not deserve slavery, but in order that first, they may themselves avoid becoming enslaved to others." Now that is connected, that's now today enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which says that a country can go to war in order to defend itself. Now you remember all the arguments about the Iraq War, and how this was a threat to the West, and so on, but the politicians had to justify. The definition of a just war theory, There are two criteria, and it's putting that in, "Jus ad bellum," The right to go to war, and "Jus in bello," the right to conduct a war. We have the right to invade Iraq because, and we will now go to war, right conduct in war, how we fight it, the Geneva Conventions. Well, we know all of that, has been blown apart by Russia's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year. And the problem is, how to enforce any of this. And what you think is a just war? Others think it isn't. Many Russians genuinely believe that this is a just war, to rescue Russians in Eastern Ukraine who don't want to be Ukrainian. Whereas Ukrainians said, this is not a just war because it's part of Ukraine by international treaty, and the story is given out by Russia are untrue.

Now, if you put aside our inbred aversion of our generation to Russia as a whole, Cold War and so on, actually, actually, Russia does have a

case. Does it justify what they've done? No. Do they have a case? Yes. Are Ukraine wrong in resisting that pressure? No, of course they're not wrong. But it isn't easy. But the West decides that it's actually black and white. The Russians are black, the Ukrainians white, the Russians wrong, the Ukrainians correct, but it isn't always quite like that. It's very difficult. And then clergy will press themselves in knots to justify. The Russian Orthodox Church approves of Putin. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not. And yet both, both came from the same stock. That is when Christianity arrived in Kyiv in the early Mediaeval times, in early Middle Ages, and brought Orthodox Christianity from Constantinople to Kyiv, and from Kyiv to Moscow, it's the same. Except the church is split, and we have a Ukrainian Orthodox, and a Russian Orthodox in broad terms. but both say their governments are correct. So just war is a dodgy thing to get involved in. It's very legalistic, and it isn't always objective. It's why many people in all three religions remain stubbornly, that's the wrong word, remain, confidently and completely pacifist. God would not want us to fight. Of course, to which the answer is God would want you to fight if the alternative to fighting is genocide. Of course. Others say, "Well, we are pacifists, but, but we need to defend our own nation." And that raises interesting questions where Judaism is concerned, which I'll come to in a moment, between religion and nationality. It's fine in Iran, they're Shi'a Muslims. It comes together, it's same in Afghanistan or Mauritania, but Jews around the world, I'm coming to World War I, and British Jews and German Jews in due course, much more difficult. These are not easy questions to answer. I said earlier about the First World War. The First world War, if you, if the Americans will pardon me, with the American Civil War, which is somewhat different, as it was a civil war, and not an international war. If we come to World War I, 1914, it's the first, it's the first war fought with technology. It's the first industrialised war. It's the first war with mass killings on many sides. It incorporated much of the globe.

Now in Europe, we had had, broadly speaking, peace for 100 years since the defeat of Napoleon, certainly in England, we had experienced that. One historian has written this. "In the early part of the First World War, a group of theologians in Germany published a manifesto seeking to justify the actions of the German government." Again, the just war, you have to say why you are justified in going to war. And so Wilhelm II's government gathered together a group of theologians, all Christian, but with from different Christian backgrounds to draw up a manifesto saying, "Yes, Germany is right, to go to war." The British government reacted to this by asking the Archbishop of Canterbury, a man called Randall Davidson, to collaborate with a large number of other religious leaders, and write a rebuttal of the German contentions that they were right to go to war. So as this historian writes, "Both German and British theologians based themselves on the just war theory, each group seeking to prove that it applied to the war waged by their own side. Each country, Christian or Muslim, think

of them, think of the Ottoman Empire, who went into the World War, believed that God was on their side. You can see pictures of the Czar inspecting the Russian Army with orthodox priests with censers throwing water over the assembled troops. You can see priests blessing the German Army, and you can see that in the British Army as well. And you can see it with Muslim imams with the Ottoman Army. Each country in 1914, about to go into a war which they really had no concept to what it would be like, still took religion with them. In fact, insisted that religion went with them, that God was on their side.

