

BELIEVERS IN THE BATTLESPACE

**BELIEVERS IN THE BATTLESPACE:
RELIGION, IDEOLOGY AND WAR**

EDITED BY PETER H. DENTON



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Sunset on 16 January 1991, from the site of the Union lines on Cemetery Ridge in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, taken at the same time as the first coalition aircraft began bombing Baghdad during the Gulf War.

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Peter H. Denton
Winnipeg, January 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Major-General J.P.Y.D. Gosselin vii

Introduction: On the Study of Religion and War

Peter H. Denton ix

Section 1: Religion, Narrative and Identity 1

1.1 At the Banquet in Hell: Sir George Mackenzie and Narratives
of Religious Conflict in 17th Century Scotland
Peter H. Denton 3

1.2 Religious Nationalism in the Russo-Turkish Wars
Levon Bond 23

1.3 From Co-Existence to Conflict: Maronites and Druze in 19th Century Lebanon
Sylvain Therriault 37

1.4 Religion and the Land: The Temple Mount
Becky Weisbloom 51

Section 2: Managing Religious Difference 63

2.1 Sierra Leone: A Model of Religious Tolerance?
Sharlene Harding 65

2.2 Peace through Ethno-Religious Partition: The Dayton Peace Accords
Christine Zubrinic 79

2.3 Creating Indigenous Religion: Conflict and Christianity in China
Nancy Reid 91

Section 3: Ideology and Identity 105

3.1 Buddhism and War in Sri Lanka
Robert B. Watts 107

3.2 Hindutva: Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Religious Violence
Rebecca Walker 119

3.3 Dodging the Missionary Effect: Western NGOs, Development and Aid
M. McLeod 133

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3.4 Motivating America: Political Rhetoric and the Usefulness of Religious Language
Charlene Piper 149

Section 4: The Politics of Personal Religion 161

4.1 Khomeini: Religious Ideologue and Pragmatist
William MacLean 163

4.2 Eyes Right: Religious Rhetoric in the Speeches of President George W. Bush after 9/11
David M. Hodson 179

Section 5: Religion and War in the 21st Century 191

5.1 Technology, Religion and Human Security in the 21st Century
Peter H. Denton 193

5.2 Peace for Our Time
Peter H. Denton 205

Notes on Contributors 223

Index 225

FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce *Believers in the Battlespace: Religion, Ideology and War*. This book represents the latest of over 35 publications produced by the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) Press. It is indicative of what we have tried to achieve – relevant operational material that will be of use to the Canadian Forces (CF) personnel service in today’s complex security environment.

Founded in January 2005, the CDA Press continues to be a testament to its founding principles. Its original vision was to provide a place where key themes and operational topics of importance for military personnel could be gathered together. CDA Press serves those who interact with the profession of arms, as well as the Canadian public at large.

Significantly, so that we may build on our proud and rich military experience and legacy, these publications have been Canadian-centric in content and perspective. This focus has allowed us to populate our CF professional development centres and schools (as well as those of our allies) and civilian universities and libraries with books that produce a distinctly Canadian operational perspective and experience.

It is appropriate that this volume emerges from a Canadian context in which religious diversity is celebrated and religious tolerance expected. *Believers in the Battlespace* explores ways in which religious beliefs and traditions are woven into both the fabric of war and of peace, how questions of ideology, identity and sacred space need to be considered as crucial elements not only in understanding 21st century conflicts, but also in working toward their resolution.

As always, we at the Canadian Defence Academy hope that the relevant and authoritative books on key operations topics published by CDA Press will both enlighten and empower those who read them. We welcome comments on our continuing efforts to develop an authoritative body of Canadian operational literature.

J.P.Y.D. Gosselin
Major-General
Commander
Canadian Defence Academy

INTRODUCTION: ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND WAR

Peter H. Denton



Blaming religion for creating conflict has become a popular activity in recent years. Such a conclusion, however, does not survive contact with the historical evidence. The closer the examination of specific situations, the less explanatory value there is in blanket statements about the culpability of religion for violence in the world.

The problem, of course, is too few people undertake such an examination. It is much easier and simpler to attribute such a role to religion and then go on to the heart of the matter – usually what needs to be done about “them.” Whether it is in the realm of politics or popular culture, “religion” (undefined) or specific religious traditions (like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam) are represented as causing, promoting or prolonging conflict. The rarely subtle implication is that were religion or religious beliefs able to be eliminated from the equation, an end would quickly be found by reasonable and intelligent people to regional conflicts that otherwise have no good reason to continue.

Blaming religion or religious traditions in this fashion is both simplistic and misleading. What is worse, in the context of the 21st century battlespace, such misunderstanding leads to the crippling – if not outright failure – of attempts to resolve conflicts within which religious elements are interwoven. Narratives of identity become ideological tools, defining groups against “the other” and justifying behaviours in which the tenets of “religion” are manipulated to serve ends that are rather more worldly and political than religious in nature.

More than thirty years ago I remember sitting in the parlour of a home in Sligo, hearing from a Presbyterian minister working in the Irish Republic about the troubles in Ireland, long accepted as religious in nature. His observation was that, were religious labels removed overnight and all memory of religion erased from the memory of the Irish people, the same groups would continue to fight each other for much the same reasons. That observation has stuck with me through a range of studies on the nature and character of religious beliefs. As an historian, I find glib associations of religion and conflict (bereft of context and evidence) instantly irritating; as a philosopher, I find them (absent clear definitions of the terminology used) intellectually lazy; as a social scientist, knowing the work that has been done on the social and cultural dimensions of religious beliefs, I find them crude and easily dismissed.

“Believers in the Battlespace”¹

Religion and violence are not strangers, as any cursory glance at world affairs, present or past, will demonstrate. While Muslim extremists might seem to have propelled religion onto the front pages in our time, it has never really been absent. Extremists of all sects and sorts historically have used religion to motivate, inspire or vilify individuals and groups. In the last 150 years of warfare involving western nations, however, religion has taken a back seat to industrial technology. God was presumed to be on the side of the bigger battalions, the larger calibres or the numbers of machines on any given battlefield.

Yet with the transformation of the battlefield into the much less distinct “battlespace” of the 21st century, the role played by religious belief in any particular conflict has become more significant. Religious factors are at least equal to social, cultural and psychological ones in understanding the sources of conflict and the motivations of the combatants. Even in a supposedly secular society like our own, values linked to religion are embodied in many of the decisions we make.

“Believers in the battlespace” is useful shorthand for this problem. The “believers” the phrase identifies are those on all sides motivated by religious beliefs to participate in – or to reject – the rigours and dangers of war and how they go about doing it. Whether these individuals are directly linked to a particular religious group or not, the effect of beliefs – what is morally good or bad, for example or the importance of helping other people, or the division of the world into “us and them” – on the choices we make is undeniable. When such religious motivations remain inarticulate, they are ineffectual; when such motivations are articulated, however, they are potent tools for mobilizing – or demobilizing – entire populations on the subject of warfare.

Because the “battlespace” of the 21st century is without necessary boundaries in either time or space, the definition of a “combatant” varies from situation to situation. Thus, while “believers in the battlespace” can point to religious elements in what happens between conflicting militaries, it can also point to religious elements in the civilian or non-combatant population upon whom those militaries must rely. What happens on the home front, as it used to be called, has real consequences for the effectiveness of the military at war, and what people at home think about the war reflects to some extent what they believe. The battlespace is thus extended into the lives of ordinary citizens who must decide what to believe, or what a war means, in the midst of conflicting values and inadequate information. What passes for “victory” or “defeat” may depend on what they decide.

The fragmenting of religious culture in western societies, however, makes a popular consensus about a “just war” all but impossible. For democratic governments wishing to bend in whatever

direction the wind of popular opinion happens to blow, this lack of consensus deposits politicians in the middle of a political minefield when it comes to proposing military intervention. Looking at Canadian, American and British involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, debates about the validity of “the mission” (itself an interesting choice of words!) reflect less of a practical confusion about what must be done than a philosophical confusion about what to believe. Because, as a culture, we are much more comfortable dealing with what people think than with what people believe, we are unable to create a meaningful consensus that mobilizes “believers in the battlespace” in an effective way, as a result.

A fair response to this problem is to ask “mobilize whom, and to do what?” For all the phraseology of “winning hearts and minds” in “the global war on terror,” there is little said or done on the subject of winning souls and spirits. History may teach us that humans are fundamentally irrational, but there are also many examples of sacrifices made in the name of some larger Cause, whether it was religious or political in nature, that inspired and motivated people to accomplish extraordinary deeds. While the most obvious example today might be the suicide bomber, in fact such individuals are outnumbered hundreds of thousands to one by people, out of their desire to help others, who volunteer with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the troubled places of our world – often as a result of personal convictions rooted in religious beliefs. In talking to a wide range of Canadian Forces (CF) personnel over the past several years, I have also been struck by how, for many members, their choice of profession is related to a desire to make a difference, to do something important in the world or with their lives. Whether these CF members self-identify as belonging to a religious group or not, the difference between a job and a calling or vocation is something religious groups have long recognized, encouraged and respected.

In the larger picture, however, what is “the Cause” for Canadians in the 21st century? What is “the mission”? Surely it is not just the deployment flavour of the moment, but the role Canadians should play in a world that, for the most part, does not enjoy our wealth and security. How do we respond to the needs of others? Perhaps most importantly, why should we? Whether it is in Afghanistan, or Sudan, or Haiti, or Bosnia, or any of a dozen places where our help is needed or given, if we are unable to articulate why we are there and what our involvement means, then the mission falters even when there is no real opposition at home or abroad.

Canadian intervention in world affairs, including military intervention, can be justified, but the reasons need to be developed past the point of bumper stickers or one-liners like “Fight Chaos.” It is unfortunate that the most effective campaigns are those – like the “Support Our Troops” magnetic decals, or Red Fridays, or the Highway of Heroes demonstrations on Highway 401 outside Toronto – that are inarticulate. Fighting chaos may be a good idea, but not articulating what this means leaves the believer adrift in the battlespace, not sure which way to paddle.

INTRODUCTION

The media and our political leaders are complicit in polarizing discussion on “Afghanistan, yes or no” without encouraging a popular consensus on the larger subject of Canada’s role in the global community. To provide a more meaningful alternative, the Canadian Forces as an institution and its members as Canadian citizens must become more articulate about what needs to be done, because they (unlike most of us) see up close what is going on. For their part, Canadians need to be drawn together into a consensus about why we should intervene in the affairs of others and about what should be done. This consensus must both incorporate and transcend a variety of religious and cultural perspectives to motivate citizens in support of Canada’s efforts abroad, whatever form these efforts might take.

That there are believers in the battlespace is both undeniable and inescapable. That religious extremists of all sects and sorts make use of what people believe to manipulate them in destructive ways is equally so. Given that every major religion, while it includes condemnations of the infidel, more strongly advocates an ethic of care for others, especially those less fortunate, believers could be mobilized to do things that are much more constructive if we had the ability to articulate why this is necessary.

From whatever perspective or discipline it is approached, the relationship between beliefs, particularly religious beliefs, and warfare is a huge subject. The War Studies program at the Royal Military College of Canada took one step toward equipping some of its students in this area by developing a course on Religion and Modern War (first offered by distance in 2008-09), out of which emerged the material for this book. Much more needs to be done. Without thoughtful analysis of the role played by believers in the battlespace, we risk turning this aspect of 21st century conflict over to extremists who have no difficulty articulating what they believe, thus increasing the insecurity, not only of the global community, but of our own communities here in Canada.

Approaching the Study of Religion and War

As religion has been implicated in most of the conflicts in recent global history, understanding the relationship between religious belief and conflict in the 21st century is crucial both for those whose careers take them within the ambit of warfare and for those civilians whose lives are shaped perhaps even more profoundly by its effects. No campaign to win “hearts and minds” will succeed without understanding the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which religion is co-opted on all sides in the pursuit of social, political, economic, cultural, and military objectives. Understanding the complexities of the relationship between religion and modern war therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach that interweaves the sociology, psychology and anthropology of religion with the philosophy of religion, all within an historical context that respects the diversity of cultures and faith traditions involved – and that is just for “religion”! Add to this the ongoing debate about the nature and character of “war” in the 21st century alone and

the complexity grows exponentially. We need new language, new terms and new approaches to enable us to manage the relationship between religion and war.

As a first response to the subject, people may be forgiven for thinking immediately of the ways in which religion is entwined in the conflicts that daily banner our newspapers, usually with some form of calamity. Thus a discussion of Israel or of the relationship between Judaism and Islam becomes how to resolve problems in Palestine or Lebanon, Gaza or the West Bank. Any interpretation of the current situation is almost immediately rendered in terms of current events, current players and some impending or immediate crisis. As a result, there is neither the time nor intellectual space to develop the skills – the interpretive tools – that would lead to a deeper and more coherent understanding of the situation. The people with the necessary theological understanding tend to be alarmingly ill-informed or unconcerned about the real world issues involved, while the people who know about the real world issues wield unfamiliar theological tools crudely and with so little understanding of what they are doing that they can cause serious damage almost overnight. This must change, because what is at stake (on all sides) is far too important to be mishandled in such a fashion.

We also should not let the larger issue of “religion and modern war” be defined in terms of current conflicts, particularly those in Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the reasons these conflicts have taken a certain trajectory is because of a lack of understanding of the wider issues relating to religion, culture and society on the part of the decision-makers involved. Iraq will not become a more peaceful place if western non-Muslims can understand the difference between Sunni and Shiite any more than peace came to Ireland because Middle Eastern Muslims finally figured out why Protestants and Catholics were fighting. Not only are the answers more than just political, economic or military answers, they are also hermeneutical, theological and profoundly local – both in the Middle Eastern context and within our own.

The inevitable consequence of any examination of religious activity is the realization that it is about local groups, what they believe and how they practice or apply those religious beliefs in their daily lives. That these groups can be co-opted into larger enterprises (pilgrimages or rallies, crusades and pogroms) is incontestable, but it may just as easily be argued that these large enterprises have more to do with socio-political issues than with a particular religious tradition.

To do little more than flag a huge academic debate with some serious ramifications, it is thus very easy to argue that there is no such thing as an archetypal “Christian” or “Muslim” or “Hindu” or “Buddhist” or whatever; there are only local expressions of a religious tradition within the lives of individuals and local communities. For decades the world talked about the fighting between “Catholics” and “Protestants” in Ireland. Yet to those outside either Ireland or the Christian tradition, it was Christians fighting amongst themselves; no doubt many an earnest

INTRODUCTION

observer wondered out loud why these Christians didn't practice their beliefs and just "love one another" as their religion required.

Even in this circumstance, the divisions were much more significant than a conventional analysis from the outside would suggest. What do you mean, after all, by "Protestant"? Do you mean Presbyterian or Anglican; Baptist or Pentecostal? The list of possible denominational affiliations explodes exponentially from there – while it might be possible to count up the various national and other expressions of Anglicanism or Presbyterianism because they have more formal denominational structures, try counting up Baptists or Pentecostals in the same way, and the task becomes unmanageable. While "Catholic" might in this case seem a little more straight-forward, as long as one assumes Roman Catholic, the regional character of the church – perhaps even parish by parish – makes the label ill-defined.

Ultimately, religious labels are either self-assigned ("I/We are Presbyterian Christians") or assigned by outsiders perhaps in conflict with the group they label. There is no necessary correlation between the two approaches to labelling; the tragic consequences of being labelled a "Jew" in Nazi-occupied Europe might have had nothing to do with personal choice or self-identification. What is clear, however, is that the process of labelling carves the larger expressions of "religion" into small and smaller bits, to the point it is possible to assert that effectively there is no such larger entity at all. The most extreme position, though one that is entirely defensible, is that there is only local religion, local theology, and that any larger representations are fictions generated for other purposes – such to promote centralized control by a hierarchy within a religious tradition, or to allow social and cultural manipulation by outsiders.

"Religion," therefore, has both nothing and everything to do with modern warfare. There is literally no point to talking about "religion" in such grand terms; we need to look instead at religious elements in specific groups, regions, and the resulting conflicts. Try to unpack any "clash of civilizations" in "religious" terms, and the analysis will collapse merely on the issue of the identification of the protagonists. There is a conflict, to be sure; there are religious elements to the conflict, to be sure; but to make it a conflict between religions is only possible if one completely ignores both the circumstances and the evidence.

It is actually more useful to refer to "religious traditions" instead of "religions." A "tradition" is a way of loosely associating those who self-identify as members – whether or not the groups themselves actually agree about which groups of individuals are members and which are not. Thus we can talk about the "Islamic tradition," though it is of little help evaluating a relationship between Sunni and Shiite, or Shiite and Sufi, or any of a host of divisions by region, nationality or ethnic character. (To those outside, of course, they are all "Muslims," and therefore able to be discussed and considered – however inaccurately – in unified fashion!)

When one hears the word “sectarian,” therefore, it is important not to assign a negative connotation; all religion is sectarian by nature. The question that emerges is not how to develop a religion that is non-sectarian (and therefore non-local), but how both the differences between sects within the religious tradition, and the differences between these sects and “outsiders,” are interpreted and managed. For example, a word often used to identify certain religious groups is “fundamentalist” – something that can be both a badge of honour within the group, and a pejorative when used by others. As with other labels, it should be viewed with considerable suspicion, and one should ask just what is meant by its use.

If religious belief and practice is necessarily expressed in local and sectarian terms, however, these local differences may be magnified by social and cultural forces into elements of conflict. Every religious tradition has its extremist possibilities, those sects in which extreme measures (usually violent ones) are not only acceptable when used against “the Others” but encouraged. The question that remains is whether the conflict can be resolved by realigning the religious elements or instead by changing the social and cultural circumstances that make use of religious traditions.

One of the crucial elements in understanding the role of religion within a society is the interplay between the sacred and the secular, between the beliefs, mores, values, and structures of religious life and the equivalent dimensions of social life. It is difficult enough to understand a religious tradition that has been in existence for thousands of years, with its own on-going internal dynamic of change; to understand it in terms of the dynamic changes taking place within 20th and 21st century society is even more tenuous an exercise. The confident predictability inherent in the language of “conflict management” gives way to the feeling one is instead “riding the tiger”!

To encourage a different approach to understanding the way religion is related to contemporary conflict, we need to step back in time and look at a series of discrete episodes in the religious history of different religious traditions, in different areas in the world. For example, to begin with Israel (but not its current situation), we might look at the concept of “the land” in Judaism, something that was a foundational belief in the versions of Zionism that justified the formation of Israel as a separate state in 1948. In fact, moving outward from those events, we should consider the significance of “sacred places and spaces” in Christianity, Islam and Judaism in the Middle East and how impossible it would be to establish ownership, boundaries and access in ignorance of what such places can mean.

The internal theological challenges facing Jews within “the State of Israel” – quite apart from its non-Jewish citizens and the relationships between Israel and surrounding states, religions and peoples – are thus formidable by themselves. Recognizing that these debates cannot happen in isolation or divorced from the realities of current affairs – and that there will be only one

INTRODUCTION

outcome if one climbs off the tiger's back – we are confronted with what it means to negotiate the relationship between “church and state.” Religious issues are thus not tangential to political decisions and their consequences, but integral instead.

When a conflict over a particular sacred place – and even a conflict over the interpretation and application of sacred texts – can be understood by an outsider to a religious tradition, it is the external social or intellectual elements that are being assessed. The internal characteristics of the conflict involving religion (its emotional and irrational elements) are likely the most significant, and yet these are the very elements that an outsider finds hardest to comprehend.

Master narratives which explain current attitudes and agendas thus need to be seen for the polemics they are and to be challenged accordingly, because in the battlespace today they serve tactical and strategic ends as surely as plans for the disposition of traditional military forces. Whenever the narrative incorporates or seeks to “explain” the significance of historical events (such as recent discussions of Christianity and Islam during the Crusades), there are contemporary system effects that can serve a much less noble and more pragmatic purpose than merely telling the historical truth.

To challenge one master narrative in particular, the myth of secularity in Western society frustrates our efforts to understand all parties to the conflicts of our time by removing religion to the realm of the personal, and therefore politically immaterial. As Charles Taylor explores in his book, *A Secular Age*, secularization has an intriguing trajectory in Western society and culture, one that is not easily represented either in terms of a separation of church and state or the elimination of religious influence from mainstream society.² Western society is anything but secular, whether the majority of its inhabitants count as regular attendees at public worship services or not; moreover, outside of western society, the role played by religious belief and religious tradition around the world is at least as pervasive as it has ever been. Discussions of ideology (or of group psychology and identity) that do not include religious practice as a fundamental component are therefore flawed; any conclusions drawn from these discussions about “what to do” are thus rendered only accidentally correct. Up against antagonists who understand the social, cultural and psychological dimensions of religious belief, our weapons and tactics are crude and ineffective.

Whether or not religious expression has been sidelined in social terms (though imagine any would-be Prime Minister or President successfully campaigning on an atheist platform!), in personal terms it is evident that individual religious belief or expression is thriving. Personal religion today has definite political, social and cultural ramifications in society at large, whether or not such ramifications are publicly acknowledged.

Thus, while we can see the logic in examining the role of religion in Middle Eastern affairs, or the significance of Buddhist thought in Myanmar as Buddhist monks protest against the government and are punished for doing so, it is unfortunately harder for us to identify the religious elements that are crucial components of Western politics – including our own. In particular, the element of apocalypticism in Western political thought (that might persuade people to make political decisions because “the end is near”) has frightening potential if those who believe in this historical trajectory have the power to bring about such an end.

Following the attack of September 11, 2001 (9/11) on the World Trade Center in New York, few people have difficulty recognizing the fanatical and extremist elements associated with some people claiming ties to the Islamic religious tradition. We also must consider the extent to which the larger problems of our time reflect fanaticism on all sides, grounded in and excused by inappropriate religious or theological proclamations.

This is not merely a recent development. It is all too easy to identify those whose political actions reflect fanaticism rather than faith, hubris rather than humility, and who favour the exercise of power over the pursuit of peace – all in the name of what they claim are the “principles” of their religious tradition – in other times besides our own. Whatever our history, however, in the 21st century battlespace we cannot afford to let conflict fuelled by differences, religious or otherwise, spiral out of control.

One of the ways of dealing with religious difference is to take the route the British took in separating or partitioning India and Pakistan along primarily religious lines, with Pakistan identified as a primarily Muslim state and India as a primarily Hindu state. (Obviously, however much those distinctions reflect the majority of the populations, they do not – and did not even then – reflect what was actually happening on the ground, as there are diverse expressions of a range of religious traditions in both countries.) In both India and Pakistan, democracy and religious expression are thus intertwined; though this is a carry-over from the days of Empire, both countries have found ways to incorporate Western democratic principles within cultures derived from non-Western religious traditions in a way that reflects their independence and sovereignty. While it might be argued that equality was inherent in Sikhism from the outset (however its local expressions might have reflected hierarchy), and that inequality was inherent in the Hindu caste system but not in Islam, the inter-relationships between democracy and socio-cultural structures derived from religious practice have created a swirl of new possibilities and problems. Are both religious tolerance and democratic institutions able to be maintained in the face of extremism, or does the political response to extremism foster religious difference instead? Are India and Pakistan forever to be “two solitudes,” making the world a more dangerous place as a result? Is there some other way to negotiate political co-existence between cultural groups that use religious beliefs and practices as political tools?

INTRODUCTION

One hopes so, not only for their sake but for our own. Whatever lip service is paid to secularism in other countries, it merely takes a Presidential election campaign in the United States to remind us of how intertwined religion and politics can be, there and elsewhere. Whether it is in the rhetoric of the campaign, the questions candidates are required to answer, or the positions advanced by religious groups, religion – frequently Protestant, Christian, right-wing, “evangelical” and likely “fundamentalist” (to use some of the usual labels) – is an element of the political process. While Canadians are predictably less vocal about such issues, there is an undercurrent of religiosity in our political processes as well that (while tending to be Christian) is perhaps more tolerant of the institutional practices of a multi-cultural (and thus multi-faith) society. Western European countries, in their turn, may be ostensibly more “secular,” yet institutional relationships between church and state may be even more formally entrenched than they are in North America. Everywhere, whether at personal or institutional levels, religious expression and religious values are to be found in all sectors of the political process.

In other words, the very same influences and issues that religious beliefs and practices bring into the political realm in other areas of the world are also to be found right here, though perhaps disguised by the veneer of secularism that overlays the political decision-making process in the public realm in Canada and the United States, as well as in western Europe. Certainly when “religion” is expanded to include the sociological and operational definitions of religious practice – quite apart from any particular religious tradition – western society and culture is imbued with the implications of a religious world view. The social choices that are made about what is important or unimportant, what is about “good” and “evil” in the world that in practice define the values and mores of our culture (one need not look further than the archetypal “axis of evil” language used on a regular basis, for example), have a religious character that is more dangerous because it tends to be inarticulate and therefore more difficult to manage.

In the 21st century battlespace, we therefore need to consider the “future history” set out by different religious traditions, and how such ideas might be embodied in the current political decisions of individuals in public. Messianism in Judaism, apocalypticism in Christianity, and the equivalent future state of the world according to Islam, and so on, may all play a significant and potentially dangerous role in the motivations of political actors on the world stage, and thus in the initiation and resolution of whatever conflicts there might be. Nor are the “future tense” elements of other religious traditions (Hinduism and Buddhism to name but two) without political, social and cultural consequence in the battlespace.

What if someone who believes “the end is near” has the means to bring it about (according to their interpretation of what the “end” looks like, in terms of their religious tradition)? Does global survival therefore require the elimination of all religious motivations in the political

sphere, and their replacement by some global secular vision, if such a secular vision is even possible? Or is there some other way, incorporating the religious vision for the future integral in all of the religious traditions we have discussed, but rejecting those extremist or fanatical elements in all of the traditions that are threatened by “the Other” and which attempt to hasten the end of the world as they understand it? As Sir George Mackenzie put it in *Religio Stoici* (1663), I would argue the problem is “the fanatics of all sects and sorts” – fanaticism and extremism as behaviours in themselves – not any particular religious tradition.

Ultimately, we need to know what we believe in order to understand why something needs to be done, particularly if we are to reach some meaningful goal that will be worth what we must sacrifice to achieve it. Yet statements like this are religious expressions, couched in terms that for any believer must have a religious dimension, whether or not it is formally acknowledged in the public sphere where political decisions are made.

Outline of the Book

Beginning with the idea that, in the 21st century, the battlefield has irrevocably become the battlespace, the authors of this collection of articles and essays explore the relation between religion and modern warfare and provide a series of examples as to how this relationship may be understood in specific circumstances.

Chapters in the first section exemplify the role played by religious belief, tradition or leadership in weaving narratives of social and political identity, particularly in a time of serious conflict. In the first article, I present the case of Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, Lord Advocate of Scotland and author of *Religio Stoici* (1663) – a book on religious tolerance, among other things – and show how the narratives of religious conflict in 17th century Scotland were unfairly drawn to make him “the bloody Mackenzie” because of his prosecution of the Covenanting Presbyterians who resisted the authority of the Crown. Levon Bond explores the relationship between religion and national identity in the Russo-Turkish wars toward the end of the 19th century and how entwined they became. Sylvain Therriault considers the historical relationship between Druze and Maronite communities in Lebanon, and how poor governance and external influence created a conflict that was then fought along religious lines. Becky Weisbloom looks at the issues surrounding sacred space, specifically the Temple Mount, which help define national identity and make the resolution of conflicts with religious dimensions more difficult.

