

Re: Invisible Friend

Nov 18, 2006

Dear Editor,

Sunni against Shiite, Protestant against Catholic, Muslim against Christian, these conflicts have all been described as people killing each other over who's invisible friend is bigger. In these contexts, religious belief merely serves to tap into and amplify our most primitive emotions. However, what all these religious conflicts have in common is the age old fight over access to natural resources and political power. Religion merely provides the required emotional traction necessary to propel one's team to victory. Is this really how we want to settle our differences?

With this in mind we might all agree on some new ground rules for civilized discourse: First, all beliefs must be open to criticism, comparison and even ridicule (there are no sacred cows), especially those beliefs based on a complete absence of evidence, written thousands of years ago by men who believed the world was flat. Second, if you want to participate in a civilized society you must be prepared to defend your beliefs with reason (without recourse to violence or dogmatism) because frankly, not all of us have a direct line to God. Third, all children should learn the historical facts (not values), rituals and proscriptions of all the world's major religions. If the propagation of your religious beliefs depends on the enforced ignorance of the young (be they Islamic madrassahs or Christian home schools) and cannot compete in the free market of ideas, then maybe they aren't all they're cracked up to be.

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