Now, I said, this is a problem in terms of Jews. This is an article, entitled, "British Jews in the First World War." "Within all the competent nations of Western Europe, the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, afforded Jewish communities a unique opportunity. A unique opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty, and their gratitude to the nations in which they lived. In every country, they did so by rallying to the national cause. As the war went on, it threw up in acute form, many dilemmas. Jew fighting Jew. Religious observance in the army, Jews fighting for countries allied the hated czarist Russia, which they or their parents had fled. And indeed, one of the reasons that America could not be brought into the war by Woodrow Wilson, until 1917, was because many Jewish Americans financing the politicians, had come from the Russian Empire, many of them Poles, Estonians, and so on. And they regarded the Czar as the enemy. And yet in Europe, the Czar was the ally to democratic France and democratic Britain. So this posed quite a lot of problems. This is this Jewish article writing about Britain. "When the Great War began in August 1914, the British army had literally one Jewish chaplain." Now the British Army had Church of England priests with each regiment and so on. But through the entire army there was only one rabbi. Ah, he isn't called a rabbi, he's called a chaplain. Like as though he was an Anglican, he wears an Anglican dog collar, because only the chief rabbi was recognised as a rabbi in 1914 in Britain. The term used is a minister, and the title used is the Reverend. And the Jewish rabbi in 1914 was a man called Michael Adler. And so he was called, if you like, the Reverend Minister Michael Adler, with no Jewish connection obviously in that, and he wore an Anglican dog collar. Now he'd been a chaplain, a rabbi with the army, with the territorial army since 1909, and he'd attended summer camps and all the rest of it, conducting services for Jewish soldiers. When the war broke out, he volunteered to go to the western front. So he's acting in exactly the same way as the Anglican priests and ministers were acting in the army. Now at the end of the 19th century, antisemitism in Western Europe was strong. we all remember the Dreyfus Case in France. But here in Britain, as you all know, antisemitism was very obvious, particularly in the upper classes in Britain. But, it gradually dawned, particularly with the coming of war, to use a French phrase, that the Jew was "Citoyen Actif," an active citizen. After all, the Jews had the vote, well, Jewish men had the vote. And there were Jewish councillors, and there were Jewish members of important financial institutions in the city. There were

Jewish peers, Jewish knighthoods, everything. And so there had to be something done about that, and, they increased the number of Jewish rabbis serving in the army. But the question remained, under the surface. Is the Jew really an active British citizen? What does he put first? Well, the answer in the British Army was, he put Britain first. But what about German Jews? There were 10,000 German Jews in the German Army in 1914. In fact, there had been German Jews in the army of Germanies before it was united in the first half of the 19th century. But one difference with Britain, was that no Jew could become an officer in the German Army. In Britain, a Jew could become an officer in the British Army, they could not in Germany, unless they converted to Christianity. In fact, the same rule as in czarist Russia. Before someone says "My dad or my granddad," it would be, or great-granddad was an officer in the German army, then he would've been an officer in the Bavarian army because they allowed it in Bavaria. Remember, in the First World War, there were units associated with the different "Lander" of Germany. This is Germany. Going to war, a historian has written, "And the need for social coherence were regarded by the Jewish communities as an opportunity to improve their status in the Reich. The Kaiser himself, spoke in those days about the need for German unity, quote, 'In disregard a political party, social status and religion.'" So the Jews thought, the German Jews thought, if we sign up and fight for the Kaiser, then civil rights will follow at the war's end. An example, the civil rights following at the war's end, is votes for women across the Western democracies. But the Jews thought, perhaps with some basis of real hope, that that is what would happen. So these are extremely difficult questions to answer.

Why and how, do religions preach peace, justify war? In the end, each individual amongst us has to make their own choice. A conscientious objector, they might be imprisoned. The other question about Jews, of course, is the British War in Palestine before '47. Jews in the British army to fight other Jews? None of this is good. All of this is complex. This First World War was horrendous. And whatever people's religion, people began to say, there can be no God, if he allows these horrors to happen. And many historians believe it was the First World War, which marked the beginning of the decline of religion across the Western democracies. Vera Brittain, wrote this of the First World War. For those of you in Britain, you know that Vera Brittain was the mother of of the politician, Shirley Williams. and Vera Brittain wrote in this way. This is a piece. "I wish those people who write so glibly about this being a holy war, could see a case of mustard gas in its early stages, could see the poor things burnt and blister all over with great mustard-colored suppurating blisters with blind eyes, all sticky and stuck together, and always fighting for bread, with voices a mere whisper. saying that their throats are closing, and they're going to choke. And yet people persist in saying that God made this war, when there are such inventions of the devil about." War raises dreadful questions for the religious. In a book called, "The Great War and Holy War," it's on my blog, by Philip Jenkins, who is, let me get