The second section presents examples of how religious difference has been negotiated (successfully or not) once such social or political identities have been established. Sharlene Harding offers Sierra Leone as an example of how religious tolerance can exist, even in the midst of civil

INTRODUCTION

war, should all parties agree it is important. Christine Zubrinic analyzes the effectiveness of religious and ethnic partition in Bosnia as an approach to resolving conflicts in which religious traditions have been deliberately used to create political and ethnic tensions. Nancy Reid considers how attempts to suppress or control Christianity in China after the 1949 Revolution actually turned it into an indigenous religion, with a specific Chinese character that subsequently has made it impossible to remove from future Chinese society.

The third section illustrates how, while religion may be a component of both ideology and identity, it does not necessarily determine a specific resolution of any individual conflict. Robert B. Watts explores the ways in which Buddhism was used to create national identity and thus encourage ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Rebecca Walker similarly explores how Hinduism has been used as a political tool to foster resentment and specific acts of political violence against Muslim and other non-Hindu citizens of India. Moving to Africa, M. McLeod considers “the missionary effect” in the delivery of aid in Africa and the problems that result from NGOs being perceived as agents of either religious or cultural imperialism. Charlene Piper then looks at the way religious language has been incorporated into American political rhetoric, from George Washington to the present, calling into question whether the separation between church and state is as definite as some might think.

The chapters in the fourth section indicate ways in which the personal religion of political leaders can shape social and political ends. William MacLean analyzes the role of the Ayatollah Khomeini in creating the conditions for an Islamic state after the Revolution in Iran. David M. Hodson explores what happens when a President (specifically George W. Bush) uses language in his speeches that associates him with the Christian Right in the United States, at a time when (after 9/11) not only America but the whole world was listening to what he had to say.

Finally, in the fifth section, the approach shifts from article to essay. Public conversation about religion, peace and security is a necessity in our time. I offer two essays here as contributions to such a conversation.

Throughout this volume, my intention has been to provide illustrations of what becomes possible if a balanced, reasonable and historical approach is taken to explore the role of religious beliefs and traditions in modern conflict. None of the chapters presented, including my own, is intended to be the last word on some very crucial and difficult topics. Emerging from the context of a graduate seminar, they are intended as exemplars, as examples of what results from a fair-minded engagement with the evidence, in order to promote (or perhaps provoke) further conversation in which we hope that you, as the reader, will be willing to engage.

Notes

- 1 This section first appeared as “Believers in the Battlespace,” in the *Canadian Military Journal* Vol. 9 No. 1 (Fall 2008), 100-101, and is reprinted here with permission.
- 2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Belknap Press, 2007).

SECTION 1
RELIGION, NARRATIVE
AND IDENTITY

AT THE BANQUET IN HELL: SIR GEORGE MACKENZIE AND NARRATIVES OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN 17TH CENTURY SCOTLAND¹

Peter H. Denton

History is often at the mercy of those who write it. There is little extravagance to the claim that every generation rewrites history in its own image, sometimes redressing previous injustices as it reinterprets the significance of “facts” and “events.” The history of Restoration Scotland is an appropriate subject for such revision, as it seems more hagiography than historiography. Peopled by historians with villains, martyrs and saints until at least the beginning of the 20th century, it still reflects the opinions of those who achieved in print the victory denied the Scottish theocrats in their century-long feud between church and state. Of all the obloquy heaped on those who “persecuted” innocent Presbyterians at the behest of Charles II and James II, few have reaped such a whirlwind of undeserved abuse as Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, Lord Advocate of Scotland from 1677 to 1688.

The voices raised against the persecution of Presbyterians on religious grounds were loud and compelling. Chief among them was Robert Wodrow, a Presbyterian minister, whose history of “the sufferings of the Church of Scotland” was published in 1721 and whose work is so much the more persuasive to modern sensibilities for his protestations of objectivity.² Setting aside the accuracy of the “facts” he presented about religious persecution in Restoration Scotland, few reasons are given for the actions that Wodrow and others so hotly condemned, other than perhaps pure blood thirstiness, engendered by natural depravity. Wodrow leaves no doubt that the King’s Lord Advocate, Sir George Mackenzie, was a willing party to the slaughter of these Covenanting lambs: “[He] was a very great instrument in the afterseverities against Presbyterians, and was scarce ever guilty of moderating any harsh proceedings against them in the eyes of the prelates themselves.”³ If assessments of persecution depend on where one sits, Wodrow makes it clear that he sits in the dock with the martyred innocents, facing the villainous prosecuting advocate, Sir George Mackenzie.

Such language is not an exaggeration of the repute in which Mackenzie has been held for nearly three centuries. Although John Dryden referred to him as “that noble wit of Scotland,”⁴ to his compatriots for generations he has been the “bluidy Advocate, Mackenzie,” and frequently dismissed as such whenever he has been mentioned at all.⁵ Author of Scotland’s first novel (*Aretina*) at a time when most books printed in that country were sermons or political treatises,⁶ acknowledged as the Scottish legal authority for 130 years because of his work on

SECTION 1.1

the Criminal Statutes of Scotland,⁷ founder of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh,⁸ Mackenzie published 18 books during his life, many of which went through several editions. His second published work, *Religio Stoici* (1663), played off a popular book published twenty years earlier by another young man – the *Religio Medici* of Sir Thomas Browne.⁹ *Religio Stoici* illuminates the mind of a man capable of intelligent discourse on diverse topics from heraldry to happiness, the trial of witches to the legitimacy of kings, and foreshadows the career of an advocate who, when finally at the mercy of his enemies, is described as “an honest man, firm beyond belief.”¹⁰

Prejudice is fostered in many different ways, and Sir Walter Scott played his own part in promoting Mackenzie's reputation as a blot on the Scottish escutcheon. In *Redgauntlet*, through the tale of Wandering Willie, he placed Mackenzie in hell at the famous banquet of “ghastly revelers” – murderers and traitors all – who had crushed the Covenanting movement, claiming that “the bluidy Advocate Mackenzie ... for his worldly wit and wisdom, had been to the rest as a god.”¹¹ On a similar note, in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Davie Deans said of a young relative of Mackenzie's:

What, sir, wad ye speak to me about a man that has the blood of the saints at his fingers' ends? Didna his eme [uncle] die and gang to his place wi' the name of the Bluidy Mackenzie? and winna he be kenned by that name sae lang as there's a Scots tongue to speak the word?¹²

Even his grave in the Greyfriars churchyard in Edinburgh has been used to terrify local children for centuries, and there the legend of the “bluidy Mackenzie” has served to hide at least one daring fugitive from justice.¹³

Scott's portrayal of Sir George Mackenzie as the “bluidy Advocate” is ubiquitous in subsequent Scottish historiography. Robert H. Story's account of the persecutors of Covenanters in Scotland reads like Wandering Willie's list of the banqueters in hell, with Mackenzie described as “the most remarkable man among them”:

A man of wide culture and great learning ... an author who clothed his subtle thought in an admirable style, as clear as Swift's, and as piquant as Montaigne's, an accomplished jurist and an enlightened politician, he yet lent all the weight of his character and abilities to the cause of misgovernment and oppression.¹⁴

Mackenzie's virtues are swamped in the balance by his actions as Lord Advocate, because of his depiction as “the willing instrument of the most prying and painstaking persecution of insignificant and fanatical offenders that Christendom has ever seen.”¹⁵ Francis Watt could relate the various accounts of Mackenzie's dealings and remark:

The dexterous twisting of legal forms, “the torture of laws” in Bacon’s phrase, gave him a certain pleasure. He stooped to chicanery [sic], trickery, and cruelty. An irritability of temper made him accentuate and underline the worst Stuart tendencies.¹⁶

Perhaps Watt’s conclusion underscores the irrelevance of evidence to Mackenzie’s reputation, however:

And so, though Mackenzie was learned and loyal, though he was faithful to a fallen cause, though he gave Scotland, his country, a great library, though he is blamed for much unjustly, it seems vain to argue or even try to remember all this. He is the Bluidy Mackenzie then and since and for all time.¹⁷

The condemnation by such “historians” is so sweeping that no one allows Mackenzie even the possibility of being able to defend his actions, nor does anyone acknowledge any principles behind his actions which, in retrospect at least, would rehabilitate his reputation.

Even those historians who wrote favourably of Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh seem to fear being considered apologists, thus undercutting much of the force of their own work in crediting him with the important role he played in Scottish history. A. Taylor Innes wrote in 1871 that although the advocate was an enlightened “latitudinarian” at first, he set himself against the conscience of a nation:

The truth seems to be, that Mackenzie was not originally an unjust man, but he was an admirer of despotism, and had a hatred of private judgment; and he was engaged in a contest with a nation which was getting wearied of the former, and was determined to have the latter.¹⁸

Similarly, when in 1916 A.M. Williams assessed blame for the persecutions of the Restoration period, Mackenzie and his colleagues were held responsible:

The impartial mind finds it hard to sympathize with either side, with the narrow, meddling, domineering Covenanters or with the brutal oppressors of the Killing Time. Yet the main blame lies with the Government. In view of the temper of the nation, a fair trial might have been given to Presbyterianism, but the statesmen of the day were not big enough men to try the experiment, and the king himself hated Presbyterianism.¹⁹

But though Innes avers Mackenzie was “no bigot,” merely a man fallen into bad company,²⁰ and Williams excuses his actions as Lord Advocate as simply those ordered by the Privy Council whom he had to obey,²¹ the sense of outraged liberalism that pervades both articles prejudices their judgments of the “bluidy Advocate”; for them, no government could have legitimate

SECTION 1.1

recourse to torture or any form of political or religious repression, it seems, and thus the Covenanting movement at worst was the lesser of two evils.

Such a conclusion, however, no longer passes for good history, for our assessment of Restoration Scotland is different from that of Robert Wodrow and his successors. The depiction of the Covenanters as the champions of liberty and religious freedom is less dependent upon “fact” than upon what Andrew Lang called “traditional” Scottish history in his 1909 biography of Mackenzie:

In our own day popular books ... and religious services held by the graves of the martyrs, keep fresh the Covenanting tradition. But a critical knowledge of more than a century of war between the Kirk and the State, from 1559 to 1689, is rare indeed. The Early Fathers of the Kirk, and the Covenanters, are too commonly regarded as champions and martyrs of enlightenment, of liberty, civil and religious, of freedom of conscience, whereas religious liberty and freedom of conscience were to them abominations.²²

When the history of Restoration Scotland is examined in political rather than in religious terms, an understanding is possible which washes at least some of the blood from Mackenzie’s hands.

Sir George Mackenzie’s *Religio Stoici* was published in 1663 and was probably written in 1662, at a critical point in the struggle between the Covenanting Presbyterians and the King after the Restoration. The first Scottish Parliament after the Restoration passed 393 acts in a six-month session, including the Act Recissory, which annulled all legislation enacted after 1633.²³ By the end of the session, the King had been made virtually an absolute monarch, and the episcopal system of church government had been reimposed.²⁴ In 1662, the newly-appointed bishops were given further powers, and it was decreed that no minister could lead a congregation without his submission to the local bishop. Some 262 ministers declined and were accordingly deprived of their churches.²⁵ Many of them set up field conventicles (open-air churches) and the government once again faced open rebellion.²⁶ Long before the events Robert Wodrow describes occurred, the Covenanters were active politically, whatever religious motivations they might ascribe to their deeds. The image of peaceful, God-fearing and law-abiding folk that Wodrow conjures in his account of the Covenanting martyrs does not square with their antics. For all the martyrology of the Covenanting movement, the struggle waged between Scottish Presbyterians and the government during the Restoration period was not primarily religious in character, but political, and those who (like Sir George Mackenzie) battled intractable Covenanters, regarded themselves as defenders of political legitimacy against anarchy poorly disguised by the “theology” of Covenanting preachers.

It is in this context that *Religio Stoici* should be viewed, as a statement about tolerance in an intolerant age, and as an attempt to articulate the necessity of separating personal religion and politics. Through persecution, if necessary, the kirk had to be removed from the political sphere, thereby allowing for the just operation of a legitimate government. Mackenzie believed that the government's choice was between persecution and civil war, and he may well have been right.²⁷ Even after the Restoration, the Covenanting movement still defied royal authority in matters touching the political prerogatives of the kirk. Though many of the King's appointees were incompetents, profligates or opportunists, not all were,²⁸ and the issue at stake was one of principle – the outward conformity of all individuals to the laws of the state, as decreed by the King in Parliament, for the peace and security of the commonwealth. Had the kirk restricted itself to protesting matters of theology, concessions undoubtedly could have been made, but when the conventicles armed themselves, and attempted assassinations of bishops – succeeding, in the case of Archbishop James Sharp, pulled from his carriage and hacked to death outside St. Andrews on 3 May 1679 – the conflict remained in the secular arena and was countered appropriately.

Others have finally begun the necessary re-evaluation of Sir George Mackenzie's career as an advocate, parliamentarian and finally as Lord Advocate from 1677 to 1688, though there is much yet still to be done.²⁹ As background to *Religio Stoici*, however, it is necessary to understand the volatile mix of church and state in Restoration Scotland, and to consider dispassionately the ideas of a man unjustly remembered as a villain by associates of those who later felt the brunt of his ability and dedication to law and order. Mackenzie may well have been used by others less scrupulous with whom and for whom he had to work, but it is wrong to call his actions unprincipled; a man less able would undoubtedly have been less successful, and would probably have thus escaped three centuries of infamy. In relating the "facts" as Wodrow and others have done, what has been ignored is their context, and thus no justification has been allowed for the persecution which they so harshly condemned. The historiography of Restoration Scotland has been the poorer for such narrow-mindedness.

Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh should be a prominent figure in any history of Restoration Scotland, and not for his reputation as the "bluidy Advocate." Through his writings he provides a unique window on the struggle between church and state, as an articulate and educated man wallowing in the morass of Restoration politics. At a time when most loyalties bent with the political winds, Mackenzie appears to have been motivated by principles of justice and legitimacy, willing to contend even with the King himself should he propose changes to the law that did not accord with these principles.³⁰ *Religio Stoici* was written before the events which earned Mackenzie his sobriquet, and a full fifteen years before he became Lord Advocate, yet it contains more than an embryo of the principles that would make him a staunch defender of the

SECTION 1.1

monarchy and the judicial scourge of the Covenanting movement. Almost three hundred years after his death in exile at Oxford, it now should be possible to reconsider the career and reputation of “that noble wit of Scotland,” and reach some more balanced assessment of both.

Against the Fanatics of All Sects and Sorts: *Religio Stoici* (1663)

Religio Stoici is a curious book. It would be easy to dismiss its oddities as unintended, as the product of confusion rather than design, and claim the context of the book rather than its contents renders it intrinsically valuable. Although there can be as many specific “contexts” as there are attempts to identify them, an awareness of the general intellectual or social milieu in which a book was written can also be crucial to appreciating its significance. In the case of *Religio Stoici*, that significance is primarily historical; Sir George Mackenzie’s book was very much a product of its times, and whatever literary influences are evident, the recent history of Scotland most occupied the attention of the man destined to become her most infamous Lord Advocate. The continuing dispute between the radical Presbyterians and Conformists over the division of powers between church and state provided much of the impetus, as well as the material, for Mackenzie’s best-known essay.

Despite the “Address to the Fanatics of all Sects and Sorts” which prefaces the book, *Religio Stoici* was not written to persuade Covenanters to abandon their theocratic designs, but instead seems directed at those who were content to remain within the established structure of the institutional church. Whatever the stories of persecution and religious repression, not all Scots of the time were Covenanters nor were necessarily sympathetic to the radical elements of the Presbyterian church. There were enough editions of *Religio Stoici*, moreover, to suggest it was reasonably popular, even as late as 1685 after Mackenzie had garnered his reputation as the “bluidy Advocate” during what the Covenanters called “the killing time.”³¹

Mackenzie claims he is “by Religion a Protestant” (82), but clearly identifies himself as a Conformist throughout the book. Though opposed to the Covenanters over the issue of the liberty of individual conscience where the state is affected, he stoutly maintains his Christian perspective: “What I have spoken against cases of conscience and the like, strikes not against their Christian fellowship and correspondence, but against the apish fopperies of pretending counterfeits” (233). One man’s “apish fopperies” are another man’s divinely-inspired convictions, however, and it is when theological disputes spill over into the secular arena that such distinctions lead to violence. Mackenzie recognizes this problem,³² and argues that persecution based on what can be no more than a difference of opinion is absurd.³³ At the same time, Mackenzie articulates his own ideas from a particular stance, which for the modern reader at least must be distilled more from the historical context of *Religio Stoici* than from any particular statement by its author.

Mackenzie is a lawyer, and his attitude throughout *Religio Stoici* is tempered with forensic common sense, whatever the specific issue. Accordingly, when the avowed aims of the Covenanting movement are compared with their actions, he sees no logical connection: “Seeing all Christians are but pilgrims here, I admire that these pilgrims should leave off to journey, and stand skirmishing and fighting with all such as will not travel their road” (90). Because Mackenzie is a lawyer, and admits to having travelled only “a sabbath day’s journey” in theology (232), however, the theological issues debated so hotly and violently elsewhere seem trivial to him, if not ridiculous: “Take not Christians more pains to refute one another, than to convince Gentiles? And stand not some Episcopists and Presbyterians at greater distance, than either do with Turks and pagans?” (95-96)

Mackenzie has two principal targets in *Religio Stoici*: the promulgators of divisive beliefs which are incidental to the essence of Christianity, and their zealous disciples who place zeal above adoration, and faith above reason. Throughout *Religio Stoici* the dominant theme is a Anglican *via media* (or middle way) between the twin poles of excessive rationality and the “enthusiastic or inspired theology” that the antics of radical Presbyterians continually displayed. After all, Mackenzie points out: “Are we not ready to condemn today as fanatic what yesterday was judged juredivino: And do not even those who persecuted others for their opinions, admire why they should be, upon that score, persecuted themselves?” (93)

He identifies three “idols” in the Scottish church – akin, perhaps, to those idols of knowledge Francis Bacon describes in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) – which reflect dangerous theological priorities, associating each with the preachers responsible for disseminating these contentious doctrines from the pulpit. The first “idol” is that of “polemic or controverted divinity” – urged by churchmen “whose humour was edged with choler” – in which confrontation pre-empts charity: “And so by an intestine and civil war of opinions, [these churchmen] raised within the bowels of Religion did waste and pillage that holy Canaan, which formerly flowed with the milk of sincere doctrine, and the honey of divine consolations” (138). The second idol is depicted as Renaissance humanists depicted medieval scholasticism – something which (if we believe Mackenzie) is still thriving in its equivalent Protestant form in the Scottish church:

Others again, in whose brains sullen melancholy formed phantoms and ideas, invented scholastic theology; and these, in abstract cells, erected a minthouse, for coining the dross of their own contemplations, into wonderful bombast notions; and to make them go current, in the suffering Church, gave them the impressa of Theology. (139)

The third idol is obviously associated with the Covenanters of contemporary Scotland, whose theocratic pretensions are the butt of much ridicule in *Religio Stoici*:

SECTION 1.1

A third sort, not able to soar their pitch in the sky of invention, resolved to set up a correspondence with Heaven; and this they called enthusiastic, or inspired, theology. And their cabins were posthouses, where one might know what was resolved lately in the conclave of Heaven, whether the King or Parliament was to wear the laurels, and what should be the issue of our pious rebellions. (139)

Each of these three “idols” is caused by the ill-ordered beliefs or goals of individuals, something in itself evidence of Mackenzie’s support for an institutional church firmly controlled by Crown-appointed bishops. When any of these opinions are maintained zealously, they become for Mackenzie what he condemns as fanaticism; he blames fanaticism for the current divisiveness in the Christian church over what he considers trivialities. For those who would claim that their zeal was all in the service of Christ, Mackenzie asserts that more damage has been done to the Church by people who claimed to be zealous followers, than by those who ignored it completely (85-86). Besides, he says pointedly,

If the glory of God were the mark at which these do level, why bestow they not their zeal, rather in converting such as scarce know or acknowledge that there is a God? And why are they more enraged against these who agree with them in most things, than these who dissent from them in all? (95)

For Mackenzie, fanaticism – even ostensibly in a good cause – bespeaks an ill-ordered mind, in which reason is either overpowered by passion, or turned into fruitless casuistry.

It is with the ill-ordered minds of individuals that Mackenzie is concerned in much of *Religio Stolica*, for that issue crosses over the lines drawn by the different subjects that became chapter headings in the 1665 editions. He states his primary purpose for writing the book in this blunt fashion:

My design all amongst this discourse, butts at this one principle, that speculations in religion are not so necessary, and are more dangerous than sincere practice. It is in religion as in heraldry, the simpler the bearing be, it is so much the purer and the ancients. (236)

He believes that dogmatism inevitably breeds scepticism,³⁴ from which in turn come superstition and atheism. Speculation in religion, moreover, is not only foolish but potentially dangerous: “The tallest wit is not able to reach Heaven, albeit (I know) many disjoint their wits in stretching them too high in the inquiry of its mysteries” (140). Further, he says, “these colossus wits, become the greatest heretics, as these ordinarily are most burnt, whose fingers ofttest stir up fires” (141).

Speculation maintained magisterially is then the root cause of the three idols he identifies in the Scottish church, and Mackenzie uses the image of reaching beyond one’s grasp to illustrate effectively the need for correctly ordering religious aspirations:

And is it not the zenith and topbranch of madness for us to pry into God's unsearchable decrees, who know not how our neighbour's calf is formed in its dam's belly?....But as this study is unattainable, so it is unprofitable; for seeing God's art of governing the world, and His decrees of saving or damning its citizens is a trade we shall never be able to practice, why should we have such an itch to understand it? (128)

Unfortunately, Mackenzie is not successful in attempting to define just when Christians should cease to speculate and be content with their theological lot.³⁵ Though he recognizes an epistemological problem in the Scottish church, Mackenzie is much better at identifying the vector than at curing the disease.

For Mackenzie the chief weapon in the devil's arsenal was the sermon, which rendered more to Caesar than to Christ,³⁶ as preachers fomented rebellion from the pulpit instead of cultivating Christian virtues:

When the pulpit was a mount Sinai, from which the Law was thundered, or a mount of Olives, whereon our Saviour's glorious transformation was to be seen, then were sermons to be honoured; but, since it is become a mount Calvary, whereon our blessed Saviour suffers daily, by scandalous railings, sermons are now become unsavoury for the most part. (166)

Mackenzie accuses the clergy of misappropriating Scripture for their own private designs,³⁷ claiming that in the past the reason for assigned liturgies was to deny individual preachers the opportunity to become demagogues, "lest if they had been left a freedom in their choice, they had chosen such as might, in the letter, have suited best with such seditious libels as are now obtruded upon the people, in lieu of pious homilies, at remarkable and festive occasions" (142). He wryly admits, however, that even such an attempt to control the subject matter of individual sermons would probably have failed of its purpose in the present Scottish church.³⁸

Though Mackenzie's incredulity at the unrest fomented by such preaching is a rhetorical device, it is not necessarily feigned. From his perspective, it does seem incredible that "scaffolds were dyed with Christian blood, and the fields covered with the carcasses of murdered Christians" (95); though the description is extreme, he is undoubtedly right in concluding that: "it is probable, that there were more damned by unprepared deaths in the fields, than were saved by peeping sermons in incendiary churches" (95). What he can understand least is how for the sake of what he considers mere opinion people could be persecuted so ferociously:

SECTION 1.1

All which makes me admire, why in our late troubles, men really pious, and naturally sober, could have been so transported, as to destroy whom they could not convince, and to persuade these who were convinced, that Religion obliged them to destroy others. (95)

It is at this point in *Religio Stoici* that Mackenzie turns what would otherwise be a theological dispute (or at least a pragmatic argument over the structure of church government) into an epistemological problem. He evaluates the current relationship between “faith” and “reason,” and attributes the speculative fanaticism abroad within the church to a misunderstanding of the role which they play in Christian epistemology. It seems, however, that he is primarily concerned with the third idol, of “enthusiastic or inspired theology,” and the implications of divine inspiration or revelation for the orderly conduct of a church and its members. In view of contemporary events in Scotland, it would be surprising to find him concerned with any other subject.

Though he sarcastically comments that a direct correspondence with Heaven is one which “few today hold” (128), Mackenzie is not amazed by the problems which “inspired theology” has been able to cause:

I am not at a maze, to see men so tenacious of contrary principles in Religion; for, man’s thoughts being vast and various, he snatches at every offered suggestion, and if by accident he entertain any of these many as a divine emission, he thereafter thinks it were blasphemy to bring that thought to the test of reason, because he hears that faith is above reason; or to relinquish it, because the common suffrage of his country runs it counter, seeing he is taught even by them that the principles of belief must not be chosen by the pole. (236)

The possibility of spontaneous inspiration unfortunately creates a theological morass which no amount of rationalization can hope to bridge. The efficacy of reason is of necessity denied, causing an epistemological standoff between the proponents of “inspired” theology and those who refuse to allow it, in which neither side recognizes the validity of the other’s argument. As Mackenzie ruefully confesses, “it is as hard to confute their fictions, as it is impossible for them to come by the knowledge of them” (128).

The problem lies in what the relationship is between faith and reason, and whether one or the other has pre-eminence in Christian epistemology. The “enthusiastic or inspired theology” of the Covenanting movement placed faith above reason, and allowed revelation before logic. Such a situation made intolerance inevitable, according to Mackenzie, for “seeing faith is above reason ... I wonder not to see even the best-tempered Christians think that which is not their own religion to be therefore ridiculous” (236). Denying the efficacy of reason, however, has its own problems, as he wryly observes: “If Religion and its mysteries cannot be comprehended by

reason, I confess it is a pretty jest to hear such frequent reasonings amongst churchmen in matters of Religion” (205). Though Mackenzie is “always ashamed” when reason is “pro-claimed rebel against God Almighty; and such declared traitors, as dare harbour it, or appear in its defence” (207), he is aware of its limits and blames excessive rationality for scholastic casuistry, in which theologians “controvert about shadows” (100).

In attempting to resolve this apparent standoff between faith and reason – a resolution necessary for any useful dialogue between the two opposing factions in Scotland – Mackenzie picks up Sir Thomas Browne’s argument in *Religio Medici* about the relationship between faith and reason. For Browne, man is “that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds.”³⁹ Thus there is no need to assert the superiority of either faith or reason, for each is needed in its own sphere:

As Reason is a Rebel unto Faith, so Passion unto Reason: as the propositions of Faith seem absurd unto Reason, so the Theorems of Reason unto Passion, and both unto Reason. Yet a moderate and peaceable discretion may so state and order the matter, that they may be all Kings, and yet make but one Monarchy, every one exercising his Sovereignty and Prerogative in a due time and place, according to the restraint and limit of circumstance.⁴⁰

Mackenzie distinguishes between faith and reason in a way very similar to Browne’s, with only “a superficial inquiry” being necessary to resolve the situation – an easy victory for what he probably would have agreed was “right reason,” exercised by “The Virtuoso, or Stoic”:

And albeit faith and reason be looked upon as Jacob and Esau, whereof the younger only hath the blessings, and are, by divines, placed at the two opposite points of the diameter; yet, upon a superficial inquiry, that faith is but sublimated reason, calcined by that divine chemical fire of baptism; and that the soul of man hath lurking in it all these virtues and faculties which we call theological. (205-206)

Such attempts to resolve the epistemological problem of the appropriate spheres of faith and reason must confront what little we know of his intellectual background. The lawyer did not exaggerate his lack of theological education, and whatever his diagnoses of the particular ills of the Scottish church, his theological remedies are sketchy at best. In attempting to steer a middle course between excessive rationality and “enthusiastic or inspired theology,” he does not even reach the same sort of enraptured conclusion which Sir Thomas Browne attains. The closest the Scottish advocate comes to the mystical “O altitudo” which Browne loves to pursue is this one passage, itself out of character with the rest of *Religio Stoici* – which, despite its title, says very little more about a hypothetical Stoic than about Mackenzie’s own character: “When I go to

SECTION 1.1

church, I should love to spend my time in praises and prayers; which as they are the only parts of adoration, so are they the natural employments of the Church, either militant or triumphant” (167). Whether this is self-conscious imitation of Browne or not is impossible to say, but it is the only place where Mackenzie refers to the personal religious practice which elsewhere is held to be so superior to mere speculation (101). Instead, the Scottish advocate seems to be working backward to their source from the political problems the government had been having with the theocrats in the Covenanting movement, trying to articulate an explanation that would allow of at least an understanding between the two sides, if not a resolution of their differences.

