Religion has been the source of so much evil in the world, so why should I even consider Christianity?

I don't know about you, but I don't like to be associated with people who have killed, pillaged, raped, and ravaged, not to mention taken over entire countries. So it's no surprise that people might look at religious wars and conflicts and want to stay a far cry from religion of any sort. I think all of us, however, understand that you can find bad apples associated with any cause from secularism to Christianity and from socialism to Islam. So the question isn't really whether religion has been associated with some not so pretty acts in history, but how religious motives stack up to others when looking at the world's long legacy of conflict.

You might have heard the claim that religion has been the cause of most wars. But is this really true? Certainly, we can canvas history and point our finger at the Crusades or the Inquisition or to the more modern Protestant-Catholic conflicts in Northern Ireland or recent Islamic jihadist movements. But is religion the majority source of conflict or is it the exception to the rule? Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod in their *Encyclopedia of Wars* help us answer this question. They look at 1,763 wars over the last 5,500 years. As a part of their analysis, they identify the cause behind each conflict. Was the war a land grab? Was it to secure trade routes? Was it the result of some political vendetta? Interestingly, Phillips and Axelrod indicate that less than 7% of all wars and less than 2% of those killed were the result of religiously motivated conflict. The specifics get even more interesting: 3,000 killed in the religiously motivated Inquisition, 620,000 killed in the non-religiously motivated American Civil War.

Given this information one has to seriously doubt the proposition that religion is the major source of conflict in the world. Saying this is not meant to absolve religious groups of what tragedies have occurred in their name, it is only to prevent ourselves from dismissing religion of any kind based on a false view of history. In fact, if one looks at the 20th century and the 100 million people or so that were killed by atheistic, Communist states, it seems the real fear ought not to be religion but the lack thereof.