this right, who is American. He's an American professor and he writes, I've got two quotations on him. The first is this. "In every sphere of life, the First World War cast a long shadow across the 20th century. In religious terms, that influence might seem wholly destructive. And educated Europeans often harp back to that conflict as the origin of the continent's later secularisation. In this view, the war left European nations cynical about exalted claims of all kinds, while churches were so utterly compromised as they leave them weakened beyond recognition. The philosopher Theodor Adorno famously declared, 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.' And we might assume that it was just as inconceivable to practise faith after the World War I's Verdun, or the Armenian massacres." And then he goes on to say, the wider ramifications of religion and war. 1914-18 war. "For Jews, as for Christians, the most important trends of the 20th century can be traced precisely to the Great War era. In 20th century Jewish history, two events stand out as among the most important in the whole development of the Jewish people. One is the Holocaust, the culmination of fanatical antisemitism. The other is the establishment of the state of Israel. With all that meant for the revival of Jewish culture, and the renewal of the Hebrew language. Together, these phenomena redrew the map of the Jewish world. In 1900, Europe was home to over 80% of the world's Jews. Today, over 80% are located in just two countries, Israel and the United States. Although the origins of these changes long predated 1914, the war hugely accelerated trends that were already in progress." What an interesting observation. You know, what I try and do anytime that I speak is to get people to think for themselves. And I was talking to a colleague earlier today and I said, "I never want people to agree with me." You can agree if you like, but I want people to think and think it through. And in this case, I thought, gosh, I've raised so many hairs running that I could be in terrible difficulty with questions. And I thought I've got to get my way out of this. So I thought, well, I can tell Jews, why don't you raise this with your rabbi and discuss it. And Christians, why don't you raise it with your minister and discuss it. Interestingly, I think we seldom discuss these issues of holy and just wars, and maybe we should more.

Now, I have to admit, I did not know this poem, before I began to prepare for this talk. It's written by an Englishman about an American, about an American Quaker who was a pacifist. The American pacifist was called Norman Morrison. And that is the title of the poem, "Norman Morrison." The English poet is called Adrian Mitchell. And Mitchell wrote this, it's, you pick up the story, he tells it in very simple language. "On November 2nd, 1965, in the multi-colored multi-minded United beautiful States of terrible America, Norman Morrison set himself on fire outside the Pentagon. He was 31, he was a Quaker, and his wife, seen weeping in the newsreels, and his three children survive him as best they can. He did it in Washington where everyone could see because people were being set on fire in the dark corners of Vietnam, where nobody could see. Their names, ages, beliefs