Whatever significance *Religio Stoici* accordingly accrues, however, none is due to what its title or subtitle (“The Virtuoso or Stoic”) suggests. Quite simply, Mackenzie’s book has little to do with Stoic philosophy, and still less with 17th century conceptions of the “virtuoso.” Why he would equate the two is even more of a mystery. *Religio Stoici* is not concerned with formal Stoicism or Stoic principles, nor does it give any kind of a picture of Mackenzie as a Stoic – except perhaps as someone whose conscience remains unaffected by the outward religious conformity required by the government for civil order.⁴¹ It is only sleight of hand which equates the Virtuoso with the Stoic, for what few direct allusions Mackenzie makes do not resemble any other 17th century conception of the phenomenon which Thomas Shadwell lampoons in *The Virtuoso* (1676).⁴²

Mackenzie begins his book by proclaiming he is “by humour, a Stoic, and such are unconcerned in censures” (82), and that he expected censure for his literary efforts is illustrated by his defensive comments and the changes made in the 1663 errata to tone down his more pungent criticisms of radical Presbyterianism.⁴³ His version of Stoicism rests entirely upon individual indifference to the blasts of fortune – indifference worth emulating in view of the recurrent political upheavals in Scottish politics after 1630:

These embodied angels, the Stoics, finding that fortune’s migraine could not be cured, nor fate’s decrees rescinded, and yet resolving, in spite of all external accidents, to secure to themselves a calmness of spirit; did place their happiness in the contempt of all these follies, whose blossoms fortune could blast, and sought for happiness in an acquiescence to all which providence did unalterably decree; so that neither fortune nor fate could stand in the way of their happiness, because they slighted the one and submitted to the other. (134-135)

If *Religio Stoici* was intended for a conservative audience whose relation to the state church had been forcibly redefined by successive governments, to praise “Stoical indolency” (191) would be an appropriate affirmation of such conformism.

“Stoicism” also serves for Mackenzie as an alternative to fanaticism, for it is emblematic of the cool, collected rationality which best allows man to display his divine origins:

As the boundless ocean keeps and shows its well drawn images, whilst it stands quiet ... but looses them immediately, how soon its proud waves begin to swell ... so, whilst a Stoical indolency and Christian repose smoothes our restless spirits, it is only then, that the soul of man can be said to retain that glorious image of God Almighty, with which it was impressed at its created nativity (191-192).

Also depicted as the philosophy that enables a man to pull himself up by his own proverbial bootstraps (132), Stoicism seems to have been chosen by Mackenzie as something representative of his *via media*. As his preface suggests, however, he is not writing so much for Stoicism, as against “the Fanatics of all Sects and Sorts,” and specific ideas about Stoicism are secondary to the polemic that banners this designation.

Is it accurate to call *Religio Stoici* a polemic as a whole, however, when it appears to have been directed at the Scottish conformists with whom Mackenzie agreed? Paradoxically, it is just that. Despite Mackenzie’s air of sweet reasonableness, the politico-religious situation in Scotland was sufficiently volatile that any support of Conformism was a polemical undertaking. Although *Religio Stoici* tends to discuss issues that are innocuous in themselves, there are allusions and asides throughout that demonstrate the author’s awareness of the implications of his work. Much of the book is concerned with theological topics, but there is an underlying premise that belies Mackenzie’s at times jocular tone, in which he speaks of “the mad-cap zealots of this bigoted age” (85) with genial contempt and dismisses heretics with a wave of his pen:

[I am] apt to believe, that if laws and lawgivers did not make heretics vain, by taking too much notice of their extravagancies, the world should be no more troubled with these, than they are with the chimeras of alchemists and philosophers. And it fares with them as with tops, which, how long they are scourged, keep foot and run pleasantly, but fall how soon they are left to themselves. (91)

As such dismissals undoubtedly raised the ire of staunch Covenanters, however, so Mackenzie’s purpose was indicative of the principles which led to the career of the “bluidy Advocate,” the man who was later to evince such an unwavering belief in principles of legitimacy in government. However ridiculous the radical Presbyterians might have seemed at times, Mackenzie could not regard them as merely theological buffoons; their “mad-cap” antics had caused too much grief for too many people when their theology was translated into political activity.

Mackenzie’s geniality would have only thinly disguised his iron fist for those who read *Religio Stoici* on its first publication, and would explain popularity sufficient to encourage its

SECTION 1.1

reprinting. His diffidence in arguing against speculation was matched by his ferocity in prescribing the state's response to non-Conformists: "When these [heretics], not only recede from the canonized creed of the Church, but likewise encroach upon the laws of the state, then, as of all others, they are the most dangerous; so, as of all others, they should be the most severely punished" (92). His articulation of the authority of the church over its members is explicit and allows no appeal or exception: "The Church is our mother, and therefore we should wed no opinion without her consent who is our parent; or if we have rashly wedded any, it is in the power of the Church and her officials to grant us a divorce" (233):

What is once statuted by a law, we all consent to, in choosing commissioners to represent us in those parliaments where the laws are made; and so if they ordain us to be decimated, or to leave the nation if we conform not, we cannot say, when that law is put to execution, that we are oppressed. (100)

Finally, in setting the decrees of the state about the issue of individual conscience, his conclusion alone would be enough to send Covenanters streaming into the fields to form conventicles: "And therefore, as every private Christian should be tolerated by his fellow subjects, to worship God inwardly according to his conscience; so all should conspire in that exterior uniformity of worship, which the laws of his country enjoin" (99).

Coming as it did on the heels of the deprivation of non-conformist ministers in 1662-63, *Religio Stoici* was a timely book that would unquestionably have been associated with the government's action by those who read the first edition. Sir George Mackenzie was thus, if not a spokesman, then certainly an apologist for the legal and political manoeuvres of what he considered a legitimate government against the anarchy inherent in the "theology" of the radical Presbyterians. Mackenzie's own theology – what little there is in *Religio Stoici*, when the book is read closely – is secondary to the appeal he makes for common sense in Scotland at a time when it seemed very rare. Given its historical context, the book is not the balanced and reflective narrative that at times it purports to be. *Religio Stoici*'s republication in 1665 – in two editions – and later in 1685 could in fact indicate its continued success as a popular vehicle for the ideals of legitimacy, justice and order which its author and his future colleagues believed were the only real remedy for Scotland's political ills.

Sir George Mackenzie himself was literally a child of the Interregnum, that volatile period in which radical ideas flourished in print as much or more than they were preached in public. What influence these ideas had upon his intellectual development is at present an open question; to what extent, for example, did the defender of monarchy owe the impetus for his ideas to the work of those people whom he cites on the title page of *Jus Regium* (1684)?⁴⁴ Did the young Mackenzie ever flirt with radical politics himself? Did he in the end define his opinions on

justice, toleration and legitimacy in opposition to the other ideas he had experienced and rejected? What nurtured his extraordinary resolve for reforming the criminal procedures of the Scottish courts? These questions and many others are not answered by *Religio Stoici*, for it is merely prologue to the nearly thirty tumultuous years of Scottish history in which Mackenzie played such a prominent role.

If the religious narrative of Restoration Scotland is to be redrawn to reflect less concern with national identity and more concern with understanding what actually took place, Mackenzie's role must be re-examined. The arguments for private religion and public conformity he expresses in *Religio Stoici* were no more palatable to some of his countrymen than they would be to many believers today, but in the wake of the disastrous turmoil caused by conflicts between King, Church and Parliament in the 17th century, they are certainly understandable. The unchallenged persistence of the religious narrative justifying the antagonism of the Scottish Presbyterians toward the English Crown and Church, in which the Bloody Mackenzie plays such a graphic part, shows just how much historical momentum such a narrative can have, over time, if it continues to serve contemporary purposes surrounding the identity of particular groups.

Notwithstanding the opinions of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Wodrow and other apologists for the Covenanting Presbyterians, if there is truly a banquet in Hell, Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh may well be present, but he has a great deal of company and for far better reasons than the ones attributed to the man opposed "to the fanatics of all sects and sorts."

Suggested Reading

Allan, David. *Philosophy and Politics in Late Stuart Scotland: Neo-Stoicism, Culture and Ideology in an Age of Crisis, 1540-1690* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

_____. "In the Bosome of a Shaddowie Grove': Sir George Mackenzie and the Consolations of Retirement." *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 25 (1999), 251-273.

Denton, Peter H. *An Annotated Edition of Sir George Mackenzie's Religio Stoici* (1663) (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1984; Microform; Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1989).

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SECTION 1.1

- Havenstein, Daniela. *Democratizing Sir Thomas Browne: Religio Medici and its Imitations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).
- Houghton, Walter E. "The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 3, Nos. 1 and 2 (January and April, 1942), 51-73; 190-219.
- Innes, A. T. "The Bloody Mackenzie." *Studies in Scottish History* (1892), 63-111.
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- Morris, Mowbray W. *Claverhouse* (London: Longmans and Green, 1888).
- Ormond, George W. T. *The Lord Advocates of Scotland*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1883).
- The Stair Society, *An Introduction to Scottish Legal History* (Edinburgh: Robert Cunningham and Sons, 1958).
- Story, Robert H. *William Carstares: A Character and Career of the Revolutionary Epoch (1649-1715)* (London: Macmillan, 1874).
- Watt, Francis. *Terrors of the Law* (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1902).
- Williams, A. M. "Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh," *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 13 (1916).
- Wodrow, Robert. *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland, from the Restauration to the Revolution*. 2 vols. (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1721).

Notes

- 1 All references to *Religio Stoici* are cited parenthetically by page number from Peter H. Denton, *An Annotated Edition of Sir George Mackenzie's Religio Stoici* (1663) (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1984; Microform; Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1989). This edition collates all variants in the several printings and issues of *Religio Stoici*.
- 2 Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland, from the Restoration to the Revolution*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1721), I, 5: "I design, that as little of this history as may be should lean upon me: Let everyone see with his own eyes, and judge for himself, upon the very same evidence I have; this is certainly the fairest and justest way." James Watson was the King's Printer in Scotland, and seems to have been the prime mover behind Mackenzie's *Collected Works*, which he printed in 1716 and 1722.
- 3 *Ibid.*, II, 438.
- 4 In *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis*, first printed in 1693. *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), II, 599-600.
- 5 Historians continue to show the effects of the Covenanting heritage. Gordon Donaldson, in *Scotland, James V to James VIII* (1965; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1978), 393, devotes little space to Mackenzie, synopsizing his career in three sentences. J.D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland* (1964; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), 241, sees little wrong with the standard depiction of Mackenzie, saying he was "not quite the [monster] of Covenanting tradition, but the laws were cruel and the men were ruthless."
- 6 Harry Aldis, *A List of Books Published in Scotland before 1700* (1904; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1970).
- 7 The Stair Society, *An Introduction to Scottish Legal History* (Edinburgh: Robert Cunningham and Sons, 1958), 45.
- 8 The Advocates' Library, which became the National Library of Scotland, was founded in 1682 when Mackenzie was dean of the faculty of advocates, and he left his own library of 1500 books to it. Cf. Donaldson, 393 and Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*. 2nd ed. (1970; rpt. London and New York, 1982), 257. Mackenzie's inaugural address in Latin on the opening of the library received much praise from his contemporaries.
- 9 Daniela Havenstein, in *Democratizing Sir Thomas Browne: Religio Medici and its Imitations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), has a fair amount to say on the influence of Browne's book on the one Mackenzie wrote. Beginning by saying "although *Religio Stoici* has been linked to *Religio Medici*, their relationship has never been scrutinized" (26), she concludes: "clearly, *Religio Stoici* must be classified as an imitation of Browne's work" (43). In my M.A. thesis in 1984 at the University of New Brunswick, *An Annotated Edition of Sir George Mackenzie's Religio Stoici* (1663) (Microform; Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1989), however, I reach an entirely opposite conclusion. Mackenzie played off the title, and some occasional forms, but instead of philosophical musings in the manner of Browne, he was offering pointed commentary on contemporary political concerns under the guise of a philosophical discourse.
- 10 By John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, in a letter written just before the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Quoted in Mowbray W. Morris, *Claverhouse* (London: Longmans and Green, 1888), 188.
- 11 Sir Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1887), 124.
- 12 Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, n.d.), 12, 120.
- 13 Many years after Mackenzie's death, James Hay, a 16-year-old boy under sentence of death for robbery, hid for six weeks in his sepulchre after escaping from prison: "He was an old Heriot Hospital boy, and the other Herioters braved Mackenzie's ghost and fed their school mate until the hue and cry was passed." Cited in Rosalind Masson and John Fullelylove, *Edinburgh* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907), 96.
- 14 Robert H. Story, *William Carstares: A Character and Career of the Revolutionary Epoch* (1649-1715) (London: Macmillan, 1874), 90.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 90-91.
- 16 Francis Watt, *Terrors of the Law* (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1902), 58.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 18 Innes republished the article "The Bloody Mackenzie" from the *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 18 (1871), 248-266, in *Studies in Scottish History* (1892), 63-111, the major changes being the addition of several pages at the end. The reference is to page 101 of the 1892 version.
- 19 A. M. Williams, "Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh," *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 13 (1916), 48.

SECTION 1.1

- 20 Innes, 102.
- 21 Williams, 140.
- 22 Andrew Lang, *Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh: His Life and Times* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), 34.
- 23 Mackie, 234; The Act Recissory restored the structure of the church in Scotland to that of James VI's reign, without all the accretions that caused the furor of the 1630s and brought about the National Covenant of 1638.
- 24 Synods and presbyteries were retained, but bishops, acting under joint royal/parliamentary control, filled the role previously occupied by the Assembly.
- 25 Mitchison, 251.
- 26 Though the vacancies could be filled by others, there was now a vocal group of ministers opposed to the government's policies. Most serious was the number of "outed" ministers in the nearly inaccessible southwest whose preaching in the fields drew crowds away from the sanctioned congregations and their nominally episcopal clergy. Soon the government found itself fining people for noncompliance with regulations on church attendance. *Ibid.*
- 27 Andrew Lang, *Mackenzie*, vi, 89, thinks so: "The Government of the Restoration, under an absentee king, and under politicians almost incredibly profligate, was, apparently, a necessary moment in the education of Scotland. The country had to be weaned from a dream of a century's duration, the dream of a Theocracy like that of ancient Israel; a Theocracy under Prophets and Judges ... The process of awakening was cruel, but the result was salutary."
- 28 One man who is consistently singled out as an example of a good bishop in this period is Robert Leighton, Bishop of Dunblane, who attempted to compromise with the outed ministers: "Leighton represented a temper not often found in the Kirk of Scotland. He was an undoubted saint, one of those rare individuals with their own private form of contact with God who can afford to be indifferent on many points of theology or discipline because they have the heart of the matter." Cf. Mitchison, 260-262; Mackie, 235.
- 29 Lang, in his biography of Mackenzie, made some effort, as did George W. T. Ormond, *The Lord Advocates of Scotland*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1883), I, 20036. There is still a great deal of work to be done, however, as both men deal in generalities and but cursorily with what Mackenzie wrote. In recent scholarship, Clare Jackson's excellent book, *Restoration Scotland, 1660-1690: Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003) makes a start in the right direction, including a variety of useful observations about Mackenzie and his involvements in the affairs of 17th century Scotland, but a proper biography of him is long overdue.
- 30 The closing act of Mackenzie's political career has its own air of nobility, and says a great deal about the man behind the tradition. His cousin, George Mackenzie the biographer, wrote this eloquent passage in the Life which prefaced the first volume (1716) of the *Collected Works*: "Now we shall take a view of this great man in the last scene of his life. King James the Seventh having succeeded to his brother King Charles the Second, who died the 6th of February 1685; that unfortunate Prince was advised to abrogate the Penal Laws against the Papists, which his Protestant subjects, looked upon as the bulwark of their religion; and it was no ways doubted but that Sir George, by his office, would be obliged to concur with his Royal Master, being a person of unshaken loyalty: But he knew too well his duty to his God and his king, to make them clash together. Being therefore convinced in his conscience, that this tended to the ruine of the Protestant religion, and of his Royal Master likewise, he did not ... despise his Royal Master, but he held his peace, and laid down his commission ... But he did not long continue in a private station; for his Royal Master knew his loyalty, integrity and parts too well, to have any real disgust at him. This made the good king perceive his error, and restore Sir George to his former place of King's Advocate, in which he continued until the Revolution, always firm to his Master's interest and the Protestant religion." (xii-xiii).
- 31 *Religio Stoici* was probably written in 1662-63, when Mackenzie was a Justice Depute – the equivalent of a circuit judge – traveling to towns outside Edinburgh in order to try local cases. It appears that Mackenzie left the manuscript with his publisher, and returned from his travels as a Justice Depute to check over the first issue, not its proofs. This could explain the 1663 errata, for the majority are not corrections of spelling errors, but are substantive revisions which in several places make his criticisms of the Presbyterians less extreme. The cancels which appear in some copies of the first edition could be accounted for in a similar fashion, as they, too, seem intended to play down some of Mackenzie's more pungent anti-Presbyterian comments. When at the end in "The Author's Apology" Mackenzie refers to a "learned Divine" who checked over the contents of the book, it is possible this unidentified person was responsible for such changes, and perhaps for the removal of "The Stoic to His Censurers" from subsequent issues as well – rendering the book officially anonymous. For bibliographic information about Mackenzie's works, scholars are indebted to F. S. Ferguson, "A Bibliography of the Works of Sir George Mackenzie, Lord Advocate, Founder of the Advocates' Library," *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions*, 1, pt. 1 (Session 1935-6) (Edinburgh: R. and R. Clark, 1-60). *Religio Stoici* appeared in five, possibly six,

editions between 1663 and 1698, as well as in the first volume of the *Collected Works* (1716). There were three issues of the first edition of 1663, as well as a cancel of the first issue. The first and third issues were printed for Robert Brown in Edinburgh, while the second issue was printed for George Sawbridge in London. There were two editions in 1665, ostensibly printed again for Robert Brown in Edinburgh, but the spelling of the bookseller's name ("Broun") and the city's name ("Edenburgh") raises doubts in Ferguson's opinion, for he believes the presswork "was almost certainly effected in London." According to both Ferguson and the Wing catalogue, there was only one issue of each 1665 edition, and there are few variants between the two editions. The 1665 editions were reissued as *The Religious Stoic* in 1685 (Wing 200) for R. Taylor, with a different imprint, and what Ferguson asserts were the author's title and initials for the first time. While Ferguson records one more edition of *Religio Stoici* after 1685 – a reissue of the 1685 edition with a cancel title printed for S. Briscoe in London in 1693 (Wing 201), the Wing catalogue lists "another edition" of 1685 "By T.B." (Wing 200A) which is likely a cancel of the one cited by Ferguson – and "another edition" of 1698 (Wing 202) with no descriptive comments.

32 "Matters of Faith and Religion, resemble some curious pictures and optic prisms, which seem to change shapes and colours, according to the several stances from which the aspicient views them" (97).

33 "Opinion, kept within its proper bounds, is a pure act of the mind: And so it would appear, that to punish the body for that which is a guilt of the soul, is as unjust as to punish one relation for another.... And why should we show so much violence in these things whereof we can show no certain evidence, as ordinarily we cannot in circumfundamental debates?" (92).

34 "I have endeavoured to demonstrate, that dogmaticalness and paralytic scepticism. are but the apocrypha of true religion; and I believe the one begets the other, as a toad begets a cockatrice" (236).

35 The closest he comes is in saying: "Wherefore, seeing many have been saved who were most inexpert in these questions, and that foolish zeal, passion, and too much curiosity therein hath damned many, I may conclude, that to pry in these, is neither necessary, because of the first, nor expedient, because of the last" (101).

36 "I hate to see that divine place made either a bar, whereat secular quarrels are, with passion, pleaded; or a stage, whereon revenge is, by satires, satisfied; or, a school-chair, from which unintelligible questions are mysteriously debated" (166).

37 "I cannot but likewise blame many of our preachers, who rather break than open holy texts; and rather make new meanings, suiting with their private designs, than tell the meaning of the Spirit" (165).

38 "Yet, I think, that our late doctors, who can find all doctrine in any text, would easily have eluded that canonic design" (142).

39 *Religio Medici in Religio Medici and Other Writings of Sir Thomas Browne* (London: J.M. Dent and New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 39.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

41 David Allan, in *Philosophy and Politics in Late Stuart Scotland: Neo-Stoicism, Culture and Ideology in an Age of Crisis, 1540-1690* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), makes a more persuasive case for the presence of neo-Stoical elements in other works by Mackenzie, passing by *Religio Stoici* in favour of other moral (and less political) essays. See also his "'In the Bosome of a Shaddowie Grove': Sir George Mackenzie and the Consolations of Retirement," in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 25 (1999), 251-273.

42 Mackenzie makes only three references to the "Virtuoso" who shares the subtitle of *Religio Stoici* with the "Stoic" (116, 180, 193). Why Mackenzie brings in the concept of a virtuoso, unless as a popular word whose meaning he does not understand, is a mystery. At first considered an antiquary, after 1640 as the scientific movement in England burgeoned into what became the Royal Society after the Restoration, the figure of the virtuoso became associated with the eclectic discoveries of the new scientific amateurs. Perhaps the source of Mackenzie's penchant for the "virtuoso" is Sir Thomas Browne – as the author of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* rather than of *Religio Medici*, however. See Walter E. Houghton's extensive article, "The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 3, Nos. 1 and 2 (January and April, 1942), 51-73; 190-219.

43 These changes are found on pages 95, 122, 124, 154, 163, 173 and 205.

44 *Jus Regium*, or, the just and solid Foundation of Monarchy in general, & more especially of the monarchy of Scotland, maintained against Buchanan, Napththali, Dolmer, Milton, etc.

RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN THE RUSSO-TURKISH WARS

Levon Bond



Despite the recent public preoccupation with the medieval Papal Crusades as the primary pre-21st century conflict between the Christian and Islamic civilizations, the confrontation actually began in earnest with the first steps of Islamic imperialism in the 7th century. Islam was born on the eastern fringes of the Christian Byzantine Empire. As Islamic conquest expanded west, it confronted the eastern provinces of Christendom and gradually obtained substantial portions of Byzantine-controlled territory, absorbing millions of Christians into its domain in the process. As the struggle continued through the 12th and 13th centuries, Turkish elements became dominant in the Islamic Empire. The Seljuk Turks, followed by the Ottoman Turks, chipped away at the declining Byzantine Empire and by the 15th century had essentially occupied all of the territory of that once great Christian Empire.

With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Russia replaced Byzantium as the pre-eminent Orthodox power. The Russian and Ottoman Empires skirmished and jostled with each other for centuries as each empire gradually expanded into the ethnic and religious homelands of the other – Russia into the Turcoman regions of Central Asia and Ottoman Turkey into the predominantly Slavic Balkans. In doing so, each empire absorbed substantial portions of the other's ethnic kin and religious brethren. This required both empires to practice a degree of toleration and acceptance of their own religious minorities in order both to maintain internal peace and to adhere to the precepts of their religions. For many centuries, the two centres of their respective religions managed to fight largely political wars in which the standing conflict between Islam and Christianity was muted.

By the 19th century the balance of power that had existed between them and within their domains began to unravel as a growing nationalism became infused with religious identity and the Orthodox Christians of Eastern Europe began to chafe under Muslim Ottoman rule. As the political, social and intellectual climate began to change in Europe, the aristocratic and monarchical age of empire gave way to the democratic age of the nation state. Nationalistic movements developed into independence movements accompanied by a renewed sense of religious identity and distinction. Anthony Smith sees these forces as naturally akin, since religious sentiment and passion often form the basis of nationalism.¹ Religion provides the emotive force for nationalist movements given that religion is steeped in tradition, a singular narrative, a sense of being chosen, identification with a region, and is connected to ritual and

SECTION 1.2

symbolism. Religious nationalism also entails a much greater sense of distinction and separation from other religious and ethnic groups, however, often leading to tension, conflict and atrocities. The advent of religious nationalism in the 19th century thus dramatically altered the nature and scope of the conflicts between the Ottoman and Russian Empires. Russia supported the breakaway movements of the Orthodox Christian and ethnic Slavic elements of the Ottoman Empire as the map of Eastern Europe was re-drawn, leading to the end of the toleration of religious and ethnic minorities within the borders of the two empires. Each empire started to feel the pressure of religious nationalism, which led to ethnic cleansing and the violent displacement of their minority groups. Religious feeling did not lead to serious violence until it was wedded to nationalistic fervour.

During their early conquests, the Ottoman Sultans were unmistakably driven by religious motives, especially with regards to supplanting the Orthodox Christian Byzantine Empire and capturing the great Christian city of Constantinople, ultimately transforming it into the cultural capital of the Muslim dominion. Within the Islamic community, this was seen as a triumph of Islam over Christianity and within a week of capturing the city Islamic prayer services were held in the great Byzantine cathedral of Hagia Sophia. In the traditions of the Arab Umayyad and Persian Safavid expansions, the Ottoman Turks were inspired by their religious duty to spread Islam through conquest and military dominance.

Within Christendom, the fall of Constantinople meant that Russia became the largest and most powerful Christian Orthodox Empire, infusing it with a unique religious duty. The Russian Tsars believed they were the “God-appointed and -anointed successors to the Byzantine Empire” and they assumed leadership as the defenders of Orthodox Christianity.² John Le Donne argues that this claim to the Byzantine legacy set them apart from the rest of Christendom, as “the Muscovite state had a mission defined by the Church as the standard bearer of Eastern Orthodoxy against Latin Christianity and Islam.”³ This divine calling did not become manifest through religious wars until the late 19th century, however, and even then it was mixed with numerous other motives. This formed the basis of a unique sense of Russian/Slavic identity that underlies much of Russian culture and history.

Both empires began as a relatively small ethnic enclave that expanded its dominion by absorbing peoples of different ethnicities, languages and religious denominations. Although religion was an essential part of their ethnic identities as Slavic Orthodox or Sunni Turks, they expanded their empires through military conquest and were highly militaristic societies. The complexities of their own social, ethnic and religious demographics were factors limiting their spiritual callings, always needing to balance the privileges of the dominant religion with the needs of the subordinate cultural and religious heritages.

