

**Martin, David. Does Christianity Cause War? Oxford, UK:  
Clarendon Press, 1997.**

W King Mott, Jr.

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**Martin, David.** *Does Christianity Cause War?*

Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997.

*Does Christianity Cause War?* David Martin's recently published lectures given at the Sarum Lectureship at the University of Oxford answer the question: "The evidence does not bear out the contention [that Christianity causes war]. The case falls." Because he chooses to answer clearly he will undoubtedly evoke an equally definitive response. Those who respond will need considerable evidence since it is objective human experience that moves the argument forward.

Professor Martin considers whether human nature or religion is the "singular virus which more than anything else undermines reason and persuades us to evil courses." He concludes this is neither - at least completely. The most powerful *casus belli* is a complex and often confused blurring of nationalistic principles of which religion is only a single marker. Accordingly, the "argument from Bosnia" that places religion as "a deadly psychological evasion and a social suction," is more aptly a corruption beginning in the fourth century with the temptation of establishment where the Church merged with the political powers of the state and, thereby, corrupted the principles of the faith. Moreover, this idea that religion, Christianity in particular, can alone move men toward war is oversimplified. Martin challenges zoologist Richard Dawkins who insists that the certainty resulting from religious indoctrination correlates directly to war making. Martin examines the evidence and finds that each situation, whether it be in Europe, North America or Asia, is too complex to make such grand "generalizations." It neither matters where the war takes place nor who is engaged in the combat. Because any peace at any time is hard to keep under the best of circumstances, Martin suggests that "a radical and peaceable universalism embodied in the foundation documents of Christianity" offers the best prescription against war making.

In the lectures, Martin challenges the interpretation of contemporary reality that so often faults Christianity, recognizing that nationalistic groups continue to claim religious justification in committing great atrocities. Martin does not avoid that troubling fact of life, but he remarks that he can find no evidence to prove that a decline in religiosity, or a minimized religious marker, results in a similar decrease in enmity. It is, again, a myriad of social markers established over centuries that mobilize these groups to war. Martin is quick to recognize, and this is where the power of his argument is most compelling, that the Christianity he refers to is very different from the incorporated religion of the state. Look toward the early Church Martin advises. There you will see Christianity at its most primitive state and, arguably, at its best.

Nonetheless, in later centuries Christianity along with most powerful religious organizations often infused *raison d'etat*. Martin writes, "[T]hroughout the early phases of differentiation, religion remained in partial alliance with organicist ideologies, for example, monarchical absolutism, enlightened autocracy (or oligarchy), and secular populist nationalism." However, when considering the current state of the Christian community and the future potential associated with that community "Christianity

acquires a greater capacity than secular society to provide an independent and distinctive socialization." According to Martin, that socialization is conciliation and peaceability. This insistence upon the ethic of love as the motivator for action in the world is the real effect of Christianity.

This collection of lectures is well worth careful consideration. Martin does an outstanding job of engaging the culture of the academy in his argument. Moreover, because he insists upon untying the knots of real human experience, employing material from Britain, the United States, Latin America and Romania, he is compelling. Students of religion and teachers alike will find this information useful.

W. King Mott, Jr.,

Seton Hall University