and loves are not recorded. This is what Norman Morrison did. He poured petrol over himself. He burned, he suffered, he died. That is what he did in the white heart of Washington where everyone could see. He simply burned away his clothes, his passport, his pink-tinted skin, put on a new skin of flame and became, Vietnamese." I find that, maybe every American knows that poem. I have to say I didn't, and I guess if you aren't American, you may not know it. And I find it a very disturbing poem. Religion and politics. Religion and war. This here is the book, again on my blog, "War and Religion" in the Oxford, Little Oxford series, by Mitchell and Rey. And their last paragraph reads this, "Wars have been fought and will be fought for religious reasons. Yet the revolt against war is also religious impulse. There are forms of religion that can pierce the fog of war. So that in bright light, under broad heavens, we may forge the reality of peace." And I was left, as I'm often left, with many endings to a talk. And I thought, well, I've talked about Christian and Jews and Jewish versions of just wars. And I'm talking to an audience which is either Jewish, or Christian, or secular Jewish, or secular Christian. So many of the ideas I've said are familiar ones. And I've talked about Judeo-Christianity at its core, which preaches peace, but goes to war. And I thought, what can I conclude with, for which unites all of us? And it wasn't, didn't take me long to be honest, but think of what it was. And it's from the Book of Isaiah, in my King James version of the Bible, It's chapter two verse four. "And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not, lift up against a nation," sorry, "Nations shall not lift up a sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore." "Neither shall they learn war anymore," does the Book of Isaiah say. And all of us, all of us, would vote for that. Jew, Christian, secular, religious. We would all agree, that we need to beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks. We will not lift up sword against another and we will learn of war no more. But that is an idealism, that humanity can't reach. If Putin drops a bomb, a nuclear bomb, on Britain, which he's threatened to do. Or on near neighbours, France or Germany, or in the Ukraine, America can't stand aside, wouldn't stand aside. And so once you start putting limits to Isaiah's dream of a future, then the debate becomes, where do you stop? And that's what religion and war does, and religion and politics, religion and war, all inter-tangled. There are no answers. There's only a hope, an optimism, which we must never lose, which is Isaiah's optimism, we must hold hard to that. That's what Churchill said when he was Home Secretary at the beginning of the 20th century in Britain. And he was dealing with prisoners. And he said, "You must believe in the goodness and the heart of every man." He was talking to prisoners, "Even if you are constantly disappointed." So we must aim for peace, even though in some circumstances, most of us would accept that we go to war. Thanks very much for listening. I'm sure there's lots of questions and lots of comments. Shall I have a look? Oh dear, there are.

Q & A and Comments

Q: "What exactly is a communist organised church?"

A: Well, it means, this is what Peter the Great did in Russia. He organised the church, therefore, he appoints the clergy, and they keep a watch on what they do. So there's a member of the party sat in, so they are watchful of sermons, it's sermons they're worried about. They don't want preaching of things that they disapprove of.

– Yes, Sandy, you are right, it's the same as China's move against Tibetans.

Q: "Is not Tibet a perfect example?"

A: Well, I, the problem with Tibet is the immorality of the Tibetan priest, but that's another story for another time. but yes, you are right.

– Angela. "I was in the Xinjiang region staying in a hotel. On the Friday night, we asked for a room to have a private Jewish service. This was the early days of the persecution, of the Muslim majority, it was refused."

– Arlene and Roger,

Q: "You mentioned agreement between Vatican and Chinese. Isn't this what happened with Hitler and the Pope?"

A: Yes, and it's the same as what happened between Napoleon and the Pope. Yes, you are right. John Cornwell's book, "Hitler's Pope."

– "It was notable," says Warren, "That at the funeral ceremony of the Queen, no rabbi, or imam, or Hindu was asked to play any role. She, after all, was the queen of the whole country and Commonwealth." Well, that's more difficult than a coronation. The funeral, I think they would regard the funeral as a personal thing. And she was a religious woman, a Christian religious woman. She was head of the Church of England. There was no way that that was going to be multi-religious. The coronation is different, and we have to wait to see what Charles does.

– Miriam, "Placing a canopy above the head of the monarch while being anointed is similar to a canopy known as a Huppah and," Have I pronounce that right? "In Hebrew, that is above the heads of the" Yes, exactly the same. Yes, exactly the same.

– Shelly, of course, you're right. "David and Solomon anointed would

not make them divine, but show who would rule. David had many sons from different wives who vied for the throne." Yes, it was setting them apart. The religious bit really comes in in Christian Europe, but they drew upon the experience of ancient Israel. It gave it, it gave it an authority, it gave it a history that allowed it to happen in the way that it did.

- "Israel has no written constitution." Alice, correct, but it describes itself as a Jewish state.

Q: "What does it mean that in USA has money, which was written on it, 'In God we trust'?"

A: I have to have, Carol, an American will have to answer that. "In God we trust," yes, there is a general belief in America in God, a Christian God, or a Jewish God, or Muslim God, or any God. But it is not a state religion.

Q: "Does Charles III become automatic head of the Anglican Church in Canada?"

A: Yes. Yes, he does.

- Who will, I can't read the name. "Israel does not have a, but rather series of basic laws which are intended to be incorporated in the Constitution at some point in the future." Yes, but it does very distinctly say Jewish state.