The Ottoman Empire had largely built itself upon the foundations of existing Muslim empires in the Middle East and North Africa; demographically diverse, it was comprised of myriad different ethnic groups and subsets of religious denominations. For example, in 1850 Muslims only comprised 44% of Constantinople's cosmopolitan population.⁴ Religious and ethnic toleration within the empire was both dictated by Islamic law and essential for peace and stability. Thus, despite the social, political and military hierarchy that saw Muslim Turks occupying the upper echelon of Ottoman society, other religious and ethnic groups were able to survive in relative peace and stability within the empire as long as they were loyal to the Sultan and paid their poll tax, which was a major source of state revenue. Over time, the empire's sizeable Christian minority was able to exert considerable cultural and political influence as many of the Sultan's concubines were Christians, as were a number of his top advisors.⁵ Thus, as it reached its zenith in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire was gradually subdued as a result of greater interaction with Europe.

The Russian Empire faced roughly the same demographic circumstances in reverse, although its solution to the problem was slightly different. As the Russian Empire expanded into predominantly Muslim regions to the south and east, it had to learn how to govern Muslim populations without giving them cause for revolt. Russian policies were similar to the Ottoman policies in that the Muslim population of Russia lacked the same rights as the Slavic Russians, although they were not subject to the same civic obligation of military service.⁶ Unlike the Ottoman fiscal requirements of its Christians, however, Russia's Muslim population was not subject to taxation because Orthodox Christianity did not have the same religious-legal parameters for the treatment of Muslims. As well, the Russian Muslim communities were amongst the poorest and most isolated of the Russian population, while the European Christians in Turkey at times occupied important positions in government and were generally among the wealthier and better educated. As a result, Russia did not have the same fiscal or religious-legal incentives to maintain a distinct Muslim population and was more inclined to encourage assimilation or "Russification," which was widespread amongst the minorities within the empire.⁷

Since the two militaristic empires developed along each other's borders, they were bound to cultivate a long-standing hostility towards one another as they competed for territorial control. The Turks began their rivalry as the dominant power. From the 14th through to the 16th centuries, Turkey was the most formidable land force in Europe and was poised to make deep incursions into Central Europe had its attention not been diverted to its northern and eastern borders to check the advance of various rival Muslim Empires, from Tamerlane to the Persian Safavids.⁸ For its part, Russia was the European bulwark to the direct north and helped contain the Ottoman advance. Thus, the traditional areas of conflict between the Ottoman and Russian Empires were the Black Sea and its adjacent territories of the Crimea and the Caucasus. They fought

SECTION 1.2

numerous wars in which territory was traded back and forth with little long-term gain on either side. Religion, while an important part of their ethnic identity, was not a meaningful cause or excuse for their early conflicts with one another. Russia fought wars against other Christian nations as freely as it did against Muslim Turks, Tartars or Mongolians. For, example, in the 17th century, Russia fought more wars with Poland and Sweden on its northwestern flank than with the Ottomans to the south.⁹ Russia's main religious effort consisted of Orthodox Christian missionary activity in the Russian frontiers of Central Asia and Siberia, where the few inhabitants were largely still practicing primitive religion and were more susceptible to Christian conversion.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, European powers were still deeply concerned with checking the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Europe. This forced the Western European powers to form their first alliance with Russia during the Great Turkish War (1662-1699).¹⁰ Their alliance was an extension of the Holy League, which was established to check Islamic expansion into Europe, but it appears that by the time Russia joined the confederation in 1686, the term "Holy" was rhetorical rather than motivational and meaningful. In 1695, under the auspices of the Holy League and primarily in concert with the Austrian Hapsburgs, Russia fought the Turks at the key Ottoman fortress on the Sea of Azov, where they forced the fortress to surrender. The Ottoman defeat marked the high point of Ottoman incursion into Europe. During its confrontations with the Ottomans from 1768-1774, Russia, under Catherine the Great, made some important gains in the Crimea, Southern Ukraine and Northern Caucasus. Hostilities ended with the Treaty of Kucuk Kainardji (1774), which had important religious and political implications for the Tsar. As a part of the settlement, the Russian ambassador was allowed to represent the interests of the new church being built in Constantinople. This gradually gave the Tsar a claim to act as the protector of Orthodoxy within the Ottoman Empire.¹¹ This diplomatic right was intended to ensure the just treatment of Christians within Turkey; it subsequently became the pretext for later conflicts between the two empires. This clause was the first instance of the integration of a religious matter into a negotiated settlement between them. By the end of the century, the Russo-Austrian alliance began to weaken as Russia began to contend with its one-time ally. By the end of the 18th century the Ottoman Empire was in decline, while Russia started to emerge as a major European competitor.

The 19th century saw a dramatic shift in the balance of power between the two empires. The Ottomans failed to adapt militarily and quickly fell behind the rest of Europe, which they began to depend upon for protection against a growing Russian power.¹² Russia, on the other hand, was at the peak of its dynastic power. Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) believed that the Ottoman Empire was his for the taking after the Napoleonic wars, although he hesitated because of political instability in Europe.¹³ His successor, the deeply religious Nicholas I (1825-1855) believed he had a spiritual calling to maintain and expand Russia's power, and he applied religious precepts

at all levels of decision-making, including the conduct of war.¹⁴ The Russian Army was behind Western Europe in terms of technology and organization, but it was still sufficiently superior to the Turkish Army to penetrate into Ottoman territory and threaten Constantinople. During this century there were three main conflicts between the two powers that were defined by a noticeable rise in religious motivation: the Greek Revolt (1821-1829); the Crimean War (1853-1856); and the Balkan War (1877-1878).

The Greek Orthodox community was probably the most privileged amongst the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire, and they enjoyed relative autonomy in trade, commerce and religious worship. Nevertheless, as Ottoman decline became apparent, a movement within Greece called *Filiki Eteria* (Society of Friends) emerged that sought to replace the Ottoman Empire with a resurrected Byzantine Empire. They hoped for support from Russia, which they thought would support a co-religious movement against their traditional rival.¹⁵ As was common for the period, the support offered by Russia to co-religionists was largely predicated on the personal religious conviction of the presiding Tsar. Tsar Alexander I initially refused to support the movement since he was more concerned about preserving stability in Europe following the Napoleonic Wars, and he encouraged the other European powers to adopt a similar stance. When Tsar Nicholas I took the throne on 26 December 1825, however, he was more willing to intervene in the Greek cause, taking his position as the protector of Orthodoxy more seriously than did his older brother.¹⁶ Thus, Western Europe, primarily Great Britain and France, were willing to renege on their initial reluctance to disrupt the balance of power and tried to persuade Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) to allow Greece its independence. Mahmud II was sensitive to the religious element of the conflict and tried to suppress it by publicly hanging the Greek Patriarch Gregorious V, wrongly assuming that the Patriarch had instigated the revolt. When the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet was destroyed in 1827 by the Russian, French and British alliance, Mahmud broke off diplomatic relations with the coalition and declared “Holy War.” This caused Nicholas to provide military support for the Greek rebels and to advance on Constantinople, coming within forty miles of the city before Mahmud sued for peace. The Treaty of Adrianople of September 1829 granted Russia the Danube Delta, Georgia, and Eastern Armenia, while Greece was granted autonomy in February 1830. Greece was the first territory the Ottoman Empire lost due to the rise of religious nationalism amongst its Orthodox Christian subjects.¹⁷

The Crimean War (1853-1856) was fought on the traditional battle ground between Russia and Turkey and it was the only war of the latter half of the 19th century that involved all the great powers of Europe. The causes for the war were tangled in a complex matrix of interrelated concerns and factors: competition between Russia and Great Britain in the Middle East and Central Asia; British global expansion and dominance and its support for the waning Ottoman Empire; a growing sense of nationalism amongst European powers; a desperate attempt on the

SECTION 1.2

part of Sultan Abdulmecid I (1839-1861) to retain his waning empire; control over the millions of Christians living within the Ottoman Empire; and the French and Russian struggle over control of the Holy Land. Virginia Aksan believes the conflict was born of a religious struggle, but the main antagonism was not between Christianity and Islam, but instead between Catholicism and Orthodoxy: “The unresolved rivalries between France and Russia over the protection of Catholic and Orthodox communities resident in Ottoman territories, which centred on the holy sites in Jerusalem, were the *casus belli* of the Crimean war.”¹⁸ What is unusual about this reason for conflict is that neither power had actual control of the territory, which indicates the degree to which the Sultan had become impotent in the management of his own territory and the degree to which European powers were positioning themselves to take over. It appears as though the only thing that kept the Ottoman Empire alive for its final century was European quibbling over who would control it. For the Western European powers it was considered strategically preferable to have a weak Islamic ruler that they could influence rather than a powerful Russia with unencumbered access to the Mediterranean.

The results of the Crimean War were largely inconclusive as the Russian and Ottoman Empires returned the territories they had gained in the conflict and pre-war borders were re-established. The religious aspect of the conflict also remained unresolved as neither Russia nor France was able to secure control over the Christian populations of the Holy Land, although the Tsar did lose his right to protect Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire. In turn, the Sultan agreed that he would improve the status of Christians within his empire; however, this proved to be a short-lived provision. Militarily, both sides suffered substantial losses of men, but the key loss for Russia was its Black Sea naval ports, most notably the port at Sevremorsk. These losses proved to be grave for the empire as Russian setbacks during the Crimean War eliminated Russia as a great power in Europe for a generation.¹⁹

The Serbian and Bulgarian uprising from 1875-1876 enjoyed popular support in Russia due to the populist pan-Slavic movement, but it was not until the revolt was on the verge of collapse that the Tsar was compelled to intervene.²⁰ A conference in Constantinople in late 1876 led to an agreement between the involved parties to form autonomous Christian provinces in Eastern Turkey. Shortly thereafter, the Sultan rejected the proposal, which brought Russia into the war in January 1877.²¹ Upon its entry, articles appeared in St. Petersburg and Moscow journals proclaiming a modern crusade.²² Alexander II (1855-1881) was not moved by the popular pan-Slavic sentiment, though, as the traditional protector of the Orthodox Christian population of the Ottoman Empire, he was somewhat willing to confront Turkey on religious grounds. On the Ottoman side, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) used his spiritual influence to encourage an uprising amongst Muslim populations of the Caucasus (the Dagestans and Chechens), as Turkey mobilized its forces, demonstrating the desire of Muslims under the Russian Empire to likewise

be rid of their Christian masters.²³ It also showed the limitations of both empires in controlling their religious minorities and reflected the problems inherent in waging religious war in a multi-faith society: “Both Russian and Ottoman authorities feared that a minority sharing the same religion as an external enemy would become the latter’s Trojan horse.”²⁴ The 1877-1878 conflict between Turkey and Russia was the only war between the two empires that was fought for primarily religious reasons, due both to the pan-Slavic religious nationalism emanating from Russia and its kindred Slavs in the Balkans and to the political and social pressure that a Sunni revival put on the Ottoman Empire’s Christian population in Europe. It was also the only conflict between the two empires that did not directly involve other European states.

Russian strategic planning included a direct thrust at Constantinople, with a diversion in the Caucasus to contend with the uprising and check the Ottoman’s eastern axis.²⁵ By January 1878, the Russian army had broken through and they were once again in position to take Constantinople. Russian troops advanced as far as Erdine, but an armistice on January 31, 1878 brought the fighting to an end.²⁶ Great Britain used its diplomatic leverage to persuade the Tsar to sign the San Stefano agreement in March 1878, giving Russia more territory on the Black Sea and creating an independent Bulgaria.²⁷ This treaty was undermined, however, by an international congress in Berlin initiated by British concerns about Russian power in the Balkans. As a result, Bulgaria was reduced and Russian gains were limited to territorial concessions in the Caucasus.²⁸ This enraged the pan-Slavists as it thwarted their desire to re-conquer the heartland of Orthodox Christianity. It also indicated Alexander’s willingness to acquiesce to Western European demands and to maintain the delicate balance of power. In the end, Western Europe was more concerned with a mounting Russian threat than with the opportunity to obtain Muslim territory that contained countless sacred sites from Christian antiquity.

Religious-based conflict for Russia was especially complex due to the competing views on religion and its role in state affairs within the empire. On the one hand, many of the educated classes and the minor nobility were heavily influenced by Western European anti-religious trends in philosophic discourse espoused by writers such as Voltaire and others of the 18th century French enlightenment.²⁹ They rejected the foundations of Christian doctrine and paved the way for a popularization of atheism, nihilism and materialist socialism. As a result, religious conviction and the antiquated practices of the Orthodox Church were considered by the “sophisticated sects” as passé. The wholesale rejection of religion would later become one of the prominent features of the Bolshevik regime.

On the other hand, religious feeling became infused into a powerful nationalistic wave that flooded the Slavic conscience in the latter half of the 19th century. Often referred to as the pan-Slavic or Slavophil movement, it sought to strengthen Slavic national identity by sponsoring

SECTION 1.2

nation-building among Orthodox Slavs of Central and South Eastern Europe.³⁰ As an intellectual development, Slavic nationalism also had its origins in Western Europe, most notably in Voltaire's literary rival, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and was popularized by the Romantic Movement through art, music and literature. The movement did not originate in Russia; rather, it was initially adopted amongst the Slavic Czechs, Slovenes, Serbs, and others in the German dominated Austrian Empire.³¹ For these minority groups, the pan-Slavic calling was not intended to unite them into a larger Slavic empire under the Tsar; instead, it was meant to foment cooperative independence movements. Their common heritage was intended to be the means of collectively throwing off the yoke of empire, not harnessing a new one. Generally, nationalism does not seek to unite into a larger whole; it seeks distinction and separation into smaller autonomous sub-groups. In this case, it was a way for minority groups of rival empires to entice Russia into conflict with its traditional rivals, in the hope that these minority groups could gain their own independence with nominal Russian protection.

Aware of the movement's political limitations, the Tsars did not initially favour pan-Slavism. They did have to find ways of channelling its patriotic energy, however; in 1858 Alexander II endorsed the setting up of a Slavonic Benevolent Committee, whose purpose was to promote the Orthodox religion, education and national development among the Southern Slavs.³² For the sake of internal unity, the Tsar needed to be cautious about encouraging nationalism, given the diverse mixture of religious and ethnic groups inside his own dominion.³³ As the nationalist ideal grew with the spirit of the age, the Tsars found it worked against their regimes as much as for them. Nationalistic passions erupted in the Caucasus among fellow Orthodox Christians, among the Georgians and the Armenians.³⁴ As well, many of the empire's conquered Muslims were ethnic Turks, occupying the region of present day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and some of the most influential Turkish nationalists drew their inspiration from Russian nationalism.³⁵

Perhaps what made Slavic nationalism distinct from its Western European counterparts was how it was synthesised with religious legitimacy and a messianic calling. Geoffrey Hosking argues that the pan-Slav movement appealed to "suppressed messianism in the Russian cultural and religious tradition."³⁶ As one example, the Russian writer Nikolai Danilevskii wrote *Russia and Europe* (1869) in which he called for Slav-Orthodox domination of Europe. He hoped that Constantinople would once again become an Orthodox capital and that Slavic culture would be recognized as the synthesis of the great cultural achievements of the past with the Russian sense of community and social justice.³⁷ Another example of this trend was the Russian nationalist poet A.S. Khomiakov who wrote an influential poem in 1835 called "The Eagle" in which he expressed the idea that God had made the Orthodox people His chosen instrument.³⁸

The most celebrated and influential Russian prophet of the pan-Slavic vision was the iconic novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky.³⁹ Dostoevsky was a member of the Slavic Benevolent Society, which was at the forefront of the pan-Slavic movement and supported the 1877-1878 war against Turkey.⁴⁰ He wrote numerous articles in favour of the war in a local journal called “Diary of a Writer.”⁴¹ Within the Diaries he outlined his vision of Russia’s messianic calling as the unifier of “all of Slavdom...under the wing of Russia.” He believed that “Constantinople will inevitably fall into Russian hands and become the capital city of a united Slavdom.”⁴² Russia would assume leadership of the Balkan Slavs in a “crusade to destroy the Ottoman Empire and reinstall the cross on the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.”⁴³ Underlying this clash was an apocalyptic vision of Slavic dominance, “For [Dostoevsky] regards the movement to help the Southern Slavs as one in which its self-sacrificing nature and disinterestedness, in its pious religious thirst to suffer for a righteous cause, is almost without precedent among other nations.”⁴⁴ What is surprising, however, was Dostoevsky’s attitude towards war. He wrote that war arises out of a noble idea that leads to self-sacrifice. This noble idea causes humanity to love war in a perverse way, as it purges humanity of the slothful and self-indulgent habits of peace. The inflammatory and militant appeal of his pan-Slavic writings was popular amongst the educated youth of Russian society and helped to stir up patriotic fervour for a military cause.⁴⁵ Most of Dostoevsky’s pan-Slavic ideals are contained in his lesser known writings, which were probably intended for a strictly Slavic audience. Nevertheless, hints of his disdain of the Ottoman Turks can be identified amongst his more popular writings in his famous passage from *The Brothers Karamazov* where he described the depravity of humanity:

A Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow... told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them... People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so artistically cruel as a man, so artistically cruel... These Turks took pleasure in torturing children, too, cutting the unborn child from the mother’s womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of the bayonets before the mother’s eyes.⁴⁶

The passage continues with further descriptions of the atrocities committed by the Turks. The primary purpose of the passage is to outline the cruelty and brutality of humanity in order to raise the problem of evil – how could humans created in the image of God behave so wickedly. The secondary purpose of this passage is to present the Turks as inhumane barbarians who are the natural enemies of the Slavs. He does not say so specifically in the novel, but taken in the context of his other writings, his Slavic audience certainly would have understood what he meant.

SECTION 1.2

The Ottoman Turks did not have such a powerful and unifying nationalistic author to articulate their common feeling; that is not to say, however, religious nationalism did not affect them and influence their rationale for war. As their military and political power began to wane, and as European ideas were gradually imported, the Ottoman Turks began to take refuge in their own distinct role as the champions of Sunni Islam. Aksan argues “an intensification of Ottoman “Islamism” was without a doubt one of the consequences of the revival of religious fervour stimulated by foreign Catholic-Orthodox rivalries.”⁴⁷ Religious nationalism in Europe influenced a counter-religious nationalism in the Ottoman territories that often opposed European reforms. Dominic Lieven adds, “Having absorbed Islamic high culture and become the world’s leading Islamic empire and champion, the Ottomans were bound to find it harder to accept and impose European innovations, especially since so many of them did ultimately challenge Islam’s core beliefs and values.”⁴⁸

Like Tsar Nicholas I, some of the Sultans were deeply religious and felt it necessary to impart that zeal throughout their army. Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) is known as a military reformer who reinvigorated Sunni Muslim orthodoxy as a means of responding to those resisting his reforms.⁴⁹ In 1826 he suppressed a Janissary revolt by slaughtering thousands of their ranks. In order to ensure loyalty and obedience Mahmud II asked each of the surviving Janissaries: “Are you Muslim?”⁵⁰ As a reaction to the Greek revolts he made a clearer delineation between Muslims and non-Muslims as a means of garnering greater control of dissident groups,⁵¹ but in the process he destroyed the foundation of a society tolerant of other religious groups and thus incited further revolts. One of the last of the royal Ottoman lineage, Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) saw himself as the spiritual standard-bearer of the Islamic Empire and his reign is recognized as the age the revival of the ideological importance of the Ottoman Caliphate.⁵² He tried to reconnect with the Islamic population of the state and rejected many of the Westernizing reforms that many felt humiliated Islam. “He also tried to appeal to Muslims worldwide to support the only remaining Islamic empire against Christian pressure.”⁵³ One of Abdulhamid II’s main Islamic reforms was to draw closer ties between the Ottomans and the Arabs in order to counter the rising Shii Safavid Iran in the East.⁵⁴ By centralizing the primacy of Sunni Islam during his reign, however, he alienated the massive non-Muslim populations in the empire, giving them further cause for revolt and independence.

The final years of each empire saw a dramatic rise in the massacres of each other’s religiously non-aligned citizens. Russia’s continued conquest of Muslim peoples formerly under the Ottoman Empire often led to bloodshed and emigration of the Muslim populations, as hundreds of thousands of Muslim Tartars were murdered or displaced. As the Ottomans withdrew from the Balkans, many of the Muslim population of the area were expelled or killed.⁵⁵ The Orthodox Christian population of the remaining Turkish dominions suffered a similar fate. During

the global upheaval of the Great War, Turkey sought to recapture Turkish lands from Russian control and to rebuild the empire based on a purer sense of Turkish national identity.⁵⁶ This led to what has been deemed the first modern instance of systematic ethnic cleaning – the Armenian Genocide – which claimed the lives of over 500,000 Armenians between 1914 and 1918. As a result, all but a very small minority of the Christian population of Anatolia had been exterminated or expelled.

The conflicts between the Ottoman and the Russian Empires, while extremely complex and multi-faceted in themselves, are thus only an example in microcosm of the larger phenomena of religious warfare between and within the world's most powerful religious blocs. As an historical study, these conflicts provide a pattern within which some of the main aspects of religious conflict can be identified and analyzed. Several of the Russian Tsars and the Ottoman Sultans viewed themselves as the champion of their respective religious denominations. This gave them a sense of spiritual calling to spread their faith and their borders and to defend it against foreign intrusion and political decline. As they expanded temporally, they absorbed massive populations of other religious and ethnic cultures whom they had to govern justly in accordance with their religious edicts, but also carefully, in order to maintain security and peace within their domains. Initially, each empire was remarkably tolerant. As these empires began to wane in terms of their power and influence, a sense of religious distinction combined with a growing sense of nationalism. Conflicts between the empires took on greater religious significance, the principle of toleration broke down and was replaced by genocide and expulsion, thus creating a trend that has continued into the 21st century.

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SECTION 1.2

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- 3 John P. LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10.
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- 32 Menning, 51; Longworth, 220.
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SECTION 1.2

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FROM CO-EXISTENCE TO CONFLICT: MARONITES AND DRUZE IN 19TH CENTURY LEBANON

Sylvain Therriault



uring the mid-19th century, in what is now known as Lebanon, a series of conflicts erupted in the region that would eventually lead to fierce clashes between a Christian sect, called the Maronites, and a Muslim-based sect, the Druze. A succession of events gave rise to three periods of clashes involving the two sects (the uprisings of 1820, 1840, and 1857), which in turn led to the massacres of 1860.¹ These conflicts were very much linked to the encounter of European colonialism with the modernizing Ottoman Empire.² Fearing that the competition between the Great Powers would allow the Maronites to strengthen their powerbase, along with lingering sectarian tensions, the Druze launched an onslaught against Maronites in Mount Lebanon in 1860. If the conflict in Mount Lebanon was political in origin, developing religious forces further fuelled the struggle. Various factors of hostilities – politics, religion, and external influences – combined to ignite the civil conflicts. While the different groups lived in reasonable peace, the increasing involvement of Maronite clerics in local politics as well as poor administration by the occupying Ottoman Empire and competing European interference eventually led to clashes that turned extremely violent.

In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire ruled the region known today as Syria and Lebanon. Together, these lands represented the large province of Syria. Within the province lay the small administrative area of Mount Lebanon, a chain of high mountains along the eastern Mediterranean coast. At the historical crossroads of multiple empires and commercial routes, Mount Lebanon was home to a diverse population that included religious groups of various religious traditions.³ The Ottomans had conquered Syria in 1516 and remained the rulers until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918.⁴ The Ottomans administered the region according to feudal customs, according to what they called the *iqta* system.⁵ The system consisted of districts further divided into fiefs where feudal families exercised political authority, the *muqata'jis* or sheiks. An emir, recognized as the supreme authority, governed Mount Lebanon. Important roles of the emir were to arbitrate among the *muqata'jis*, unify and mediate regional interests, and maintain allegiance to the Ottoman Empire.⁶ The emir delegated responsibility for collecting taxes, maintaining order, and judicial authority to the *muqata'jis*.⁷

SECTION 1.3

Three features of the *iqtas* in Mount Lebanon under the early Ottoman regime were not characteristic of *iqtas* in other Ottoman occupied regions. First, the districts were not organized in military fiefs and no military duties were expected. The Ottoman *iqtas* elsewhere had military garrison towns where the emirs lived and held office. In Mount Lebanon, the emir lived in his rural estate, maintaining a closer contact with his *muqata'jis* and their followers. Loyalties were not based on military coercion, but on the good will of rulers and followers.⁸ It is essential to note that this political allegiance was not sectarian or religiously based. According to Semir Khalaf, “the *muqata'ji* usually presided over districts that were religiously mixed.” Second, the *muqata'jis*' appointments were hereditary and consequently, power remained within the same kinship. Third, *muqata'jis* enjoyed much independence when compared to their equivalent outside of Mount Lebanon, acting more akin to autonomous feudal chiefs than officials in the Ottoman hierarchy. They also wielded immense powers over their fiefs. The Ottomans monitored events, but (for the most part) left the region governing itself, while still collecting annual tribute.⁹

While the population of the Mountain was almost entirely Arab, the people practiced a variety of faiths. Most were Christians or Muslims of different sectarian denominations. The two leading sects in 19th century Lebanon were the Druze and the Maronites. The Maronites are Christians of Uniate confession of the Roman Catholic Church, whose denomination appeared in the 8th century.¹⁰ Maronites became known as the “Patriarchs of Lebanon” where they are concentrated. Its members “consider themselves as a unique community, which by religion and culture was distinct from a predominantly Muslim Arab World.”¹¹

The Druze movement appeared in the early 11th century, self-identifying as an Islamic movement having its origins in the Shia Muslim sect.¹² Other Islamic groups do not consider Druze to be Muslims, however, because of their significantly different practices and beliefs.¹³ The knowledge and practice of the faith is highly secretive and the society has been sealed since the closure of the religious call, meaning that there is no missionary activity, no proselytising, no public ritual, and finally, no marriage outside the community. In essence, the community is closed to outsiders and there is no prospect for converts.¹⁴ Under such a set of beliefs and practices, it is no surprise that Druze solidarity is highly valued.

Until the early 19th century, Druze and Maronites lived in harmony.¹⁵ This fine relationship was likely responsible for the autonomy enjoyed by the *muqata'jis*. Effectively, Maronites and Druze maintained a network of alliances among their clan leaders who placed loyalty beyond that of sect, village, or district.¹⁶ Peace resulted from this arrangement and the Ottomans likely felt little need to interfere in an area with long-standing diversity and general tolerance for religious and cultural difference as long as they could collect taxes and tribute.¹⁷

Adding to the sectarian general harmony was the relative stability offered by the high stratification of the feudal elites within each sect and within families. Prestige and power were thinly distributed in width and stretched deep vertically within kinships.¹⁸ Villages were designed in accordance with kinship considerations in mind. Clearly, such an arrangement among nobles would enforce loyalties and help minimize lateral competition. Families likely dealt rapidly with internal issues. Helping to retain commoners' loyalties was the fact that social prestige was not based on property, but rather based on hereditary rights, also an anomaly from typical feudal systems.¹⁹ This hereditary system was originally a Druze privilege, but successive emirs would eventually afford the same rights to Maronite families.²⁰

Despite the Ottoman occupation, Mount Lebanon developed strong commercial ties with Europeans, mainly for the commerce of silk.²¹ Over time, the region became more dependent on European imports as well. Strategic competition in the Middle East between Egypt, European Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire brought much attention to Syria and to Lebanon. A brief invasion by Egypt in the mid-19th century and the involvement of European powers would eventually establish temporary alliances between Lebanese sects and the Great Powers that, added to commercial interests and a common Christianity with the Maronites, would eventually affect Mount Lebanon sectarian harmony.²²

1820 Uprising

Abdallah Pasha, the new governor nominated in 1819, demanded exorbitant tribute from Mount Lebanon emir, Amir Bashir. Although Bashir initially refused, the arrest of his subjects forced him to abdicate.²³ Soon after, the peasants from the northern localities, mostly Maronites, mounted an effective rebellion against the emir who was forced to leave in exile after his failing attempts to quell the uprisings. The Druze majority in the south did not choose to riot because their local sheik, Bashir Junblat, helped relieve the surtax demanded by Abdallah Pasha. Because the peasants of the north did not benefit from tax relief, they demanded a more equitable distribution of the levies.²⁴ Getting no consideration of their demands, the Maronite clergy responded to popular grievances and motivated the populations to rise against the emir.²⁵ Rioting remained widespread by 1821 and the Ottoman reappointed Bashir who would eventually quash the insurrection.²⁶

The popular response to the Maronite clerics' call for action was an important evolution in the lives of peasants who until then had pledged loyalty solely to the sheiks and emirs. This incident also represents the first sign that the population of the Mountain sought independence from Ottoman authority; however, the lack of Druze enthusiasm for revolting against their masters prevented more significant social changes.²⁷ Effectively, only one Druze feudal family supported the uprising, and the others remained loyal to feudal sheiks. These events also

SECTION 1.3

gave the Maronites courage to further voice their displeasure and assume a leading role in the politics of the Mountain, threatening the Druze-dominated political order.²⁸ This would lead to further changes in the Druze-Maronite relationship, namely a sectarian friction.

