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February 1, 2012: Just the Beginning of the War on Religion

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2/1/2012—Sarah Posner has a very good piece in Religion Dispatches today about Newt Gingrich's talking point charging President Obama with fighting a war on religion. (story here). Part of this claimed war is sheer demagoguery, but part of it is genuine anger at the Administration over its refusal to extend a religious exemption for contraception coverage beyond a narrow category of religious institution to include Catholic hospitals and universities. Posner concludes that whatever Newt's chances of nomination after Florida, "We haven't heard the end of the 'war on religion'. It's just the beginning." Well now, maybe secularists will wake up to a political reality. A perceived war on religion is an electoral disaster in a country overwhelmingly Christian—still around 75%--and massively religious aside from Christianity. The religiously nonaffiliated might number as much as 15% of the population, but that is all. So maybe all that anti-religion rhetoric is at least a tactical mistake. And it is particularly galling to hear Sarah Posner complaining about "war on religion" rhetoric when she has been bashing religion, certainly bashing conservative religion, for quite a while. Anyone who doubts it can read her hatchet job on Rick Santorum back in early January, which I criticized in a blog entry below. All those who have been cheering on the late Christopher Hitchens and his best-selling *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*—and that is an awful lot of secularists—and all those who congratulated Obama for narrowly defining religious conscience have been engaged in a war on religion. I'm glad that some religious believers are pushing back.