- "Jews are not Jewish by religion alone. Jewish recognition are primary through ethnicity, and most antisemitism in the modern world," says Mitzi, "Has not much to do with religion. The Nazis," Well you see a lot doesn't have to do with religion. The clashes in Northern Ireland have very little to do with religion, for example. let me finish what Mitzi said. "The Nazis never cared whether or not Jews went to a synagogue, or in there, converted to some form of Christianity." Correct.

- Ross, "Israel is Jewish state is France is a French state, or Italy is an Italian state. Having said that, the very religious, national religious parties remain until recently, part of the ruling coalition. So religions certainly commands a dominion, dominant role in the governance of Israel." Well, that's where these things become, as it were, confused.

- Diane says what I've just said, "Israel does not have a written constitution. Israel's been described as a Jewish state. There have been attempts since '48 to have a written constitution."

- Judith writes, "Jewish also means peoplehood or ethnicity, as well as religion."

Q: "Why did they want to get rid of Catholicism?"

A: I'm not sure who they are. If you mean the Chinese, because it threatens communism. I think that's what you mean.

- Michael says, "Queen Elizabeth I refused to appoint a mayor," Michael, hello. "Queen Elizabeth I refused to appoint a mayor of Westminster," very sensible, "because she was worried that he might usurp her authority. Consequently, Westminster was ruled by the Dean of Westminster until 1901." Yeah, absolutely. For those who don't know, Michael was once mayor of Westminster, that's why I say I think to Elizabeth's refusal to appoint the mayor of Westminster was a jolly good. We know each other too well.

- Michael said, Michael Goldberg says, " (indistinct) were being a Jewish state, there's nothing," we've gone all through that, I think. Myrna, "How tragic that religions preach peace, but make war."

- Abigail,

Q: "What if you changed the word religion to ideology? Defensive war is justified war from a Jewish point of view. If someone is out to attack you, you are justified attacking them first. But war for profit is totally forbidden."

A: Well, yes, that is what the United Nation says, but Jews have fought in Iraq, with the Americans and with the British. It's, it's not as straightforward as one might imagine.

- Stephen. Right. We're going back to the, I'm sorry I said Jewish constitution. I did know that it was, as it were, in long preparation. Bismarck, "War is diplomacy by other means." Putin in the Russian Orthodox Church, which I mentioned, a significant value divergent between Judaism and Christianity, Judaism, sorry, I am, between, Right. I think that's, I guess, simply not be mistyped. "A significant value diverge between Judaism. and Christianity." Full stop. John 14:6. "No one approaches the Father except through me. This principle of exclusivity carries on from Christianity and Islam, not a principal value in Judaism." Yes, so that, sorry, that's a religious argument, not a political one.

- I'm sorry, Alfred. I'm not, I'm not a theologian, you are quite right, that's a theological division between, Christianity, three gods in one, or the Trinity, or one God. But that's not a political issue. That is, and that doesn't affect the core values of Judeo-Christianity and liberal democracy.

- I'm not sure what Mike means by what he's written.

- Ed says, "The Hebrew word for the anointed one is Messiah, from the word root 'to smear with oil,' as a sign of status or consecration." Yes, yep, absolutely. The use of oil in consecrations is well established historically. It just is odd, that in England we're going to crown a king in the 21st century using this extraordinary ceremony.

- Oh, Jack, I'm sorry. I yeah, I'm sorry. In, in a very woke world, I shouldn't use white and black, but I'm, as Steven says, you put things down in black and white. It doesn't mean anything to do with race, but if it offended you, I'm sorry. It's, that's how we speak, it's very difficult to keep up with the latest woke-ism.

- "Islam and Christianity" says Hazel, "Dress up Imperial Wars to control territory or resources as holy wars or just wars. All religions justify defensive wars, including preemptive strikes and civil wars, to replace unacceptable leadership. I don't think the Jews practise just or holy wars, just defensive wars." I'm not sure that it, well, yeah, okay. I don't think I'm going down that road.

- Oscar,

Q: "You said Russia has a case but did not elaborate. Exactly what case does Russia have?"