1840 Uprising

Under Ibrahim Pasha, Egypt invaded and occupied Syria and Lebanon from 1831 to 1840. Taking over the administration of the Ottoman province, Pasha established a highly centralized political order that took away the feudal Lebanese autonomous form of government. Reforms in the fiscal system, changes in land tenure, emphasis on foreign trade, and especially the development of a strong security apparatus, all added to disrupt the fragile equilibrium in the Mountain.²⁹ The Ottomans had never seen the need for garrisoning in Mount Lebanon and conscription was infrequent, although it was more common elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. The Egyptians, however, likely fearing Ottoman aggression, established garrisons to protect their new land possessions.

The Druze, in particular, suffered from this disruption. Egyptians attempted to conscript specifically Druze personnel into their army. Druze had a reputation as strong and fierce warriors. This spurred three responses from Druze society. Many left Mount Lebanon for their historical refuges deeper in Syria where Pasha was not in control. Others converted to Christianity, mainly to Protestantism because of British Anglican missionaries' efforts. The others mounted a rebellion that led to a general uprising against Egyptian authorities in 1838.³⁰

Because of the Druze resistance, Pasha and emir Bashir, who had sided with the Egyptians, ensured that Druze communities would not benefit from the enlarging economy and undermined their ability to rise against the authorities. Druze leaders were marginalized and their property appropriated, while their followers were disarmed.³¹ Breaking the tradition of non-alignment in the Mountain, the Christians allied with the Egyptians who they felt promoted equality between Christians and Muslims. When Bashir recruited Christians to repress the Druze uprising, the latter developed a permanent hostility towards their Christian brethren.³²

Rather than exploiting the Maronites' loyalty, Pasha decided to disarm them after crushing the Druze rebellion, despite promises to the contrary when he had requested Maronite fighters.³³ In 1840, the Maronites, once again backed by the Church, changed allegiance and decided to resist Egyptians' demand for disarmament and heavy taxes.³⁴ In a short alliance, the Maronites and the Druze rebelled against Egyptian authorities. British envoys stirred the insurgents and helped arm them against the Egyptian occupiers. This motivated additional Muslim and Christian sects to fight the Egyptians.³⁵

The revolt did not initially succeed and Pasha (aided by Bashir) suppressed the insurrection. The conquering momentum of Egypt threatened the fragile European-Ottoman strategic balance. When Egypt blockaded Mount Lebanon, it was the last straw for the Great Powers who intended to prevent Egyptian expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. According to the July 1840 London Treaty, British, Austrian and Ottoman forces landed along the Lebanese coast to reinforce the local insurrection. The intervention forced Egypt out of Syria and Mount Lebanon, returning them to Ottoman rule.³⁶

Events leading to the 1860 Massacres

The departure of the Egyptians did not bring peace to Mount Lebanon, however: “In retrospect it was inevitable that the hostilities would persist between the ascendant Maronites with their powerful French and Vatican backing, and the recently dispossessed Druze, hopeful of British and Ottoman support to regain their former position.”³⁷ The Druze continued to feel victimized and fought every sign that the authorities or the Maronites were exploiting them. In particular, Druze returning from exile following the Egyptian era found their properties in the hands of authorities or Christians.³⁸ In addition, Druze notables rejected the Maronite Church’s growing involvement in Lebanese politics.³⁹ In 1841, land and taxation disputes erupted in violent Maronite-Druze clashes. Traditional peaceful life in mixed villages turned to competing sectarianism.

Pressured by European powers, the Ottomans launched unpopular reforms to control Mount Lebanon. The European plan, called the Double Qaymaqamate, involved splitting Mount Lebanon into two self-governing districts, the north under a Maronite governor and the south under a Druze.⁴⁰ The Maronite Patriarch objected stating that Maronite villages in the south would be vulnerable to Druze oppression. Although the Ottomans agreed to appoint Maronites as representatives for each village, the Maronites of the south refused to obey a Druze governor. The Maronite clergy helped foster this Druze hatred, once again stimulating sectarian hostilities. Civil war broke out in 1845. When the Ottomans intervened to stop the fighting, they favoured the Druze community and only partially disarmed them.⁴¹

An additional effect of the new reformation was the stripping of the Lebanese elites of much of their authority. Maronite nobles in particular, fought among themselves to maximize their remaining power rather than providing effective leadership to their communities. In 1858, the resulting local power vacuum led Maronite commoners to press for reforms, tax relief and the restoration of social order.⁴² Ignorance of their plea resulted in a Maronite revolt that targeted the nobles. Attacks of this nature continued until 1860, often taking the shape of lootings by villagers who demanded that elites abandon their privileged status.⁴³ The Maronite Church attempted to mediate between the parties, but to no avail.⁴⁴ Adding to the confusion, the rebel

SECTION 1.3

leader, Shahin, gave a religious overtone to the rebellion and accused the Christian elite of rejecting their beliefs. Shahin also attacked the integrity of the Ottomans by claiming additional Christian rights.⁴⁵

The ongoing Maronite peasant rebellion unsettled the whole Mountain. All that was necessary to inflame sectarian hostilities was a spark. History traced back the match that lit the massacres of 1860 to an isolated and insignificant incident in August 1859. When parents took sides of quarrelling Maronite and Druze boys, outrage spread to the opposing sect's villages. Later, Maronites interpreted musket shots fired out of bravado by Druze as a provocation. Replies by Maronites ignited clashes that resulted in dozens of deaths. Throughout the fall of 1859 and winter of 1860, both Maronites and Druze began organizing for hostilities. While the Maronites screamed condemnation, the Druze prepared quietly and established contact with Ottoman authorities. By spring, anxiety was so high that Christian families left their villages in droves to avoid the imminent conflict.⁴⁶

The civil war began on 29 April 1860 when each side attacked the other's villages.⁴⁷ Ussama Makdisi describes the events:

The events of 1860 constitute a turning point in the modern history of Lebanon. In the space of a few weeks between the end of May and the middle of June, Maronite and Druze communities clashed in Mount Lebanon in a struggle to see which community would control, and define, a stretch of mountainous territory at the center of complicated Eastern Question politics. The Druzes carried the day. Every major Maronite town within reach of the Druze was pillaged, its population either massacred or forced to flee. In July, Damascene Muslims rioted to protest deteriorating economic conditions, targeting and massacring several hundred of the city's Christian population. The Ottoman, local, and European reactions inevitably conflated both events.⁴⁸

The conflict turned purely sectarian, with Druze killing Maronites and Maronites killing Druze. The Maronites did not coordinate their defence and consequently, the Druze won by means of their organized offensive. By the time that the Ottoman restored order, the Druze had killed an estimated 10,000 Maronites.⁴⁹

European powers believed that the massacres of the Maronites were merely an attack against Christians and blamed the Ottoman governor because of his known hatred of Christians.⁵⁰ Ottoman authorities made little attempt to stop the fight until June 1860. When they finally sent troops to intervene, it became evident that the Ottoman had backed the Druze. Although not attacking the Maronites directly, Ottoman formations did not always prevent the Druze from mounting attacks against the Maronites.⁵¹ In any case,

and despite European concerns, neither the Ottomans nor the Europeans intervened early enough to stop the massacres.

What happened in Mount Lebanon?

Why did the ancestral and symbiotic relationship between Druze and Maronites shatter in the 19th century? The stable feudal system of Mount Lebanon had eroded in the latter part of the 18th century. Appointed by the Ottomans, governor Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar ruled the region harshly from 1775 to 1804. His manipulation of local politics and economy on the Mountain significantly disrupted the well-regulated and traditionally autonomous feudal authority. Jazzar effectively took control of agricultural lands and increased taxes and custom duties on all goods, often for his own benefit. Not only did he damage the local economy, but he also manipulated Druze emirs into becoming “instruments of oppression on behalf of the Turkish authorities.”⁵² During the same period, the Maronites supported their emir, Amir Bashir, the first Maronite emir and one who opposed Jazzar. This sectarian alignment between competing rulers increased antagonism to a level unseen before, and not for religious reasons.⁵³

While the Druze had historically been the senior partner of the Druze-Maronite relationship, this began to change at the end of the 18th century. In Mount Lebanon, the Maronite population increased and its society became wealthier, giving it more confidence to act politically.⁵⁴ At the same time, the Druze population started to decline, especially as a result of the flight from Egypt’s conscription in the 1830s and the associated conversion of Druze to Christianity. While Maronites accepted new members in their sect, the closed Druze religious society likely exacerbated the growing disparity in numbers of the members of each sect. With the death of Governor Jazzar in 1804 and the continued leadership of Amir Bashir, inter-sectarian relations actually improved. Bashir worked hard to eliminate sources of rivalries, but further sectarian competition developed following the uprising of 1820, as traditional Maronite culture began to erode due in part to a decade of Egyptian occupation and Ottoman jealousy of European interference.⁵⁵

The Maronite clergy became more influential both in religious and political affairs, further eroding the feudal system in the process. Often motivated by French missionaries and ambassadorial staff, the Maronite clergy applied masterful leadership to the community, and were involved in fostering the rebellions of 1820 and 1840.⁵⁶ Amir Bashir was also responsible for the rise in Maronite clergy influence, which he cultivated while weakening the Maronite *muqata’jis*.⁵⁷ Because of the new autonomy conferred on Maronites, the monastic order became particularly dominant through a productive community that was involved in many economic fields and was well educated. The monasteries had also managed to be exempted from taxes and levies, allowing them to build considerable wealth. “By the end of the 18th century, the [Maronite] Church had become the largest, the most organized, and the wealthiest

SECTION 1.3

organization in the whole of Mount Lebanon.⁵⁸ In essence, the Maronite clergy allowed the peasants to become detached from their allegiance to kinships and feudal families and connect with communal and public interests instead.⁵⁹ The specific role of Maronite clerics during the 1860 massacres is unclear, however, as Lebanese historians contradict each other. According to Leila Fawaz and contrary to the uprisings of 1820 and 1840, Maronite clerics would not have spurred the 1858 Maronite rebellion that led to the 1860 massacres. This civil war was not an uprising against the elites. This time, violence was purely stimulated by sectarian hatred and religious leaders allegedly tried to stop it, although without success.⁶⁰ Engin Akarli stated that clerics played a leading role in fostering the Maronite uprising against not only Druze elites, however, but also the community at large.⁶¹

If the developing religious social order allowed Maronites to develop effective enabling institutions, the obsolete Druze feudal establishment failed them.⁶² The Druze felt marginalized by the Maronite rise in influence and power. In essence, the Druze suffered from an internal crisis. The massacres of 1860 were an extreme reaction to mounting frustrations and perhaps the result of a deep identity crisis among the Druze. To put in terms of social psychology, the Druze likely fell victim to an identity change possibly because of victimization by conquest by the rising Maronites, which in turn rendered them more vulnerable to committing atrocities.⁶³ Ervin Staub developed a psychological model based on identity change to explain the origins of genocide and mass killing.⁶⁴ When rapid social changes occur, such as severe economic collapse, or the collapse of the political system, people start questioning their identity and their self-worth. This scenario is an unmistakable representation of what transpired with Druze society prior to the massacres. Finally, in an attempt to remedy the situation, the same individuals will change their norms (such as their moral thresholds), as necessary, to eliminate the source of the social changes. The Druze perceived the Maronites to be the source of the changes forced on them, and, unable to cope with these changes, rose violently against the Maronites in response and retaliation.

External interests in Lebanon played a significant role in modernizing and dismembering the Lebanese feudal system. For example, in the early 1840s the Maronites had established strong and permanent ties with France while the Druze had a similar relationship with the British.⁶⁵ As Leila Fawaz explains, “Both governments began to look upon their local minorities as their clients and protégés.”⁶⁶ The European intervention of 1840 that defeated the Egyptians, gave them leverage to enforce political change upon the Ottomans, the most notable being the splitting of Mount Lebanon into the Maronite north and the Druze south. Although sectarian villages remained mixed throughout the region, in addition to breaking the original Lebanese feudal system, this segregation of power could only favour sectarian competition. To make matters worse, the Ottomans attempted to defend their authority by resorting to “their time-worn ploys

of inciting sectarian suspicion and hostility.⁶⁷ The new system failed miserably and only led to further sectarian clashes.

Christopher Catherwood claimed that the Ottomans were repressive, and that they were Muslim conquerors of Christian land.⁶⁸ While the Ottomans had given relative freedom to Christians in Mount Lebanon, the masters were not ready to allow them to develop a power base in Ottoman territories. Effectively, during the 1841 clashes, Ottoman forces were quietly encouraged to support the Druze.⁶⁹ The political intrusions by European powers and their developing relationship with the Maronites also represented a threat to Ottoman local rule. Notwithstanding this threat, the Ottomans were pressured by the powerful European states and consequently began the necessary reforms to demonstrate their determination effectively to rule Mount Lebanon. Departing from the traditional decentralized feudal system, the Ottomans gradually centralized power and became more autocratic in their governance.⁷⁰ Consequently, the ancestral autonomous Lebanese feudal system disintegrated from the top.

Sectarian Conflict and Religious Identity

From the time the Ottoman Empire first occupied Lebanon in the 16th century to late 18th century, the Maronites and the Druze experienced relative peaceful relations. The autonomous and non-military feudal system enjoyed by Lebanese was unique within the Ottoman Empire and prevented sectarian rivalry from flaring up despite the potential for competition. Sectarian conflicts between the Druze and the Maronites appeared when the old feudal regime of allegiance to an elite hierarchy (where secular lineage rather than religious affiliation prevailed) collapsed and sectarian loyalties emerged in its place. This change was made possible by increasing contacts with European powers as well as the Ottoman Empire's lack of discernment. The combination of European cultural and Christian missionary activity among the indigenous population and the complacency inherent in Ottoman reliance on tenuous bonds of feudal loyalty led the people of Mount Lebanon to take advantage of both imperial powers "by declaring themselves to be both European protégés and loyal Ottoman subjects."⁷¹ It was tension between competing interests that could not be maintained for long.

In such a context, the rising influence of Maronite religious leaders and their building of effective and modern non-feudal institutions posed a threat to the traditional Druze social and religious order, which remained entrenched in the feudal system and was becoming obsolete in the industrial civilization spawned around the world by European culture. The conflict between Maronites and Druze had nothing specific to do with either of their religions; their religions served as an identifier of the particular social group to which they belonged, just as language, customs and ethnicity serve as identifying characteristics of groups in other contexts. No doubt the Maronite clergy acted out of Christian faith in defending their adherents, but they clearly

SECTION 1.3

had political ambitions as well; it was these political ambitions, manipulated by the external imperial powers competing for control of the region, which created the flashpoint for conflict. For the traditional and secluded Druze, change became unbearable and taking up arms against the Maronites was a solution of last resort.

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SECTION 1.3

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RELIGION AND THE LAND: THE TEMPLE MOUNT

Becky Weisbloom

The intersection of religion and geography, of sacred and secular, can have real and present political consequences. Considered to be the intersection of the material and the spiritual, the land is not simply land; it is a symbol of identity, a sacred space that simultaneously embodies physical and spiritual realities. This identity may be based on religious myth, historical fact, the geographic location of a nation's ancient homeland or an attachment to the sacred, quite apart from the more mundane issues relating to social and political geography. Whether they are religious or secular, these factors affect both personal and national self-image and thus can be manipulated for political ends.

While an issue as complex as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is difficult to understand due to the intricacies of the relationship between religion and identity, by focusing on one site, the Temple Mount, it is possible to understand the complexity of national identity formation involved. The Temple Mount is a symbol of the complex nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to its integral role in the formation of national identity. Its history, geography, and political importance are ingrained with divergences that have spanned over centuries. One of the more recent conflicts to take place concerning this site was the Al-Aqsa Intifada that began in September 2000. The simple act of an Israeli politician visiting this site, holy to both Jews and Muslims, became the catalyst for a conflict that since has claimed thousands of lives.

In most, if not all religions, certain objects or places are designated as sacred in contrast to the everyday profane. Sacred spaces are designated as “an opening to the holy or divine, a place where communication with sacred power is made possible.”¹ Mircea Eliade described this phenomenon as an “*axis mundi*, the centre of the world...around which, symbolically speaking, the world rotates.”² Some religions, such as Rabbinical Judaism, interpret this literally and believe that their *axis mundi*, the site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, is the centre of world. The legitimacy of these sites often has divine designation. Therefore, these sites become unquestionably important and their status non-negotiable.

The Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary has an obvious place of importance in Israeli and Palestinian national identity. The link that this holy site serves between the sacred and profane lends legitimacy to national struggle. Both sides of the conflict believe that, without sovereignty over their holy site, they are incomplete. The fact the Israeli Government has legal authority over the

SECTION 1.4

Noble Sanctuary serves to accentuate the administrative power that they have over the Palestinian people. The sacred nature of the site has taken on a political identity in the realm of the profane, demonstrating the delicate balance between sacred and profane, religion and politics.

Identity and Sacred Space

In the Jewish religion, the Ark of the Covenant of God, which was located in the centre of the Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, is considered to be the foundation of the world. The importance of the Temple Mount to Judaism stems from the time of Abraham, when God commanded the sacrifice of his son, Isaac. The site of Isaac's sacrifice was to be Mount Moriah, renamed by Abraham to "Yeru Shalem."³ This spot, according to 2 Samuel 24:16, was where God commanded an angel that was spreading pestilence across the land of Israel to halt.⁴ This spared the rest of the Israelites from a plague that had killed tens of thousands. Therefore, King David determined that the site was holy and purchased it in order to dedicate the space to God. When the first temple was built in the reign of King Solomon, it is said that the divine presence was indicated by a cloud that filled the House of God.⁵ This site became the centre of worship for the Israelites, as it was a place where they could pay homage to God. Although the public could not enter the inner sanctuary, it was as close to God as they could get in this life. It provided the spiritual basis under which Temple Judaism flourished. Even after the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the location continues to be the most holy site in all of Judaism. The direction of prayer for Jews is towards Jerusalem, facing where the Ark was once located.⁶

The site of the Temple changed hands between the pagans, Romans and Muslims in the century that followed its destruction. According to historians, the site was recognized as holy by the various religions; a shrine to Jupiter was built by the Romans, a small church was constructed by Saint Helena, and the Muslims constructed both the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. Only Jews identify this site as their *axis mundi*, however. The most holy site in Islam is the Ka'ba in Mecca, and for Christians it is the site of Jesus' crucifixion at Golgotha/Calvary where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre now stands. All three religions believe that Jerusalem was the site where Adam was both fashioned by God and buried; however, only Christians and Jews take this spot as the centre of the world.⁷

The reason that these sites are sacred is because they are in contrast with the profane and provide orientation out of the "chaos of the ordinary."⁸ There are rituals practiced at the various holy sites on the Temple Mount that break with ordinary custom. For example, all visitors must dress modestly, with men and married women covering their heads at the Western Wall, and with women wearing *hijab* at the mosques. Visitors must remove their shoes before they enter

mosques, and in some areas they may not take photographs. Women and men are segregated for prayer at both the mosques and the Western Wall. These practices are done in order to pay respect to the sacredness of these sites, and are in clear contrast with the profane of everyday life. Worshippers flock to these sites to be closer to God, to have a religious experience and to bring clarity or meaning to their lives. This feeling of the sacred is extremely powerful and is integral to religious identity. To control one's holy sites is to control access to God and God's blessings. This is why it is very difficult to extract religion from what would appear to be a political struggle about land and nationalism.

The idea that identity can be affected by religious beliefs is an obvious but complex concept. According to Eliade, the *axis mundi* "serves as that fixed definer for a religious person," it is the place where one's values and beliefs are formed.⁹ When religion provides the foundation for a person's or a system of values it becomes an integral part of their identity. The idea of ethnicity-identity in the case of Israeli and Palestinian national identity is based on the concept of religion-ethnicity.¹⁰ Israel is a country made up of people from various origins, with nothing in common but their religious affiliation as Jews. Therefore, it is natural that the Israeli national identity be founded on Jewish culture and values. According to Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, Jerusalem is for all Jews (not just Israelis) the "center of their nationalist movement."¹¹ As D. Baly explains, "No thoughtful Jew, or Christian, or Muslim, can approach [the territorial claims on Jerusalem] without the most profound emotion. It is bound up with everything that makes him what he is, and apart from this city, in his understanding, he has no identity."¹² Therefore, an approach that excludes religion and sacred space as a factor is unsatisfactory for the purpose of determining the foundations of Israeli and Palestinian national identity. Israel is home to a disproportionately high number of religious Jews, so it is logical that they would want to live in Jerusalem, in order to "live as near as possible to the Center of the World."¹³ Thus, Jerusalem is where the centralization of the Jewish people occurs. In modern day Israel, the parliament (*Knesset*) is located in Jerusalem, the capital, and serves as the centre of political life. The intersection of secular and sacred, of religion and politics, is blurred in Jerusalem, giving shape to the Israeli national identity.

The second largest ethnicity in Israel is Palestinian, known as Arab Israelis due solely to their citizenship. Although there is an Arab Christian minority, the common implication is that an Arab Israeli is a practitioner of Islam. They do not fit the mold of an Israeli nationalist, but they do share a fervent attachment to Israel's most important holy site. The Temple Mount is known as the Noble Sanctuary (*al-Haram ash-Sharif*) to Muslims, and the complex contains al-Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques. The Ka'ba in Mecca serves as the *axis mundi* for Muslims, however, despite their belief in the sanctity of the Noble Sanctuary. Muslims subscribe to many of the same religious myths as the Jews and Christians and therefore believe that Abraham was

SECTION 1.4

asked to sacrifice his son on this site. In the Muslim version, Abraham was asked to sacrifice Ishmael, not Isaac, and then built the first mosque in this location. When the Prophet Muhammad first introduced Islam, the direction of prayer (*qibla*) was towards Jerusalem, not Mecca where the natives paid homage to their pantheon of gods.¹⁴ When the Jewish people rejected Muhammad and his ideas, the *qibla* was changed to face Mecca.

Another story that highlights Jerusalem as important to Islam is found in the *hadith*, which is Muslim tradition transmitted orally from the time of the Prophet. It is based on the opening line of the *sūra* (chapter) called “Children of Israel.” The line reads, “Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque (*al-Aqsa*), whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).”¹⁵ The story is about Prophet Muhammad’s journey, which according to tradition goes as follows: One night, the Angel Gabriel came to Muhammad and brought him to a beast called a *burāq*, which is similar to a horse but has wings.¹⁶ It transported them from the Ka’ba in Mecca to the farthest Mosque in Jerusalem, and from there ascended to heaven. The fact that this spot was chosen for Prophet Muhammad’s ascension to heaven does make it a type of *axis mundi*, as it connects heaven and Earth. Thus, although in 622 CE al-Aqsa Mosque had not yet been built, even without a building being erected on the site, the Temple Mount was still holy.

The actual al-Aqsa Mosque is an expansion of the original mosque built by Caliph Umar. It was erected in 705 CE by the Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik.¹⁷ In 1033 CE, Caliph Al-Dhahir completed the mosque as it appears today.¹⁸ The mosque is said to be built on top of the stone from which the Prophet Muhammad, atop the *burāq*, left Earth on his ascension to heaven.¹⁹ Nowadays, thousands of Muslims attend Friday prayers at the mosque just on the other side of the Western Wall – all that is left of the Second Temple infrastructure. Despite the site’s third place ranking, the Noble Sanctuary still provides much of the same function as the Ka’ba as an *axis mundi*. It is a source of pride for the Palestinian people to “own” such an integral location in Islam. Under the British Mandate, Palestinians feared for the future of the Muslim holy site, which caused Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, to form a “campaign to protect the sanctity of the *haram al-sharif*.”²⁰ This campaign served a dual purpose: not only did it protect the most sacred Islamic site in Palestine, it also evoked nationalist sentiments that allowed him to “mobilize the populace against the Jews.”²¹ In essence, Palestinian national identity emerged from the conflict between Muslims and Jews in Palestine. To unite the Palestinian people, conflict often centred on Jerusalem’s sacred sites. The mosques at the Noble Sanctuary became the forum at which political rallies were held, and speeches were made to incite the people. By capitalizing on the importance of Muslim holy sites, al-Husayni was able to construct a national identity for an otherwise divided people.

For many Palestinians, the conflict surrounding the site is a microcosm of the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Any threat to the Noble Sanctuary is seen as a threat to Palestinian identity, something that evokes great feelings of nationalism. With nationalism comes pride and the natural urge to defend what is one's own. This sentiment is common to both Israelis and Palestinians. The intrinsic link between religion and politics is present not only in the geography, but in the hearts and minds of the land's inhabitants. This is why it is essential to envisage the land as more than simply land; rather, it should be seen as a source of identity and thus a source of potential conflict.

The State of Israel was designated the Jewish homeland upon its inception in 1948. Thus, Judaism is an intrinsic component of Israeli national identity. Many aspects of Israeli life do not have a separation of church and state as are found in Western nations. Respective religious authorities have the monopoly to preside over rituals associated with births, deaths and marriages in Israel.²² In certain Israeli cities, buses do not run on the Jewish Sabbath. On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, all transportation stops and businesses are closed. Thus, it is much easier to conform to Jewish laws in Israel than in the Diaspora. Despite the fact that many Israelis are not practitioners of the Jewish religion, their identity is ultimately tied to it. When Israel conquered East Jerusalem in the 1967 War, it was a moment of national pride when Jewish holy sites finally fell under Israeli control. Thus, because of the importance of the Jewish religion in shaping its national identity, Israel has a difficult task balancing Jewish and democratic values.

As a society, Israel must balance the secular and the sacred, the religious and the political, to arrive at a compromise that satisfies the majority of its citizens. The Temple Mount Complex illustrates how these competing (if not conflicting) factors affect the everyday functions of Israeli society.