A: Because Ukraine is a modern concept. East Ukraine and West Ukraine have always been different, and places like Sevastopol and Odesa were entirely Russian. And you, it's just, it's just the long history, I, if I do a course on Ukraine, I'll explain in detail. All I can say is, that Ukraine is a modern post World-War concept and is not an old concept. And it was always a division, East and West. Regarding Russia's case for war says Steven, "From the point of view of the Western capacity, only relevance is a western values in the international law is represented by UN, thus as Ukraine is a sovereign state recognised by and with membership in the UN, no case for war against it without clear defensive purpose is relevant to the exercise of Western power against such war." Yes. That is the answer. And that, as I say, is indeed the Western and Ukrainian answer to the Russian. All I'm saying is that, that it is not as clear, I'm not saying black and white, it's not as clear. As sometimes it's portrayed in the Western press. If you read the history of Ukraine, You'll see what I was after.

- Peter says, "There was a battle between atheists and deists before the French Revolution. The deists happened to be more of an influence on Robespierre. The atheists had to keep a low profile during the Reign of Terror. The following quote is from," is that? I think, I don't know, do you mean Napoleon? Of all religious opinions, more or less observed for which men destroy each other with fury from one pole to the other. Deism is necessarily the most intolerant. Indeed, the deists once attacked in the last asylum of the religious man is

nowhere to rest his head. He must therefore hate, persecute, and even exterminate, if he can, the destroyer of the phantom of his exhorted imagination, the enemy of the God of which he was the inventor." Wow. We'd have to think along. I knew this would get everyone going. I'm very impressed by the comment. I now feel very, I now feel I've failed you badly tonight, because the comments are much better than the talk.

- David says, "As the delay in US involvement in World War I, It was because so many had a German background." Yes, that's true. But it is also true about what I said about the Jews. There's, that element was clearly there. There were Jews who had a, a view that they couldn't join the war until, if it was the czar. Once the czar had been overthrown, they were quite happy to join the war.

Q: "Who said, 'there are no atheists in foxholes?'"

A: Sandy, I can't answer. I have no idea who said that. That's a very good quotation. but I have no idea who said it. And shall we say Mr. Or Mrs. Anon? I don't know. Have I won the Nobel Prize?

- "It is interesting. Wars of man are blamed on God or fought in His name, technology has enabled killings on a scale grander than hundreds of years past rather than religion. Still the Holocaust remains as something to question religion, was done against God, not in His name. And we cannot see a divine response in some obvious, even limited visible way. And people ask and must continue to ask why." Yeah, absolutely, Julian.

- Elaine, I've got to look at the clock. I've got to finish in a minute 'cause I've been, you've got another talk coming out. Elaine, "My father was in the Canadian army during World War II and in his dog tags was a letter J. Okay, to fight, but bottom line is, you are Jewish." Oh, that's interesting. I don't think that was so in the British Army, somebody will tell me it was.

- Shawnee, "The politicians want religion behind them." Yes, and that's Russian position at the moment, isn't it? that's, you see, every time somebody puts something on this feedback, it sets up another whole raft of questions,

- Mike, that's a very good point. "Surely, the politicians want religion behind them, otherwise," that sounds like a title of an essay in a post-graduate course. I can't answer that, but say I think it's a jolly good question.

- Oh, Rosalyn. "Your last quotation is on the outside of the UN building, in New York and Geneva." I did not know that. Yes, the Russian Orthodox Church is backing, Linda, the war in Ukraine.

- And somebody else has said the Isaiah quotation is on the UN

building. Thank you for those saying it was thought-provoking. I really did not want, I did not want to upset anyone with what I said, and I did not want you necessarily to agree what I said. These are questions which, pray God, none of us will ever have to answer as an individual. If our country goes to war, in what we feel is an unjust cause. Let's hope we don't go to war. It's, we live in a very fractured world at the moment, and we have to cling to the optimism to fight for peace. Even though, in order to do so, we might have to fight in a war. Well, that's an awful statement to say, but it's the truth historically, and it's the truth today. I'm going to stop there, Wendy, because I know there's another talk coming.

- [Wendy] Thank you very much. Thanks so much, William. That was really a wonderful, that was really was a wonderful presentation. You did mention earlier, and I was a bit curious to know, when you mentioned, Russia, do you remember what you said about Russia and Ukraine?

- [William] Yeah.

- [Wendy] What do you mean by it?

- [William] Do not interpret it that I'm pro-Russian. I am not.