Since the Israeli Government obtained control over Jerusalem, the maintenance of the Temple Mount Complex has been one of its most controversial responsibilities. Due to the fact that East Jerusalem was acquired by "military conquest" any "legislation aimed at the incorporation of occupied sections" is "totally invalid" according to the UN and international law.²³ Therefore, laws and administrative bodies derived from operating on "occupied territory" are rejected by Palestinians. The Department of Antiquities was established in 1948 with the State of Israel. In April 1990, the Antiquities Department was founded along with the Antiquities Authority Law.²⁴ In order to excavate, preserve or do construction, Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) must receive approval from the Ministerial Committee for Holy Places, which is composed of the Ministers of Justice, Education and Religious Affairs.²⁵ The crucial responsibility of the IAA is that it is "responsible for the integrity of these holy sites,"²⁶ a fact that upsets many non-Jews. The

SECTION 1.4

Israeli Government allowed the *waqf* (religious endowment) that had administered the Temple Mount Complex under British and Jordanian rule, however, to retain its authority.²⁷ The consequences of this decision give IAA only limited authority and therefore they can only make recommendations regarding the areas deemed to belong to Muslims. The decision to implement the maintenance of the Temple Mount Complex in this manner was chosen in order to appease both Muslims and Jews, with the greater goal of preventing conflict.

Despite the efforts of Israeli politicians, both Jewish and Muslim, several incidents over the years have highlighted how sensitive an issue is the Temple Mount Complex. The following examples serve to demonstrate how a sacred space can stir up nationalist sentiments to the point where violence becomes an option. In 1969, an Australian by the name of Dennis Rohan set fire to al-Aqsa Mosque.²⁸ Rohan believed that the second coming of Jesus could only happen when the Jews were able to rebuild the Temple. In order for this to happen, Rohan felt that the site had to be clear and thus the mosque had to be destroyed. Israeli firefighters were attacked due to a rumour that their hoses contained gasoline, and not water, therefore slowing the dousing process.²⁹ Despite the fact that Rohan was discovered to be a fundamentalist evangelical Christian, numerous news reports continued to label Rohan as Jewish and an Israeli, thus propagating the conflict.³⁰ The next “successful” incident at the Complex also occurred in al-Aqsa Mosque. On 11 April 1982, Alan Goodman, an Israeli-American Jew and IDF soldier indiscriminately opened fire in the mosque.³¹ Two were killed and the gunman served fifteen years for his crime. At the United Nations, many countries condemned Israel for failing to protect Muslim holy sites, which is its “responsibility as an occupying power.”³² There have been eight documented attempts to destroy the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque by Jewish extremists over the past forty years, most of which involved a large quantity of dynamite.³³ Despite the best efforts of policy makers on both sides, there will always be extremists who are unsatisfied with the status quo.

One of the most controversial aspects surrounding the conquest of Jerusalem by the Israeli Defence Force in 1967 involved an intricate law found in the *Halakha*. The site of the Temple is considered the most sacred space, and therefore it is not to be disturbed by the profane. The exact location in which the Temple Mount stood, however, is of smaller dimensions than the Noble Sanctuary. Some rabbis argued that Jews should be allowed as close to the *axis mundi* of the Jewish religion as possible. The problem with this is that one might transgress accidentally onto the sacred ground. Therefore, the state ruled that they would not allow Jews to have access to the site. It is both ironic and politically useful that the site that “undergirds the very nature of [the state’s] sovereignty” is the institution restricting the ability of Jewish citizens to pray at their religion’s holiest site.³⁴ The policy serves the dual purpose of preventing Jews from breaking *Halakha* law and of engaging in conflict with Muslim or other Jewish worshippers.

Much of the analysis thus far has focused on the effects that identity stemming from religion has on potential conflict. An inverse relationship also exists, however. When conflict centres on a sacred site, the profanity of war affects the site's symbolic nature. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict transformed the "meaning of the site, the doctrines which are ritualized there, and the identities of those who claim the site as their own."³⁵ War is an instrument of state policy, which therefore implies that the state "stands at the profane perimeter of any sacred space as the guarantor of its sanctity."³⁶ When the Temple Mount fell under Jewish sovereignty after the 1967 War, Israel's political culture was transformed. The Western Wall has since "penetrated to the very core of the Israeli state's civil religion."³⁷ In addition to religious services that are held at the Wall, politico-military ceremonies that have sacred meaning to Israeli society also take place. Elite military units of the IDF visit the Wall as part of their indoctrination process, overtly linking their job as defenders of Israel's sovereignty to specific holy sites and thus promote a psychological bonding. In Jerusalem, therefore, the line between sacred and profane has been deliberately blurred in order to strengthen Israeli national identity.

Arguably the most infamous event that took place at the Temple Mount with far reaching social, political and religious implications occurred on 28 September 2000. The *al-Aqsa Intifada* is considered to have begun when then-opposition leader Ariel Sharon of the right-wing Israeli Likud party went to visit al-Aqsa Mosque.³⁸ The official reasoning behind Sharon's visit was to show Israeli citizens that everyone, no matter what their religion, has guaranteed rights to worship at any holy site in Israel.³⁹ Sharon, who became Israel's Prime Minister in the next election of March 2001, ignited a political conflict by capitalizing on religious fervour. The move was popular with right-wing Israelis and the violence that ensued brought moderates further in line with Likud values. This act was considered to be a provocation to the Palestinians, challenging their legitimacy and (for many) their identity. What followed from this one act was the eruption of violence on a scale that had not yet been seen in the region for some time. Thousands lost their lives during the *intifada*, forcing world leaders to intervene in the conflict once again. The *intifada* forced Israelis and Palestinians to examine who they are and in what direction they wanted their future to progress. For Israelis, the decision was made that the Gaza Strip was not an integral part of Israeli identity and could be given up in order to increase peace and security. For Palestinians, it led to the rise in popularity of the religious traditionalist Hamas party instead of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which had represented Palestinians for decades. Perhaps to a number of Palestinians and Israelis the Temple Mount is nothing but a holy spot, but that day in September 2000 reminded both sides that their commonalities could also be their downfall. Their shared sense of sacredness, focused on Temple Mount holy sites, was non-negotiable and highlighted the challenges to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

SECTION 1.4

The larger issue for which the Temple Mount has served as an illustration concerns conflict over land that is considered sacred. How can politicians, who dabble in the realm of the profane, make decisions that overrule divine covenants that promise the land to a chosen people? Rulers in most modern countries are no longer considered to be the earthly representatives of God, thus lacking the legitimacy to make religious policy. It has therefore become necessary for governments and international institutions to view the land as simply land, although special consideration is given to the interests of the warring parties. When the United Nations was tasked to divide British Mandate Palestine in 1947, their conclusion was to exclude Jerusalem from either side's territorial acquisition. Rather, Jerusalem would be given special international status under the proposed Partition Plan.⁴⁰ This plan was never realized due to the war that broke out upon Israel's declaration of statehood.

The current arrangement concerning the Temple Mount, under which the *waqf* maintains the complex but claims its legitimacy under the laws of the State of Israel, appears to be the best compromise. Under the Safeguarding of Holy Places Law of 1967, a series of extra measures were taken to ensure a peaceful transition from Jordanian to Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem holy sites. It states that religious leaders of affected communities must be consulted when dealing with identified holy sites.⁴¹ The official stance of the State of Israel is to prevent any act that intends to destroy the Muslim holy sites. The Israeli Government has made praying or the display of holy items except by Muslims illegal on the Temple Mount. There are steps that must be taken to ensure that non-Muslim worshippers are allowed to visit the Noble Sanctuary, however, and in turn, that these visitors do not incite violence. There is no reason that Jews cannot continue to worship at the Western Wall, as they have been doing for centuries. Altering the status quo would not only create considerable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but would also provoke the rest of the Muslim world.

The contention surrounding the Temple Mount or Noble Sanctuary acts a microcosm for the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The site has the unique ability to act as the intersection between the sacred and the profane, between religion and politics. It has been instrumental in constructing Israeli and Palestinian national identity, as it has served as a place of meeting, of worship, and has highlighted the Self in the face of the Other. In this sense, the sacred has been deliberately manipulated for political purposes throughout the past century. Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount only served to remind Israelis and Palestinians that underlying national differences are never far from their everyday reality. Whether a peaceful resolution is possible in regards to the division of Jerusalem and its holy sites depends on the separation of the religious and political. It also depends on whether a national identity can survive without the site on which that identity, like the different structures associated with the Temple Mount, has been constructed.

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SECTION 1.4

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SECTION 2
MANAGING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

SIERRA LEONE: A MODEL OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE?

Sharlene Harding

Africa is a continent in which religious elements are present in conflicts, whether they are short-lived or endemic, formal or informal. Sierra Leone is one nation, however, that has managed to avoid being embroiled in what have been called “wars of religion.” Despite the assimilation of Sierra Leone to Islam as early as the 15th century, its subsequent partial conversion to Christianity upon European colonization in the 18th century, and the continual practices by many inhabitants of its original African Traditional Religions (ATR), it remains a nation with Muslims, Christians and Animists living together in religious harmony. This is not to say, of course, that Sierra Leone has always been a peaceful nation. It is currently immersed in national reconstruction efforts after a bloody 11-year civil war. That war was caused, however, by the corruption of the government, influences of outside parties, and the revolt of military and insurgent forces in response to the disastrous socio-economic condition of the country. Religion was never a factor. In effect, despite the diversity of religion and ethnicity in Sierra Leone, there has rarely been significant religious or ethnic conflict.

Sierra Leone has become a model of religious tolerance in a region fraught with religious friction. Its impressive level of religious harmony is due to the evolution of its culture and language caused by diverse immigration, its syncretistic practices, and government support of constitutional rights. While other West African nations do not have the advantage of key historical immigration patterns that have led to Sierra Leone’s modern day multi-ethnic diversity, their governments can still learn how to be more accepting of other spiritual practices in the same manner as Sierra Leone, which openly recognizes all religions and formally supports initiatives to strengthen religious harmony.

Africa has been plagued with monotheistic religious war and conflict since the first Europeans began colonizing its vast lands centuries ago. Western world media tends to portray Africa as a continent in a constant state of crisis, with brutal autocracy ruling each nation and inter-tribal or religious conflicts in abundance.¹ Unfortunately, in many (though not all) nations this has been the reality. Decolonization left most African countries searching for an identity and steeped in power struggles for governance. In addition, due to political boundaries imposed by European powers, many West Africans have turned to religion instead of nationality or tribes as a focal point of collective identity. According to Zain Abdullah, West African “tribes” are not homogeneous at all; the majority are full of intermarriage and constantly changing identities.²

SECTION 2.1

Religions, on the other hand, specifically Christianity and Islam, have greater homogeneous tendencies (despite their various sects), making them more appealing for those who are seeking guidance and acceptance from a larger group. Unfortunately, these same religions are also causing much angst in West African nations such as Liberia, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Chad.

One West African nation that does not have the burden of religious tensions is Sierra Leone. This is in part due to its history of colonization and repopulation by an extraordinarily diverse mixture of peoples. Sierra Leone's strategic location on the west coast of Africa made it an appealing place for European explorers to stop and establish an economic hub. The first such European settlers were the Portuguese in the mid-1500s, who named the region "Lion Mountains" (Sierra Leone) based on its lush geography.³ Around the same time, Mende-speaking people from Liberia moved into the north of the country, establishing their own Muslim communities. In 1787, the "Black Poor" who were becoming a burden in London, England, were sent to Sierra Leone to establish a colony.⁴ They were followed shortly thereafter by 1000 freed black slaves from Nova Scotia. In addition, Jamaican indigenous Maroons were shipped by the British to the region in 1800.⁵ Finally, in 1807 after Britain abolished the slave trade, it established a base of operations against slaving ships on the coast of what is now Sierra Leone. Approximately 50,000 slaves freed by naval action were brought to the area, where they established themselves as part of the local community. They were known as "recaptives," and along with the other ex-slaves who were already living there and under the control of the British government, they established the city of Freetown. The recaptives were from regions ranging from Nigeria all the way to the Congo, with each group as culturally distinct as possible in language, customs and beliefs.⁶ The freed slaves from North America were also very different, predominantly Christians from prior conversion practices and familiar with the economic advancements of the Western world. Not surprisingly, the former North American slaves living in Freetown became very active in missionary work, commerce and civil service.

At the end of the 18th century, the Sierra Leone Company (from Britain) took control of the commerce of Freetown and also founded the Church Missionary Society. This organization dramatically increased the number of liberated slaves converting to Christianity by establishing the Church of England as the official denomination of Freetown and developing educational institutions. The ex-slaves were baptized en masse and renamed with European Christian names instead of their "heathenish" tribal names. This new identity did not seem to bother the ex-slaves as church life proved to be a significant unifying factor for the inhabitants of Freetown. Furthermore, the English language of the Bibles that were used for literacy training was combined with the many spoken languages of the area and collaboratively adapted by the residents of Freetown into their own language of Creole or "Krio," who went on to use it as the basis of their own unique, shared and diverse culture.⁷ While Krio owes its existence to historical Christian

influences, its diverse origins have developed a people open to “others.” As the nation’s capital and economic hub, Freetown set the standard for the rest of the country in terms of the liberated acceptance of differences, and the use of Krio embodied this ideal.⁸

The presence of Christian colonizers has had a lasting effect on Sierra Leone. Christianity is still practiced, especially in the capital of Freetown. Over 15% of the country’s 6.5 million citizens practice some form of Christianity.⁹ The longevity of the practice is due to the missionary work of the 1800s, and largely based on the success of the black missionaries to whom it may have been easier for the people of Sierra Leone to relate.¹⁰ The recent memory of slavery left many of the black population wary of “the white man,” even if he was coming in the name of God. The majority of successful black missionaries, in fact, were those who came from Nova Scotia.¹¹ The predominantly protestant groups managed to spread the word of God throughout Freetown and into the rest of the country.

In the early days of Freetown, everyone belonged to one church or another. As was common with West African ministries of the day, the lower class societies were targeted first since church membership gave them a sense of belonging to a group and a sense of status or prestige.¹² Joining a church for deep religious convictions was most often an afterthought. According to Sierra Leonean expatriate Arthur T. Porter:

Many turned to the church and the missionaries because of the social and economic advantages that would accrue from such affiliation, and also because of a desire for guidance in making the necessary adjustment to the new environment of Freetown... these liberated Africans found themselves in Freetown without the support of their own cultural patterns [causing] a feeling of insecurity and instability...they were eager to embrace it, for it supplied a new consciousness of group membership which otherwise would have been lacking.¹³

In addition, missionaries realized that Islam was also spreading quickly as the northern tribes continued to migrate southward. In order to halt this spread, missionaries concentrated their efforts on the malleable poor. In other countries at the time, people of nobility were targeted for conversion in the belief that the commoners would follow their leaders in changing religious affiliation.¹⁴ This was not the case in West Africa, however, because heads of state and nobility were reluctant to part with their culture and practices for fear of displeasing their supporters. West Africa, specifically Sierra Leone, thus experienced a bottom-up approach to Christian conversion and assimilation.

Overall, however, Christian missions were not very successful in the 19th century in West Africa. There are different perspectives on why Christianity did not grow to be as significant as Islam. One reason is that the actual practices of Islam closely resemble some West African norms, such

SECTION 2.1

as polygamy.¹⁵ It would have been easier to let such traditions continue than to try to change already well-established customs. In addition, Muslim men were able to marry four wives, who would each bear five or more children and thus increasing the chances of monogamous Christians becoming outnumbered by Muslims. Christianity was also often referred to as “the white man’s religion” since the religion itself was so different from many West African practices and converting was such a long and convoluted process that people lost interest.¹⁶ Christianity’s failure to spread across Sierra Leone can also be attributed to the racism that seemed to accompany the religion, especially when the British Empire officially colonized the nation. Black ministers were taken out of previous positions of power and black citizens were relegated to second or third class status.¹⁷ People lost faith in the missionaries, who promised equality and peace, but were unable to provide it. Thus, Christianity only has a modest (though growing) representation in Sierra Leone at the present time. The Krio, representing only 10% of the overall population of Sierra Leone, are the only completely Christian ethnic group in the country.¹⁸

Despite some growth in Christianity, Islam is still the dominant religion in Sierra Leone. Fifty percent of Sierra Leoneans currently follow Islam.¹⁹ Islam came to the country from the north, as Muslims migrated through Guinea to Sierra Leone from the 17th to 19th century. These Muslims were warriors and craftsmen, who brought resources with them that the northern Sierra Leoneans found of great value.²⁰ The Muslims were also tradesmen, bringing wealth and jobs to the people. Most importantly, they did not use force to pass on their religious beliefs. “The normal pattern [of conversion] was through peaceful means by long-distance traders, missionaries and teachers.”²¹ While Christianity spread in Freetown during this timeframe, Islam continued to grow in the outer regions of the country. By the time Christian missionaries made their way out of Freetown to attempt conversion, they were often ineffective. The tribes were so culturally intact and immersed in Islam or ATR, that they were not open to accepting Christianity.²²

Islam also spread faster among the identity-seeking residents of Freetown than it did among the well established Temne or Mende peoples. The spread of Islam in Freetown can also be attributed to urban civilization. The Muslims establishing themselves in Freetown came with money and skills in commerce.²³ This not only interested the citizens of Freetown, but also the British government in power. By 1870, the British government in charge had adopted Arabic as an official language in dealing with indigenous rulers.²⁴ It also employed Muslims on its staff to appease the masses. Due to this support from the government, Muslim scholars became prominent public figures, garnering the respect of the people. In addition, Islam was renowned for its racial tolerance. This tolerance enabled those who were disenchanted by the British government’s treatment of black citizens to find solace with their Muslim brethren. The British may have undermined the growth of Christianity by welcoming the Muslim immigrants, or more

importantly, the economic advantages they represented. Conversely, the precedent was set for a nation of religious tolerance with Christian rulers not only accepting Islam, but also incorporating it into the government.

African Traditional Religions, also known as Animism, is not as popular as Christianity or Islam to the western world; however, it is the oldest and second most practiced form of worship in Sierra Leone with a following of approximately 35% of the population.²⁵ ATR is a title encompassing several thousand different religions attributed to various African peoples (tribes),²⁶ though the Mende people are the predominant practitioners of traditional religions. ATR in Sierra Leone involves the belief in souls and spirits.²⁷ Both good and bad spirits are significant, as the belief is that most objects have a soul, personalizing animate and inanimate matter alike. English anthropologist Sir E. B. Tylor maintained that since all religion is based on a belief in some type of soul or supernatural being, all religions can be deemed forms of ATR,²⁸ though this idea has been reworked or discounted by many scholars. To mainstream religious traditions, ATR has a reputation that portrays it in a negative light, as it is often considered as “fetish, pagan, heathen, idolatry, magic, primitive, savage, [and] native.”²⁹

Most European colonizing nations did not feel threatened by ATR even though it was difficult to fully convert those who practiced. This was due to the fact that it was referred to as a philosophy more than a religion.³⁰ ATRs are generally handed down from generation to generation and are as integrated into local culture as any other religious traditions, making complete conversion challenging, if not impossible.³¹ In fact, it is this phenomenon that allows Sierra Leone to enjoy its current level of religious tolerance. ATR followers who were converted to Islam or Christianity managed to maintain some of their ATR traditions. This discouraged any sense of having to renounce their entire identity, ensuring less resentment towards their newly-acquired religious identity.

The practice of incorporating ATR traditions into the monotheistic religions of Sierra Leone is known as syncretism. Syncretism is the blending of religious and cultural practices.³² Syncretism allowed for the easier conversion of Sierra Leoneans to either Islam or Christianity. One could join a Christian denomination, yet still continue to practice old beliefs by blending the practices together. In many parts of the country, there were Christian churches founded by local individuals practicing distinctively local rituals, and these continued unmolested.³³ In addition, not every region possessed the money or means to change their community to a unified Islamic system, which resulted in various communities practicing their own local version of Islam.³⁴ Some Sierra Leoneans even built mosques “to resemble Gothic-windowed churches built by their Christian brethren.”³⁵ This accepted blending of religious norms became more prevalent with the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people during the civil

SECTION 2.1

war. Communities were dispersed throughout the conflict and many have resumed life in another part of the country. Although syncretism may seem to some outsiders too liberal an application of the various faiths, it is a system that works for the people of Sierra Leone. The blending of Christianity, Islam and ATR, to varying degrees by varying communities, has alleviated some of the friction associated with the strict adherence to dogma. This compromise has contributed to the environment of religious tolerance that sets Sierra Leone apart from a number of its neighbours.

The syncretism of spiritual beliefs in Sierra Leone resembles the diverse integration of its peoples. Sierra Leone's demography is different from most African nations due to the large influx of immigrants during the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition, Sierra Leone is not only composed of immigrants from other nations. The language patterns amongst the majority of its peoples illustrate that it had actually been occupied for several centuries before colonization.³⁶ Thus, Sierra Leone is considered a boundary-blurring country, where "boundary-blurring" means accommodating religious and cultural pluralism through the co-existence of alternative beliefs.³⁷ This societal acceptance is evident in Sierra Leone's ethnic composition and the fact that indigenous peoples and immigrants managed to form a new culture together. Along with the varying religious groups, there are also 18 ethnic groups in Sierra Leone.³⁸ The predominantly Muslim Temnes represent approximately 30% of the population and are the main tribe in the north. The Mendes, residing in the southeast of the country, represent another third of the population. The Krio are a minute part of the population; however, they have a significant role in promoting religious harmony in the country, as the capital is home to an ethnic group that formed their own culture, their own common practices and norms, through coordination and cooperation instead of by coercion. Krios have historically accepted any members regardless of their religious affiliations – a synthesizing practice that fellow West Africans would do well to emulate.

The Sierra Leone civil war that occurred from 1991 until 2002 was neither an ethnic nor a religious war. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was a rebel group that instigated an insurrection in response to the corrupt and autocratic practices of the government of Sierra Leone.³⁹ Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor sponsored the RUF in its aim to force a change of government practices. His involvement in this conflict was two-fold: he wanted the profits from the prosperous diamond industry to finance his own presidential campaign; and he was infuriated with the government of Sierra Leone for supporting the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces that were preventing him from becoming president of Liberia.⁴⁰ Despite the criminal and ideological issues surrounding the conflict and the various religious wars simultaneously occurring in its neighbouring countries, religion did not contribute to the invasion of the RUF or the subsequent 11-year battle.

Religion did play a significant role in the lives of the RUF members, however. It is ironic that there is a section dedicated to the religious convictions of its members in its manifesto, *Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone*:

We are religiously Godly in our bearings and beliefs. We enjoy communal prayers and communication twice daily and on all occasions prayers are said both in the Islamic and Christian ways. The people, through their own initiative, have removed doctrinal differences from their way of worship. They say if there is one God/Allah then there ought to be one congregation. In respect of this awakening there has emerged the Jungle United Christian Council (JUCC) and the Jungle United Muslim Council (JUMC). The different divisions in Islam and Christianity respectively worship under one roof and under the guidance of a Chief Imam or Priest and a church Mother.⁴¹

Religious tolerance is thus upheld even in the midst of one of the most brutally violent civil wars in recent history. Individuals who were trained in mutilation and amputation in order to project ultimate fear upon the populace were accepting of the religious differences of their peers. This is an abnormal situation in West Africa, because traditionally civil wars have been associated with religious conflicts, not a celebration of religious difference. In the case of the Sierra Leone civil war, religion became a moot point.

Conversely, religious harmony had no bearing on preventing or ending the civil war. Taylor's support of the surprisingly effective RUF coupled with the corrupt and inefficient Sierra Leone government led to instability in the entire region. Millions of people were killed, maimed or displaced during the conflict. The violence was so brutal that even the previously uninterested international community became heavily involved when images of the unimaginable atrocities of this war were broadcast. Despite the fact that the war was not religiously or ethnically based, it does illustrate the fact that religious tolerance is not enough to keep a country at peace. If the government is not competent and effective, no amount of religious harmony can save a nation from social instability, economic decline and increased security infractions. Religion did not cause the war; neither did it bring about the peace.

Seven years after the end of the civil war, Sierra Leone continues to set an example of religious tolerance in West Africa. Sierra Leone has no state religion. Every citizen of Sierra Leone, like those of Nigeria, Chad and Côte d'Ivoire, has the right to freedom of religion under the constitution.⁴² As stated in section 24(1) of the Sierra Leone Constitution:

Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of conscience and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either

SECTION 2.1

alone or in community with others and both in public and in private to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.⁴³

The difference between Sierra Leone and these countries, however, is the fact that the government adheres to this freedom and actively enforces it. Religious groups are not discriminated against by the democratic government and human rights policies are based on international laws.

In addition to the government-supported freedom of religion, the government continues to promote religious tolerance. The Ministry of Defence and various other governmental department meetings begin with both a Christian chaplain and Muslim imam saying religious prayers.⁴⁴ This is not a contradiction of its policy of separating church and state. Instead, much like the Canadian Forces has prayers during formal ceremonies, dinners, and remembrance parades, the government of Sierra Leone is allowing those affiliated with the dominant religions a chance to worship without fear of prejudice. As was illustrated earlier, the inclusion of Muslims into the government started in the 1800s and the current government recognizing both religions equally highlights the message of religious coexistence that it is trying to enforce. The government also supports Muslim and Christian instruction in public schools and permits children to choose which type of religious schooling they would prefer.⁴⁵ In addition, interfaith marriages are common practices supported by the government and the general public. Furthermore, both Christian and Muslim religious holy days are celebrated as national holidays.

The government also supports the successful Inter-religious Council, which is a non-governmental organization composed of Christian and Muslim representatives.⁴⁶ This council is attempting to promote peace in the country by encouraging and educating the masses in interfaith relations. The Sierra Leone government is effectively managing to keep religious tensions at bay through its fair practices. The resulting religious mosaic in Sierra Leone is a welcome respite for all considering their current economic and social problems in comparison to other more prosperous parts of the world. It is one less thing to concern them.

Sierra Leone is thus arguably a model of religious tolerance in West Africa. The fair and incorporative practices of the government are an effective means to encourage interfaith relations. The same cannot be said for fellow West African nations such as Liberia, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Chad. These nations in particular are constantly struggling with religious tensions resulting from power struggles and years of mistrust, though these nations do have larger populations and other regional influences on their domestic events. Unlike Sierra Leone, these other nations do not have the advantage of a multi-ethnic and spiritually-diverse culture living in religious harmony in the nation's capital where the laws are made and enforced. While ten percent of a country's population cannot create religious harmony for the entire nation, especially during extreme conflict, it is a strong support to the constitutional practices needed to accomplish this goal.⁴⁷

Affording their citizens both the freedom of conscience and the freedom of religion would be a highly effective way of defusing resentment among different groups in the population.

Additionally, these nations need to choose whether they are going to separate the church from the state. Sierra Leone has managed to separate the rule of law from the church, but still encourages non-threatening public displays of worship. If citizens cannot envision how it is possible to incorporate more than one religion during periods of public worship, then perhaps their governments should introduce the practice slowly until it is as common elsewhere as it is in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, public and private business hiring based on religion should be curtailed.⁴⁸ Clearly, if these countries implemented the governmental practices and promoted the interfaith cooperation found in Sierra Leone, they would be able to alleviate some of their current religious tensions.

Similar to most colonized nations, colonization and religious conversion has had a significant effect on interfaith relations in the nations of West Africa. West African countries, however, were left embroiled in continuing religious suspicion and tension whereas other parts of the world, like North America, have forged ahead with a new collective identity. Sierra Leone has managed to circumvent religious tensions through an intentionally-created culture in the nation's capital, the syncretism of tribal religions with monotheistic ones, open acceptance of religious differences, constitutional freedom of religion and government-supported separation of church and state. Other West African nations have not been as successful even though they have similar constitutions and religious demographic compositions.

The greatest difference between Sierra Leone and its surrounding nations, however, is that it has been able to effectively separate the religious biases of the heads of state from governmental practices. It also encourages and indirectly assists in the development of inter-religious relationships, which the other countries fail to do as effectively. Even though the Sierra Leone civil war can attest to the fact that religious harmony does not necessarily mean freedom from conflict, the nations of West Africa experience enough economic, ethnic, and political turmoil that religious harmony is one less threat to their overall peace and security. Imagine how much more intense and protracted the Sierra Leone civil war would have been if religious intolerance had provided another reason to continue fighting!

There will always be reasons for conflict. In an effort to avoid any further wars within their country, the government of Sierra Leone has realized the wisdom of reducing the causes at least by one. They have done this, not by trying to remove religion from the public sphere and thus adopting the secular values of an external secular culture, but by embracing all the aspects of religious expression that have played an important role in the personal lives of the citizens of Sierra Leone, promoting tolerance rather than uniformity or hegemony. It is an example worth emulating elsewhere.

SECTION 2.1

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- 1 Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana: 2005), 5.
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- 3 Joe. A.D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford: 1990), 31.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 61.
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- 7 Alie, 79; Fyfe, 412.
- 8 Arthur Porter, "Religious Affiliation in Freetown, Sierra Leone." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* (1953), 4-11.
- 9 E. Fahlbusch and G.W. Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity: Volume 5: Si-Z* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 1.
- 10 Porter, 11.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Dzedzorm Reuben Asafo, "Social Class Conversion: Socioeconomic Status of Early Christian Converts in Africa," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, (1997), 87.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 83.
- 16 Alie, 110.
- 17 Fyfe, 414.
- 18 E. Fahlbusch and G.W. Bromiley, 5,1-2. It is important to note that the actual Krio population in Sierra Leone is difficult to determine. Different sources from World Bank, to Ethnologue to the CIA World Factbook report varying

SECTION 2.1

population figures ranging from 2% to 13%. The difficulty lies in the fact that the Krio language is spoken by the majority of the country, although the Krio peoples are only approximately 10% of the population. Most sources report 10% as the most accurate figure, however.

19 Ibid., 1.

20 Alie, 45.

21 Ibid., 43.

22 Porter, 12.

23 Dziejzorm Reuben Asafo, "Social Class Conversion: Socioeconomic Status of Early Christian Converts in Africa." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, (1997), 82.

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25 E. Fahlbusch and G.W. Bromiley, V, 1.

26 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New Hampshire: Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 1.

27 M. Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 34.

28 Ibid.

29 John Pobee, "Aspects of African Traditional Religion." *Sociological Analysis*, (1976), 1-2.

30 Ibid., 18.

31 Mbiti, 232.

32 Sergio F. Ferretti, "Religious Syncretism in an Afro-Brazilian Cult House," in Sydney M. Greenfield and Andre Droogers, eds. *Reinventing Religions: Syncretism and Transformation in Africa and the Americas* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 90.

33 Porter, 12.

34 Zain Abdullah, "Negotiating Identities: A History of Islamization in Black West Africa." *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, (2008), 13.

35 Fyfe, 412.

36 Ibid.

37 Abdullah, 8.

38 Alie, 6 and 9-10.

39 K. Peters and P. Richards, "'Why We Fight': Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, (1998), 184. This article is one of many that attests to the fact that the Sierra Leone conflict was not about religion or tribal affiliation or diamonds (originally, although diamonds certainly became a significant motivator as the war continued).

40 Charles Taylor's history with the government of Sierra Leone was tumultuous. It is no surprise that he enthusiastically supported the RUF in their aims. Taylor's relationship with Sierra Leone was something out of a soap opera: "Taylor left for Sierra Leone to seek permission to invade Liberia from there...he was kicked out after he seduced the defence minister's wife." His follies coupled with Sierra Leone's lack of support for Taylor's quest to overthrow the Liberian government helped fuel a deep hatred that RUF leader Foday Sankoh gladly exploited. Howard W. French, *A Continent for the Taking: The Tragedy and Hope of Africa* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 104.

41 The Revolutionary United Front, "Footpaths to Democracy: Toward a New Sierra Leone," <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/AFRC-RUF/footpaths.html>>, (1995).

42 Government of Sierra Leone, "The Constitution of Sierra Leone," Act No. 6, (1991), Ch. 3, Sect. 24. This section is quite detailed in its support of the freedom of religion of all Sierra Leoneans. There was an Amendment Act passed in 2001 under President Kabbah. The changes were minimal, however, mainly concerning election processes and had no bearing on the freedom of religion. Another Amendment Act was signed in July 2008 by President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma. This Act was put in place to allow the Anti-Corruption Commission to freely prosecute any offences involving corruption.

43 Ibid., Sect. 24(1).

44 This information came from an unpublished interview with a reliable member of the International Military Training Assistance Team (IMATT). IMATT is a United Kingdom sponsored operation in Sierra Leone working in cooperation with the United Nations. This Ministry of Defence practice is in keeping with the practices of the RUF, which corroborates the general custom of recognizing both religions in the country.

45 Kingsley Banya, "Colonial Legacy and Education: The Case of Modern Sierra Leone." *Comparative Education* (1993), 161.

46 United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Sierra Leone International Religious Freedom Report 2009," United States Department of State, 2009. The following sentence also derives from this source. The council is open to other religious groups as well. Membership applications submitted by Jewish and Baha'i leaders have recently lapsed with no current indication as to whether they will reapply.

47 The Constitutions for all four countries implicitly state the right to freedom of conscience and religion for all members of the population.

48 Government of Sierra Leone, "The Constitution of Sierra Leone," Act No. 6, (1991), Ch. 3. The government of Sierra Leone does not condone prejudice based on ethnicity, sex or religion.

PEACE THROUGH ETHNO-RELIGIOUS PARTITION: THE DAYTON PEACE ACCORDS

Christine Zubrinic

The war in Bosnia and the Dayton Peace Accords that followed reignited the argument surrounding partition as an effective solution to ethnic/religious conflict. Historically the use of partition as a tool to end ethnic conflict has a great number of precedents; however, its success is debateable. Partition might arguably have been successful in areas where there is ethnic homogeneity (such as Czechoslovakia), but Bosnia is not homogeneous. The partition of Bosnia is comparable to that of India or Ireland, because each involved ethnically mixed and dispersed populations and each was held to be a pragmatic recognition of irreconcilable ethnic identities.¹ The division of Bosnia into three unofficial “statelets” under the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 has thus far been effective at maintaining peace among the three former belligerents despite the gradual removal of military peacekeepers from the country. Examining the case of Bosnia, it is clear that partition, though not ideal, can be utilized as a tool in post-conflict reconstruction to maintain a sustainable peace long enough to implement concrete changes to infrastructure and government, thus ensuring quality of life and avoiding conditions that enable ethnic conflict to continue.

The attempts at peace agreements surrounding the war in Bosnia went through an evolutionary process starting with the idea of “cantonization” under the failed Vance-Owen Plan which called for small cantons of each ethno-religious group to be set up within the country in a way that made intermingling between the groups unavoidable. This plan was unacceptable to the belligerent parties involved in the negotiations of the peace process and would have been doomed from the onset, as it promoted a temporary stay in the fighting rather than a permanent peace. The Dayton Peace Accords never meant partition to permanently break apart the country of Bosnia Herzegovina; rather, it used partition along ethno-religious lines to allow for space between the groups to appease the belligerents and allow the reconstruction of the country to take place. Soft partition as modelled by the Dayton Accords was successful due to the conditions present in Bosnia following five years of violent conflict. The ethnic cleansing and subsequent population shifts which took place during the war created geographic areas of nearly homogeneous populations, thus carving out clear delineations between religious and ethnic groups. The success of the Dayton Accords and the resulting soft partition of Bosnia into a decentralized federal system may prove problematic, however, for the future unity of

SECTION 2.2

Bosnia Herzegovina, as the newly formed decentralized framework mimics the political conditions of Yugoslavia prior to its dissolution.

Bosnia: Background to the Conflict

In order to understand the post conflict situation in Bosnia it is vital to understand some of the history behind the conflict itself. Much of the world watched the war in Bosnia on their television sets and heard terms such as “ancient ethnic hatred” repeated hundreds of times with no idea how important religion was to the ethnic identities of the people fighting the war. Despite the best efforts of Josip “Tito” Broz and the later Yugoslav Communist governments, the nationalist movements in Bosnia (the Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) were all building ethnic identities based on their religious differences rather than their cultural commonalities. This would eventually lead to the bloodiest conflict on European soil since the Second World War. The causes of the war in Bosnia are often cited as being rooted in ethnic differences dating back hundreds of years, but one could argue that the differences in religion, though present, were intentionally accentuated and deliberately made into pillars of the nationalist movements which became popular for political and economic, not religious, reasons.

To understand the background to the secession of Bosnia from Yugoslavia, its timing and the reasons behind the type of fighting that ensued, one could delve back hundreds of years to find the roots of the war for Bosnian independence, but it seems the history of the last fifty years of Yugoslavia’s existence may be the most important. Yugoslavia has since its rebirth in 1945 had a number of incidents that when combined became the catalysts behind its collapse in 1990. Tito’s early reign saw hundreds of Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox and Muslim clerics liquidated as a precautionary effort to rid Yugoslavia of the threat of nationalism within the newly formed republics of Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia. This murderous action only cemented the relationship between nationalist movements and the remaining religious leaders of their communities. The suppression by Tito of nationalist threats as well as those from within the Communist party had a lasting effect, as it was not until 1967 that most nationalist movements saw the first signs of the revival of independent political activity that began with the Croatian League of Communists (known as the Croatian Spring or the *Maspok*, short for *masovni pokret*, or “mass movement”).² Modelled after the “Prague Spring” of 1968, the *Maspok* was seen as a possible chance for “democratization” by movement organizers.³ The Yugoslav Communist government and parties had in 1968 openly criticized Soviet interference in the student demonstrations in Prague that undoubtedly altered the future of Yugoslavia. Though Tito did attempt to quash the Croatian movement by jailing many of its leaders, he did not intervene militarily. This allowed the nationalist movement to grow slowly and made those who were jailed into heroes to Croats, both in the republic as well as those in diaspora.⁴ The growth of nationalist movements outside of

Yugoslavia was common among Serbs and Bosniaks as well, though their growth within the country was not as evident.

The second and perhaps most important determinant in the war that eventually destroyed Yugoslavia was its floundering economy. According to Branka Magaš in her work, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-1992*, the Yugoslav economic crisis started in 1979 with shortages of elementary consumer goods and continued throughout the 1980s causing increasing unemployment and unrest amongst the population.⁵ By 1980 Yugoslavia's foreign debt had increased 400%, leaving the country with mismanaged debt caused by the building of "political" factories, which were giant operations built for political aims and not designed to meet economic objectives.⁶ Another sign of the disintegrating economy were mass worker strikes that swept the nation in 1987. The economic situation in Yugoslavia came to a head in 1990 when the nation's banks "revealed they could no longer cover their customers' foreign currency deposits – a private asset built over time and deeply treasured by Yugoslavs – because of the shortage of convertible currency in the Federal Reserve (sic)."⁷ According to author Jasminka Uduvički, this crisis signalled to the general public that the economic system was in fact on the verge of total collapse. The crumbling economy and growing nationalist movements within the urban areas of Bosnia, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia helped aid in the eventual decision by both the Croatian and Slovenian Communist parties to leave the Yugoslavian parliamentary system and hold free elections leading to declarations of sovereignty by both republics in 1990 and the eventual declaration of independence by Bosnia which led to the bloodiest conflict in the region. These factors in combination with the republic centric constitutional shifts which occurred following the death of Tito all played a role in dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent conflicts that followed.

The Role of Religion in National and Ethnic Identity in Bosnia

The ethnic identity in Bosnia of all three of the ethnic groups represented there is characterized by their different religious affiliations, despite their many shared historical experiences, proximity and intermingling in communities. The three groups (Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks) can be described individually as "ethnic communities" which are defined (according to Anthony Smith) as consisting of six characteristics: a common name; a myth of common ancestry; shared memories; a common culture; a link with a historic territory or homeland (which it may or may not currently occupy); and a measure of common solidarity.⁸

The division of Bosnia into the ethnic communities that currently exist began under the Ottoman Empire. Despite being under the rule of the Muslim Ottoman Empire for an extended period of time, the millet system⁹ of the empire institutionalized and allowed the expression of Roman Catholic and Orthodox religion in Bosnia;¹⁰ in so doing, the Ottoman Empire laid the ground work for the unique make up of Bosnia. Within the millet system each religious

SECTION 2.2

community maintained its own courts, judges and legal principles as well as dividing communities along religious and ethnic lines, thus acting as the first step in nationalizing along ethno-religious lines the three religious groups of Bosnia. The shift of nationalism and ethnicity from an amorphous one in Bosnia and the Balkans as a whole into one defined by religious affiliation began to emerge in the latter part of the 18th century. Prior to this shift, religion acted as the sole defining characteristic between the people rather their nationality. Eventually during this period each religion (Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim) became associated with a certain nation or group within Bosnia.¹¹

In the years immediately preceding the war, these ethnic divisions were further deepened during the 1970s and 1980s when nationalist groups began to stoke the fires of religious difference. Bosnia was particularly vulnerable to this divisive type of nationalism, one that was emerging due to the dire economic situation across Yugoslavia. In direct reaction to the ethnic nationalism gaining popularity in Croatia and Serbia, Bosnian Muslims put greater emphasis on their most distinct characteristic, their religion.¹² Despite the best efforts of the Communist government, these nationalist movements continued until the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1990 and thrived thereafter. The key characteristic of each of these nationalist movements was an emphasis on religious difference, something that allowed the nationalists to depict those of different religions as “the other” despite their being friends and neighbours, with a shared history and many other common characteristics.

This new era of nationalism based on religious differences between the three key religious groups in Yugoslavia began with the mythmaking, in effect creating the identity of each group as the common cultural myth began to be propagated. The modern nationalisms which prevailed throughout Yugoslavia were examples of how national myth is often reinvented in response to contemporary political needs. An example of such reinvention is the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, which was brought forth into the mainstream Serb national consciousness by Slobodan Milošević nearly six hundred years after it occurred. Under Milošević, the Serb national identity began to emerge as one almost exclusively based on their Orthodox faith and the victimization by the “other” (which included the Croat Ustase, Bosnian Muslims and Kosovars). Emphasis was put on the battle between the Ottoman Empire or the “Turks” and the Orthodox inhabitants of Kosovo who were exiled from their homeland in Kosovo by the “Turks.” Despite the historical inaccuracies surrounding this myth and the well-documented reality of religious freedom under the Ottoman Empire, the nationalist politicians continued to propagate such myths in order to create a common homeland myth. The politicians were not alone in their propagation of this myth, according to Branka Magaš:

The Serbian Church was thus a state in embryo – a spiritual state in anticipation of a secular one. Whereas in Russia the church always remained subordinated to the secular

authorities, in the Serbian case the church substituted for the state, preparing the ground for its eventual rebirth. When the multifaith state of Yugoslavia came into existence at the end of World War One, the Church remained the most jealous guardian of Serb state and nation, imparting a strongly mystical dimension to Serb nationalism that has even survived modernization. It is here that critical intellectuals in present-day Serbia have found the seeds of Serb fascism.¹³

This type of myth building surrounding the religious affiliation of each of the nationalist groups in Bosnia is seen in the Croatian nationalist movement as well as the Bosniak (Muslim) movement. It is vital to understand that the nationalist movements of the Serbs, Croats and Muslims centred on their religious differences and by doing so united some groups and excluded others in such a way that dehumanization and violence became acceptable in the Bosnian war.

Ethno-religious differences in Bosnia (and in Yugoslavia as a whole), amplified by the nationalist movements of the Croats, Serbs and Muslims, fundamentally altered relations between the different groups. The wounds inflicted in the decades leading up to and during the war have affected the outcome of any attempted resolution of the conflict, as well as the reconstruction of the region. The atmosphere of separation and distrust bred during this era is a key factor in the soft partition of Bosnia which was laid out in the Dayton Peace Accords and its predecessor, the Vance-Owen plan.

Vance-Owen Plan: Cantonization

The war in Bosnia raged for a number of years prior to the 1995 peace agreement at Dayton during which time the international community submitted a number of suggestions for the resolution of the conflict. Unfortunately for the people of Bosnia, many of the suggestions were simply unrealistic because of the nature of the war. The most significant of these efforts was the Vance-Owen plan, which suggested the cantonization of Bosnia into ten tiny ethnic clusters. The agreement, penned by Cyrus Vance and Lord David Owen, was presented to the belligerents of the Bosnian war on January 2, 1992 in a three part package which consisted not only of the cartographic changes to Bosnia it proposed, but also cessation of hostility conditions and ten suggested constitutional principles. According to Owen, in his work *Balkan Odyssey*, the plan was an attempt to delineate “a ten province structure reconstituting Bosnia Hercegovina (sic).”¹⁴ In so doing, the plan called for what seemed like a miniature Yugoslavia carved out of the already fractured Bosnia.

The further fracturing of Bosnia along religious/ethnic lines proposed by the Vance-Owen plan would have weakened an already fragile country and would likely have led to more violent conflict in the future. The weakness of the plan was rooted in three types of factors, structural,

SECTION 2.2

political/environmental and perceptual. The first of these is perceptual, according to Stephen Van Evera in his *Hypotheses on War and Nationalism*, as the more divergent the beliefs of nationalities (in this case the three ethno/religious-based nationalities in Bosnia) about their mutual history and their current conduct and character, the greater the risk of war.¹⁵ Within the Vance-Owen plan, no concessions were made to legitimize the governments and leaders of the nationalist movements; the plan simply called for the creation of enclaves separating groups at the local level, with the expectation that on a national level the government would be viewed as legitimate. The lack of a legitimate national leadership in Bosnia, however, would have increased the chances of violent conflict recurring in the country.

The second factor that weakened the Vance-Owen plan was one political dimension that the plan ignored. The plan did not call for a process that would bring about any reconciliation and justice for past crimes committed against each other. By failing to include the steps necessary to bring to justice those who committed crimes during the conflict, the Vance-Owen plan had the potential to pause the conflict, but exempting those responsible for the atrocities from any kind of consequence would also have contributed to later violence.

The third factor absent from the Vance-Owen plan was structural. The plan called for ten autonomous provinces spread out within the borders of Bosnia. Each of these would have acted as an ethnic enclave, but the plan would have given “substantial autonomy” to each of the provinces while denying them any international legal character.¹⁶ By dividing the country up into these enclaves, the plan called for the reversal of all ethnic cleansing, but failed to realize that by intermingling the ethnicities so densely among each other the opportunities for war were increased rather than decreased. The cantonization presented in this plan was also unacceptable to most of the leadership in the region, since it separated like ethnic groups from each other and left only the fortunes of war to unite (for example) the Serbs of different provinces.

The dismissal of the Vance-Owen plan by the belligerents involved in the Bosnian war was in fact justified in that it did not solve the immediate or long term problems of a multi-ethnic society. Rather, it attempted to re-establish the prior structure of Bosnia as a means of bringing about peace. The basic premise of the Vance-Owen plan was the belief that the lives of the people of Bosnia were “inextricably intermingled” and thus there was no viable way to create three territorially distinct states based on ethnic or confessional principles.¹⁷ This presupposition was flawed, however, since it did not take into consideration the demographic shifts that had occurred due to systematic ethnic cleansing. The separation of the belligerents (in this case, the Croats, Serbs and Muslims) along religious or ethnic lines was necessary in order to decrease the risk of future violent conflict in Bosnia. Bringing about peace in the Balkans and Bosnia in particular depended on the understanding of the negotiators of the role that religion played in

the ethnic/national identity of the groups involved, as well as the real or imagined history with which those religious affiliations were associated.

Dayton Peace Accords: Partition by a Different Name?

The Dayton Peace Accords are unusual in the annals of peace treaties. They went beyond the traditional conditions of cessation of hostilities and territorial demarcations and attempted to design a new country, a unified state of Bosnia Herzegovina. The Dayton agreement was preceded by a number of proposed peace agreements that had attempted to end the war in Bosnia. One of the major stumbling blocks of the previous agreements had been the western presumption that pluralism would be the best possible resolution for the conflict in Bosnia. Pluralism remained in the Dayton Accords but was secondary to the physical separation of the belligerent parties, specifically the Croats and Serbs in the far eastern and western areas of Bosnia, with a Muslim mini-state in and around Sarajevo. There remain only a small number of truly ethnically mixed areas in Bosnia, despite the efforts of many in the international community to return refugees to areas that were previously ethnically cleansed. The success of the Dayton Accords and the democratization of Bosnia have been debated for some time among academics; it is clear that the agreement, however, has successfully maintained a sustainable peace through unofficial separation for more than a decade.

Despite the opinions of some who believe that the Dayton agreement forces the three groups in Bosnia to live together in an “artificial state,”¹⁸ a careful examination of the Accords’ details reveals the “soft” partition of Bosnia along religious/ethnic lines. This soft partition may eventually lead to a hard or permanent partition of the country due to the decentralized nature of the government designed by the Accords; presently, though, Bosnia is still intact, peaceful and moving forward.

The religious divisions that were amplified by nationalist leaders prior to and after the Bosnian War have yet to disappear from the landscape that is Bosnia; they were in fact cemented by the settlement of territorial boundaries in the Dayton Accords. The country was divided into three zones unofficially by the agreement, though officially only two were put into place. The two official zones were the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Croats and Muslims) and the Republika Srpska (Serbian Orthodox majority). Unofficially, however, the three religious groups had splintered the country (with the help of ethnic cleansing) into three regions: the majority Catholic Croats in the west, the Serbs in the east and the Muslim majority in the centre of the country. Despite the agreement to the conditions of Dayton by both the Serbian and Croatian governments to withdraw from Bosnia, the Croats and Serbs in Bosnia still affiliate themselves more with their external homelands than with Bosnia.

SECTION 2.2

The intention of the Dayton Peace Accords had not been to partition Bosnia. The implementation of the plan and the effect of many of its conditions have not discouraged such a fate, however. One of the major stumbling blocks to Bosnian national unity lies in the political or institutional structure laid out in the Dayton plans. The provision for two separate constitutions, one for the Federation (FBiH) and one for the Republika Srpska (RS) as well as an overarching constitution act as a decentralizing force within the nation, has allowed for highly distinctive political and administrative structures to develop within each entity. These include a presidency at the state level, consisting of a Bosniak (Muslim), a Bosnian Croat and a Bosnian Serb representative. Above these is a High Representative (HR) who functions as the “chief authority” with legislative powers (including veto powers). All of these conditions have made the unification and centralization of government immensely difficult in Bosnia, but decentralization may in fact be the key to maintaining present day Bosnia as a whole, according to the HR, Paddy Ashdown. In his opinion, Bosnia will “survive as a state, albeit not a centralized one of classic European tradition – more Belgium probably, than France.”¹⁹

The reality is that Bosnia now consists of three de facto mono-ethnic entities, with three separate armies, three separate police forces and three separate education systems.²⁰ This situation has put the national government in a precarious situation, as it exists mostly on paper and operates at the mercy of these three entities. The ethnic leadership within these entities is especially difficult to deal with, as many are in support of the results of ethnic cleansing and what James Lyon describes as the subsequent system of ethnic apartheid.²¹ By making it difficult or in some cases impossible for refugees of ethnic cleansing to return to their homes, there is no way to undo the demographic shift that occurred during the war – one of the failures of implementation that has haunted the Dayton Accords. The soft partition of Bosnia may be the key to sustained peace among the three groups, as a total reintegration seems impossible at this point in time; there has been no real reconciliation, apart from the legal prosecution of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Such failures in the implementation of Dayton in Bosnia often overshadow the overall success of the plan. There have been a number of successes in the realm of security, including customs reform, the State Border Service and the State Protection Agency, all of which are national organizations working in a centralized way to maintain security. In addition to the customs and border services, the process of unifying the three militaries has begun. Other successes include the establishment of a central bank, a common currency and even license plates, all helping to define (at least on the surface) a Bosnian identity that encompasses all the ethnicities within it. Whether the different ethnic groups will choose to identify themselves with the larger nation remains to be seen, and in that uncertainty lies what may be the true failure of the Dayton Peace Accords.

The struggle to implement the conditions of the Dayton agreement may stem from the inability of the international community to rectify the problems which led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia. The attempts to restore the economic systems of Bosnia have all been resisted by the local governments and politicians. Programs to restructure the financial system, tax policy, investment and to privatize state-owned assets have all been met with resistance by local authorities, despite the benefits these changes would present to Bosnia as a whole. The political institutions of Bosnia have also proven to be resistant to the changes offered by the Dayton plan. These factors, partnered with the assumption by at least some in the international community that the ethnic groups of Bosnia would put aside differences in order to build a better Bosnia, have led to failures in the reintegration of the three ethnic/religious groups into one Bosnian national identity.

The Future of Bosnia and the Dayton Peace Accords

In the thirteen years since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the nation of Bosnia has not evolved into the unified ideal laid out in the framework of the accords but rather into a decentralized nation containing three mono-ethnic states within its borders. Despite the best efforts of some, the full unification of Bosnia under one national identity has failed to surface as was hoped by architects of the Dayton Accords. One explanation for the failures may be the continuation of plans for the creation of the Republika Srpska; another explanation may rest with the inability to find ways of creating reconciliation among the three religious/ethnic groups. Regardless of the reasons for the failures of Dayton, Bosnia has become a nation that has partitioned itself into three regions along religious lines. The Catholics of northwestern Herzegovina ally themselves with their external Croatian homeland while the Orthodox Serbs live in their separate state entity and ally themselves with Serbia to their immediate east. The majority of the Muslim population has settled into the centre of the nation in and around Sarajevo, the country's capital. There remain a small number of ethnically mixed areas in the country, but even these seem to have partitioned themselves. This is evident in Mostar where the city is divided between Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks.

The Dayton Peace Accords have brought a sustainable peace to Bosnia despite the soft partition that has occurred among the three ethnic/religious groups there. The true test of the ability of the political and structural institutions put in place by the international community in the Dayton Accords will be the eventual removal of all international peace keepers from Bosnia. It will be at that instant that the three religious/ethnic entities within Bosnia will demonstrate whether this soft partition will lead to a unified nation or a full partition and therefore the dissolution of Bosnia.

Such a complete dissolution of Bosnia based on the ethno-religious divisions deepened by the Dayton agreement is not beyond the realm of possibility. The existence of multiple governments

SECTION 2.2

and constitutions as well as the close proximity of the “homelands” of two of the groups involved may prove motivation enough for a full dissolution. What Dayton has done is to smooth the way should such dissolution take place. The borders have been drawn between the ethno-religious groups and each has some political infrastructure in place should the nation cease functioning. The nation is not, however, doomed to fail as did its parent Yugoslavia. Its success will be based on the ability to build a Bosnian identity that includes the three groups involved without threatening their individual identities, a difficult task indeed in a region where attempts at this have failed in the past.

The Dayton Peace Accords ended the violence in Bosnia and made it possible to begin reconstruction of the nation. This is the major success of the plan. The failures came from the overextension of the peace treaty into one centred on post-conflict reconstruction of Bosnia into a nation according to the ideals of the international community, not the political, ethnic and religious realities on the ground in Bosnia. This can be a lesson for future conflict resolution and reconstruction efforts by the international community. The past instances of soft or hard partition have generally been engineered by external powers to bring about peace; Bosnia differed from that model, however, with the ethnic leadership pursuing partition of the country through ethnic cleansing. The Dayton Accords sought to stop ethnic cleansing, but failed to reverse the damage it had already caused by dividing the country psychologically in a way that suited the establishment of political boundaries where none had previously existed, boundaries based neither on history nor on geography, but on religious and ethnic affinity.