- [Wendy] I'm just waiting for emails, I'm waiting-

- [William] But, Ukraine is is not a natural country.

- [Wendy] Right.

- [William] It was split before the First World War amongst numerous countries.

- [Wendy] Right.

- [William] It is also very clear that there is a division between and has always been, between East and West Ukraine.

- [Wendy] Right.

- [William] Which has been lost once the whole of the Ukraine went into the Soviet Union.

- [Wendy] Alright.

- [William] And when it came out of the Soviet Union, with the exception that the Crimea was never part of Ukraine until it was given to Ukraine by the Ukrainian Khrushchev, to sort of, well, it was a sort of gesture to his Fatherland. The other thing to say is particularly, well, not particularly, but Jews should be aware that

there are being massacres of Jews in Ukraine by Ukrainians, Ukrainians supporting Nazis, and Ukrainians in the first World War. If we take the town of Lviv, through which Ukrainians were escaping to Poland, there are no Poles in Lviv. But in 1914, Lviv was a Polish city and not a Ukrainian. The Ukrainians were either, the Poles were either butchered by Ukrainians or left for Poland in the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. So the story is a really complex one, and it's not, it's by no means straightforward. Russia has always hankered after Kyiv, because that was the seat of Russian Orthodoxy. That is how, and Russia emerged from Kyiv, and from Ukraine, from the land of Ukraine is where Moscow came from. It is a complex story, and it, it's also a horrid story where, where you don't like me using white and black, where, the positives.

- [Wendy] Exactly, you're right.

- [William] The positives and negatives are mixed, historically.

- [Wendy] Right.

- [William] Is all I'm saying. that does not justify what the Russians have done,

- [Wendy] Yeah.

- [William] But it begins to allow one to understand why they have a view that it says. That's all.

- [Wendy] That's right, so really, I really, it's history, really, is a tapestry of complicated events.

- [William] It's very complicated.

- [Wendy] It depends on where you are standing, what perspective you have, what colour you are, what religion you are, where you-

- [William] Can you just hold on one second while I find a book to show everybody? Oh.

- [Wendy] I think that's a beauty of Lockdown University. William is ready to offer different perspectives and for people-

- [William] Here I am, here I am, I've got a book. Oh, there are two books.

- [Wendy] Right.

- [William] There's Anne Applebaum's book, "Red Famine: Stalin's War,"

- [William] which I'm sure,

- [Wendy] Right.
- [William] lots of people know. But there's a new book, which is the "Pogroms of 1918-21: In the Midst of Civilised People." by, I'm not sure how you pronounce the name, Jeffrey Veidlinger,
- [Wendy] Right.
- [William] "In midst of Civilised Europe." And this is the pogrom in Ukraine, at the end of the First World War, and this is, gives you a quite different view of Ukrainians and what they were doing.
- [Wendy] Right, right.
- [William] To Jews.
- [Wendy] So there's a lot of history here.
- [William] Exactly.
- [Wendy] I Have to do it, I have to do some talks on Ukraine.
- [William] No, no, no, no. Listen, thank you very, very much. It's very, this is really, really an example of just, as I said, the tapestry of history.
- [Wendy] Yes.
- [William] And it depends. It depends whether this is standing on the north, the south, the east, the west, where you coming from, your own personal perspective, your own knowledge, and really we just have to, you know, really integrate what you say, think about it and spark dialogue, have the conversation and,
- [Wendy] Absolutely.
- [William] And
- [Wendy] Absolutely.
- [William] Leave us growing up because Russian-
- [Wendy] Lockdown University, is really an opportunity for freedom of speech.
- [William] Absolutely.
- [Wendy] But I'm not cancelling you, you're a vital part of, you're a vital part of our faculty, so,

- [William] Oh dear.

- [Wendy] Yeah.

- [William] No.

- [Wendy] Thank you very much. And I'm going to say to all of you who are on today, thank you for joining us, we have Rabbi Dweck on, and if for those of you that, if you're not going to be on tomorrow, and I may not see see us on, I wish you all an easy fast. Thank you for all your good wishes. Thank you, And thank you, William, to you, for everything that you do, for all of us.

- [Wendy] Thank you. Thanks everyone for listening.

- [William] Thanks for today, thanks, bye-bye.