Soft partition as a means of resolving violent conflict, as the Dayton Accords modelled, can be moderately successful if the necessary conditions are present. There must be clear geographical delineations of religious or ethnic areas prior to the implementation of such divisions or it may lead to future violent conflict concerning those borders. The problem with the Dayton Accords and the resulting soft partition of Bosnia into a decentralized federal system is that it mimics the political conditions of Yugoslavia prior to its dissolution. Until the country truly becomes stable, without the presence of international peacekeepers, in the end it is perhaps unfair to use it as a strong example of the success of partition as a means of conflict resolution and reconstruction.

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SECTION 2.2

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- 1 Radha Kumar, "The Troubled History of Partition." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (1997), 26.
- 2 Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 184.
- 3 Ivo Goldstein, *Croatia: A History* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1999), 178.
- 4 When using the term "national movement" the author is referring to the definition of nationalism as a political movement by van Evera which states that it has two characteristics: (1) individual members give their primary loyalty to their own ethnic or national community, this loyalty supersedes their loyalty to other groups, i.e. those based on common kinship or political ideology; and (2) these ethnic or national communities desire their own independent state. Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism in War" in Michael Brown, et al, eds. *Theories of War and Peace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 258.
- 5 Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-92*. (London: Verso, 1993), 94-95
- 6 Jasminka Udovički and James Ridgeway, eds. *Burn this House: The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 81.
- 7 Ibid., 81.
- 8 Anthony Smith, ed. *Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 1991), 22-30.
- 9 The millet system had a socio-cultural and communal framework based, firstly, on religion, and, secondly, on ethnicity. This framework in turn reflected the linguistic differences of the millets. The millet system was divided into communities according to religious affiliation. Each religious community formed a "millet" and the collection of millets formed the millet system. Each millet established and maintained its own institutions to care for the functions not carried out by the Ruling Class. Individual millets governed institutions such as education, religion, justice, and social security. Many currently existing schools, hospitals, hotels, and hospices for the poor and the aged have their origins in the individual millets. Talip Kucukcan, "State, Islam and Religious Liberty in Modern Turkey: Reconfiguration of Religion in the Public Sphere," *Brigham Young University Law Review* (2003), No. 2, 475-507.
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CREATING INDIGENOUS RELIGION: CONFLICT AND CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

Nancy Reid

Chinese political and religious tradition is a history of great personalities, diverse and rich culture, and authoritarian rulers. The Maoist era is no exception. Communist rule was an attempt to shake foreign imperialist intervention and provide a social order that embraced class struggle as a means for social transformation and abolished the need for traditional or religious beliefs. During the rule of Mao, however, traditional and religious beliefs, particularly Christian ones, continued to flourish despite repression and a veritable resurgence occurred after his death. Christianity in China in effect became an indigenous religious tradition as a result of the hostility of Mao and the Communist Party toward it between 1949 and 1976. Various strains of Christianity, both rural and urban, not only survived the expulsion of missionaries and the closing of churches after the Revolution, but also the more severe repression of the Cultural Revolution. As this now-indigenous religious tradition continued to grow, out of the sight of foreigners and their influence, the Chinese government was compelled to recognize and permit its public expression after Mao's death in a way that led to the 1982 Central Committee Document 19 acknowledging that religious belief and practice served a constructive social purpose.

The assimilation of Christianity (as a foreign religion) into local Chinese culture occurred through the long process of missionaries practicing medicine and education and creating local communities of believers. Christianity has been present in China since 636 CE when the first Syrian bishops and monks arrived.¹ This is documented in the Xi'an Stele, a monument erected in 781 but not discovered until around 1625. The arrival and writings of these early Christians were approved of by the Taizong Emperor, and the inscription describes Christianity as the "luminous religion" and God as "the origin of origins."² The writing has a Taoist tone, suggesting that this was a means for the early missionaries to deliver Christianity in a way the Chinese would accept. During this time every established religion was required to fit harmoniously within the Chinese Empire; the Christian Stele therefore signifies the integration of Christianity within China. Monasteries were founded in all provinces and were supported by the Emperor. During a brief period from 660 to 705 CE, Christianity suffered opposition from Taoists and Buddhist monks; it regained favour, however, and was further integrated into Chinese culture when the Emperor Xuanzong personally chose the names of the monasteries.³

SECTION 2.3

An account of the Christian missions in China is well beyond the scope of this chapter; it is safe to say, however, that Chinese contact with the Christian world has been continuous, if not relatively consistent, since the first arrival. This was largely due to the ability to reach China through established trade routes and the capacity of the Church to engage in evangelizing missions. Syrian and Persian monks were able to maintain their presence in China because they were used to being the non-dominant religion within their own Persian Empire and could accommodate to a dominant culture.⁴ During the 8th and 9th centuries, Christianity in China faced increasing rivalry from Confucian, Buddhist and Islamic influences, problems that culminated in the banning of all foreign religions from the country in 845. Thus, for the next three hundred years, Christianity all but disappeared from sight in China until contact with the Mongols brought it back into view.⁵ Starting again in about the 11th century, Christianity gradually resurfaced and spread as contact with the Mongols increased. Delegations from the West continued to make contact; by 1368 with the end of the Yuan Dynasty, however, Christians became a small minority.⁶ Missionaries continued to arrive throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, and by the end of the 16th century the first Jesuits arrived in China. While the discovery of the Stele around 1625 fuelled discussion surrounding the question of the wisdom of introducing a “new” religion in China, clearly Christianity was not a new arrival.

The indigenization of foreign culture or beliefs is a process that is dependent on many variables related to the individual situation. In China, indigenization of Christianity was closely tied to the common culture between behaviour, institutions and beliefs.⁷ Being Chinese was to live with proper human behaviour and in accordance with cosmic principles, qualities reflected in the Confucian tradition that has been an important and integral part of Chinese history and identity. For the Chinese it was both an ideology and a way of life. Confucius (551-479 BCE) saw his era as “a state of perfect harmony between heaven and earth, when human behaviour was regulated by the law of heaven and the state enjoyed perpetual peace.”⁸ Confucianism, therefore, was concerned with regulating the behaviour of both rulers and subjects, and placed significant importance on the practice of ritual. It also became an intellectual school promoting well ordered human relations. Ritual, known as *li*, was extremely important in the adherence to morality and etiquette. This set the social dynamics to include an elite intellectual class who, because of their greater understanding of *li*, served as exemplars for society.⁹ Certain aspects of ritual could be quite expensive depending on the nature of it, and thus it was only the elites who could afford such practices. The role of ritual was understood by ordinary people and though they often could not afford the elaborate aspects, coming as close as possible to the elite standard of *li* was considered important.¹⁰ The construction of Chinese identity for each individual, poor or elite, was related to their ability to adhere to these practices.

The vast diversity of China and the various regional divides were also important in the development of this ritual identity. Some regions had weaker economies than others and so money was not always available to perform the necessary rituals. Regions also had their own interests with which to be concerned and these were protected in rituals to enhance local welfare. Local personality and character fostered this sense of identity, and while each region was ultimately still “Chinese,” one dimension of that identity was rooted in local family and community. By extension, one could also be a participant in the political, cultural and social arrangements of the state and beyond, because consciousness at each level was important. Because one’s identity was tied to this all-encompassing inter-related consciousness, the influx of Western political, social and religious thought in the 19th century led to a crisis in self-identification among many Chinese. Initially this only affected the elite scholars and bureaucrats who had contact with such foreign influences, but the cultural crisis spread with the introduction of technology, institutions and ideas, especially by means of the Christian missions that penetrated beyond urban areas into the Chinese countryside.¹¹

Given the long history and presence of Christianity within China, it could be argued that indigenization began with the arrival of the Syrian monks. Indigenization in the 19th and 20th century, supported by Western influences, helped to create the conditions in which such a process could grow roots deep enough to withstand the conflict that China would soon experience. By this time, missionaries had been present in China for hundreds of years, though they had always been associated with either Catholic or Protestant missions. In the early 1900s independent foreign missions began operation in China, while individual Chinese teachers and evangelists began to have an impact on local congregations. Both movements have certainly affected the indigenization of Christianity. The cultural crisis of identity was enhanced by these independent missions, many of which were not clearly aligned with main-line Western denominations. Furthering this process of indigenization were the individual Chinese evangelists who could be regarded as a *via media* between the more formal Western missions, with foreign personnel and their local followers. In the rural areas, the elitist divide between those who could afford strict adherence to ritual and those who could not propelled many poorer Chinese away from Confucian tradition towards “heterodox” beliefs in which at least some elements of Christian tradition might be found.¹²

By the middle of the 19th century, a concerted effort began to be made to promote Chinese nationalism. After 1842 there was an increasing effort to strengthen China’s military capabilities to defend against imperialism.¹³ The threat of imperialism from both Japan and Western powers became very apparent during the Great War (1914-1918). In 1915 a cultural movement by young Chinese intellectuals began examining the problem of China’s continuing weakness. Much blame was placed on Confucian culture, which in light of Western technological and economic success, came to be viewed as weak and even backwards. The Versailles Conference

SECTION 2.3

decision to award Germany's territorial concessions in China to Japan further demonstrated the imminent imperialist threat, resulting in the May 4, 1919 uprising and demonstrations in Tian'anmen Square and reviving the cultural movement that had begun in 1915.¹⁴

The issue of who was in charge of the Christian movement in China was equally explosive. These missions were thought by the West to be the forefront of reform, educating new Chinese leaders and enjoying unprecedented growth. In the post-War period, however, they came under attack from both non-Christian forces and even from Chinese Christian leaders.¹⁵ The Protestant missionary movement had failed "to do what it said it wanted to do: to pass on real authority over the institutions of the 'Sino-foreign Protestant establishment' to Chinese Christians."¹⁶ By all accounts this was also a failure on the part of Catholic missions, which were even more dependent on foreign leadership and structures than before.

During the 1920s and 1930s the Nationalist and Communist armies engaged both international forces and each other, as control of the state was contested and military power proliferated. Following the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949, Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China (PRC). Mao made it clear that China would "lean to one side" and support the Soviet Union during the Cold War.¹⁷ That Christianity continued to survive in China past this point may be surprising to many Westerners, due to idea that Marxist and Communist ideology refutes religion and thus, after the Revolution, would expect it naturally to have withered away. This initially was Mao's hope, and so by using a selection of Marxist texts, he constructed a Communism that he considered "more accessible" to Chinese minds. It was a "moral communism, full of imagery and at the same time practical and dialectic."¹⁸ Mao was a self-taught intellectual with a strong charismatic presence that was perfect for rallying a crowd. His persuasion that class struggle was actually a universal principle of contradiction was important to promote the idea that "conflict was seen as the motive force of all social transformation," which was one of Mao's ideas entrenched in the catechism for Communism in China.¹⁹ Chinese Communism interpreted religion in somewhat differently than did Marx, regarding religion as "an outdated superstition" that was left over from another, less advanced, society. Atheism then, confirmed their traditional humanism, something that found congenial elements in the Confucian tradition.²⁰ For Chinese Christians however, atheistic Communism was a genuine fear. Evangelism, spiritual growth and church work were important parts in their private lives, and while many were apolitical, antagonism from the State pushed them to consider the relationship between their personal faith, their local community and the role of the State in determining what should happen in either of these areas.²¹

Mao recognized that religion and faith could not simply be stamped out because it was against Communist doctrine. Instead religion was gradually worn down through means such as study

sessions, which replaced faith in religion with faith in the people, science, socialism and the Communist Party.²² Opposition and contradiction were introduced into believing communities. It is interesting that although Mao recognized that faith could not be forced out of people, nor Marxism forced into them, he also argued that matters of an ideological nature must be debated democratically through discussion, criticism, persuasion and education. “Ideological conflict between state and religion underlies the Communist religious policy,”²³ however, and therefore despite this relatively liberal attitude towards faith, religion under Mao was prohibited and at various times the response of the State authorities ranged from mild suppression to outright military intervention.

The Russian Revolution had been an important influence on Mao prior to his development of the theory of Chinese Communism. Russia was a model for China in how it adopted atheism as a philosophy and acted in ways consistent with the Confucian idea that “religion contained falsehoods and malice detrimental to the good of society.”²⁴ To the Chinese Communists, Russian denunciation of Christianity confirmed suspicions that missions were a foreign conspiracy and Christian missionaries had no other goal than to promote foreign interests.²⁵ The switch to the Communist Party in 1949 was lauded as a transition from an old to a new China; interestingly, for many people initially there was no question that this new China could also be Christian. In fact, it was argued that the cross as a symbol for Christianity was consistent in the Chinese context with the attempt to relate love and power through the “rejection of servility, indifference, and cringing in the face of tyrannical power.” This was to be accomplished, however, not through deliberate suffering, but through armed struggle.²⁶

After the Communist Party came to power, it became very clear that Chinese Communism did not easily coexist with Christianity. A major component of the socialist transformation included transforming the churches. The Triple Autonomy Movement was implemented as a Communist political campaign with three principles. The first was that administrative autonomy “means being directed by the Party and rejecting all imperialist influence.” Second, economic autonomy “means financing oneself by productive activities and possibly grants from the state while refusing all imperialist subsidies, especially American ones.” Third, autonomy in the apostolate “means propagating the faith by Chinese people only, using a Chinese theology and rejecting all foreign missionaries.”²⁷ Also known as the “Three-Self Patriotic Movement,” its leaders believed that Christian participation was possible in the socialist reconstruction of China. Essentially, however, this was a campaign for control by the government, and Christians were required to sever all imperialist (and therefore foreign) ties. While the push for self-reliance and independence of the Chinese Church was not new, this movement was intended primarily to serve a political purpose. Foreign missions were closed and missionaries expelled, Christians suspected of counterrevolutionary activities were targeted and many churches were closed or

SECTION 2.3

destroyed. Only aspirations of nationalism and materialistic progress for the Chinese nation were acceptable, and this could only be achieved through complete subordination to Maoist ideology in order for China to reach its ultimate destiny.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was an all-encompassing movement by the Communist Party; the goal was not just to politicize and regulate religious policy but also policies in industry, agriculture and education. The theme of these policies was standardization, centralization and nationalization. For Church leaders this meant complete isolation from foreign religious intervention and missionaries, and the takeover of Christian churches by the Communist Party in order to assure Party control and loyalty to Maoist principles. Church leaders were labelled as capitalists as a means to repress the passing on of the Christian faith. During this time of repression, the teaching of Christian faith often came to be a familial responsibility and was passed on in the same manner as culture and ancestor worship. As Joseph Tse-Hei Lee argues, this “overlap of kinship and religious identity [offers] a key to understanding the indigenization of Christianity.”²⁸ Christianity was forced into the very place within the Chinese culture that allowed it to meld with the traditions and rituals that were associated with ancient Chinese religious and philosophical beliefs and to do so out of the sight and influence of the Maoist state.

Christian identity thus became as much a social and collective identity as it was a religious one, and the survival methods for Christianity included five factors: First of all was the network of support through kin and social connections. Second was the shift of religious operations to rural areas to avoid direct confrontation. Third was the recruitment of new members from Mao’s victims of land reform and political opposition. Fourth was the education of children and organization into youth groups to increase support to resist political pressure. Finally, some reliance on overseas Chinese Christian support groups in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia for protection was necessary for survival.²⁹ For the individual Christian in China, maintaining faith and resisting political opposition was certainly a struggle and one which took much devotion and personal strength to survive. It also demonstrated, however, the high level of autonomy and entrenchment of Christianity within communities to maintain its position despite interference and attempted external control by the State.

Everything changed in 1966, however, when the Cultural Revolution was declared by Mao, who felt that his power as a revolutionary was being eroded by the Communist Party and by those profiting from the new order. In Mao’s opinion, progress could only be made through conflict and contradiction by constant upheaval and the destruction of China’s ancient culture.³⁰ This was a violent decade during which mass killings and extreme persecution occurred in the name of patriotism, class struggle and permanent revolution. Anyone thought to be reactionary, a revisionist or counter-revolutionary could be targeted.³¹ The Cultural Revolution included

much religious persecution and during this decade all churches, even ones supported by the state, were closed. It is interesting to note that throughout the Cultural Revolution it was never mentioned that there was a constitutional guarantee to religious freedom.³² During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards destroyed many aspects of Chinese society, including both churches and Buddhist icons. Bibles and other literature were also destroyed, and officially the Church was “dead” because all Christian activity was illegal.³³ While for many this would be enough to dissuade members from continuing to practice their faith, the process of evangelization never stopped. Even Christians who were sent to prison camps continued to convert during the Cultural Revolution. In place of religious beliefs of all kinds, the radical Red Guards gave Mao an almost deified status, and he became a larger-than-life national symbol.³⁴

Mao’s death in September 1976 was a major turning point for China, as various power struggles presented the chance for new opportunities in economic development. It was widely recognized that China had fallen behind economically in the international arena. A campaign for modernization was launched in order to address four main areas: agriculture, industry, armed forces and science and technology. These were known as the “Four Modernizations.”³⁵ Many intellectuals pushed for a “Fifth Modernization” as an “emancipation of minds,” but while initially the movement for democratization looked promising, on March 5, 1978 the Chinese constitution was written, encompassing the Four Basic Principles: a socialist system, rule by the Party, dictatorship of the proletariat and the Marxist-Leninist thought of Mao Zedong.³⁶

Despite this setback and the repressive State policies that accompanied it, Christian growth during the Reform Era (1978-present) was strong and facilitated the development of a relationship between politics and cultural society. Tse-Hei Lee argues that there are many reasons for the resurgence of religion in China; two of the most significant ones, however, are the crisis of faith resulting from the collapse of Maoism and the natural inclination of the search for meaning, accompanied by a desire for salvation. The specific reasons for choosing Christianity are more uncertain, and, he argues, are based on two parallel phenomena that reflect a broader interest in religion and spirituality.³⁷ The first phenomenon is the transformation Christianity has endured from a marginalized and “foreign” religion to an indigenous movement that has taken on a shape of its own in local Chinese communities. The second phenomenon is that Christianity provided the construction of a new value system that gave spiritual and psychological support to those people participating in an increasingly globalized environment and market economy. By addressing the ideas of God, eternal salvation and the cultivation of virtues, Christianity incorporates religious worldviews and provides strong spiritual, psychological and material incentives.³⁸

Actual figures of Chinese Christians are hard to determine due to the fact that independent scholars are not permitted to conduct an official survey. Government estimates in 1982 placed

SECTION 2.3

the number of Protestants at 3 million³⁹ while a 1993 study conducted by Hunter and Chan estimated the number of Protestants to be around 20 million. They argued that this was likely too low, however.⁴⁰ The 1982 government estimates for Catholics was about 2.7 million.⁴¹ In 2003 the Three-Self Patriotic Movement estimated the official number of Chinese Protestants to be 15 million while the Catholic Patriotic Association put the number of Chinese Catholics at 5.3 million.⁴² Other scholars place their 2003 estimates much higher, with 70 million Protestants and 12 million Catholics. It is quite possible that within the next thirty years China could become the nation with the largest Christian population, with up to one-third being Christians of one persuasion or another.⁴³

The growth of Christianity has been particularly high in rural areas, partly due to the fact that traditional religions were banned by the Communist Party while Christianity remained a legal option for peasants with strong religious needs.⁴⁴ Rural Christianity has also tended to incorporate more of the traditional cultural elements than the urban Three-Self churches. As atheism was a founding principle in Communist China, it seems only natural that because religion was marginalized politically, those who were already part of a marginalized group (such as peasants) would be attracted to religion. It is ironic that precisely because of its marginalized status Christianity was attractive to these rural peasants as means of a personal struggle against the state. The challenge facing many rural Chinese Catholics today is modernity, however, as for the poorer and lower classes the church ironically acts as a barrier to the outside world and creates an “ethnic religion” which is then difficult to adjust from if they have to migrate to the cities.⁴⁵

Because Western Catholic and Protestant missionaries were expelled from China after the Korean War, it was up to local Chinese Christians to continue to maintain the churches and to resist state harassment and repression. Many marginalized minorities converted to Christianity for protection and as a means of resistance against state oppressors. Because many intellectuals possessed only a basic knowledge of Western culture, they came to refer to Western culture as Christian culture, while Chinese culture was regarded as Confucian culture. To many, Chinese backwardness was rooted in Confucian culture while the West’s affluence and openness was due to Christianity.⁴⁶ As a result, through the Reform Era the government started to lose control over Chinese Protestants and Catholics, who belonged to the official (and urban) churches, to local offshoots and breakaway groups with no necessary allegiance to any ecclesial hierarchy. This decentralised situation made external control difficult to maintain, as it was replaced by an adaptation of Christianity to suit the desires and needs of local communities.

In effect recognizing this new political and social reality, in 1982 the Central Committee Document 19 produced by the Eleventh Party Congress acknowledged that religious belief and practice “could serve constructive social purposes, even though such belief was fundamentally

erroneous.”²⁴⁷ A policy of suppression was thus replaced by one of cooperation and control through the Three Autonomies Movement and the Catholic Patriotic Association that were supervised by the government.

Document 19 significantly illustrates the distance that the State by 1982 had travelled in terms of accepting the role of religion in China. It is very stereotypically communist; written with a paternalistic tone that clearly recognizes the diversity of Chinese religions, it is not apologetic for any wrongdoings which may have been committed. The purpose of the document, however, is to sum up “the historical experience of our Party, positive and negative, with regard to the religious question since the founding of the [PRC], and clarifies the basic viewpoint and policy the Party has taken.”²⁴⁸ It advocates the need for provincial, municipal and local levels of government to investigate and document the work for which each department is responsible. It compares the emergence of religious mentality to the low level and primitiveness of lower-class people who wouldn’t know any better. It recognizes however that religious faith and sentiment are products of the history of society and that the long-term influence of religion on people in a socialist society cannot be avoided.⁴⁹ This drive towards a balanced socialist society is reinforced throughout the document; it is somewhat of an idealist outlook, however, as it also recognizes that this achievement will likely take generations and requires proper management on the part of the state. There is a tacit recognition that the period of Communism under Mao did not work to expel religion from China; this apparent failure is qualified by noting the expulsion of imperialist forces, leaving behind only those elements even of religion that were inherently Chinese. Thus, by recognizing that Christianity is indigenous to China, the Party was able to explain why, even despite state efforts to the contrary, religion in general, and Christianity in particular, has persisted. The Central Committee states that the “Catholic and Protestant churches ceased to be tools of the imperialist aggressors and became independent and autonomous religious enterprises of Chinese believers.”²⁵⁰ They also argue that the Party “proclaimed and carried out a policy of freedom of religious belief, enabling the broad masses of religious believers... to enjoy the right of freedom of belief.”²⁵¹ Protecting the non-believers is just as important as protecting the believers, however, so “respect for and protection of the freedom of religious belief” is granted. It is also recognized that the use of coercion to deal with ideological and spiritual questions is “fruitless and extremely harmful.”²⁵² While Communist Party members are not permitted to freely believe in religion, and any “criminal and antirevolutionary activities which hide behind the façade of religion, which includes all superstitious practices” will be punished,⁵³ the coexistence of Marxists and believers is needed to “form a United Front in the common effort for socialist modernization.”²⁵⁴

Christianity in China has a long, and at times complex, history. During the authoritarian rule of Mao and the Communist Party, strong and often violent measures were taken in an attempt to wipe

SECTION 2.3

out Christian culture and beliefs. The opposite result occurred, however, and instead Christianity has since experienced the largest increase in support in its history in China. Government recognition that Christianity is in fact conducive to society and serves a social purpose can be seen both as a great victory and a grudging recognition of this achievement. While traditionally thought of as a religion of “Western” nations, the reality is that Christianity has been present in China much longer than it has been in many Western and non-Western societies. The indigenization of Christianity as a Chinese religion that has led to its current growth and health is an ironic result of the hostile actions toward it of Maoist governments since the Revolution in 1949, actions that not only enabled its survival even during times of extreme Communist persecution but firmly embedded it within the local culture Chinese communities. As Chinese Christianity develops its own theology and culture out of reach of the Western influence of mainline Christian traditions, the longer term effects of this religious transformation of the world’s largest country remain to be seen.

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SECTION 2.3

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SECTION 3
IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY

BUDDHISM AND WAR IN SRI LANKA

Robert B. Watts



n August 17, 2006 an interfaith peace rally in the capital of Sri Lanka was the scene of a truly remarkable sight. Led by Buddhist monks, Hindu priests, Christian clergy and Muslim mullahs, the widely attended peace rally was calling for the end of the violent civil war which over a span of 20 years had caused the island to suffer 70,000 dead. Yet in the middle of this peaceful rally a large group of saffron-clad Buddhist monks attacked, beating participants and loudly calling for the banning of the peace movement to the northern parts of the island controlled by Tamil rebels.¹ This image of Buddhist monks, supposedly among the most peaceful of religious groups, was stunning, yet is illustrative of the conflict that has engulfed Sri Lanka and speaks to its religious overtones.

The war in Sri Lanka is widely characterized as an ethnic conflict and with good reason. Ethnically the two major combatant groups (Sinhalese and Tamils) are descended from independent peoples originating in India who spoke different languages, were physically different and practiced vastly different religions. Despite long settlement of the island, these differences have not been mitigated by history. Sri Lankans have always been sharply divided along ethnic and religious lines; following independence, long standing resentment among ethnic Sinhalese and Tamils exploded first into widespread dissent and then ultimately into civil war. In the broadest strategic sense, the war revolves around separation; Tamils striving for an independent state located in historically Tamil regions in the North, while the Sinhalese arguing that only a single nation is an acceptable solution.

But if the conflict is indeed ethnically based, why did the Buddhist monks attack that day? What role does Buddhism play in the conflict? On initial examination, it would seem that this role is minimal. The major religions of the respective combatants (Buddhism and Hinduism) arguably have no necessarily inherent basis for violence or war, and neither the Sinhalese nor Tamils use religion as a primary focal point in their stated rationale for conflict. On detailed examination, the influence of religion can be seen to be much more subtle. Sri Lanka is a nation that is embroiled in two conflicts; the well-known ethnic war against Tamils in the north (that at time of writing is “officially” over), and the more subtle struggle for Sinhalese nationalism that fuels the ethnic conflict. Since the mid 1800s, Sri Lanka has been undergoing a Buddhist revivalism that seeks to instill a vision of religious social order that activists believe to be superior to all other forms of government, including (at many times) the elected secular government of Sri Lanka. This movement has targeted non-Buddhists in an effort to enforce one overriding religious

SECTION 3.1

philosophy that masks itself in Sinhalese nationalism. Throughout its development, Sinhalese “nationalism” was (and is) inseparable from Buddhist culture, language and historical legacy making these concepts virtually indistinguishable. Combined with a desire to avenge past wrongs (both real and imagined) inflicted on Sinhalese Buddhist monks, such sentiment continues to drive the war by rationalizing conflict and giving it a cloak of religious respectability. This is evident in an examination of the history of the Sri Lankan conflict, the development of “political” Buddhism as a driving force in Sri Lanka, and the continued effect Buddhism has today in Sri Lanka in terms of fostering both cultural conflict and war.

History and Development

It is impossible to understand the conflict in Sri Lanka today without first examining the history of the island in terms of both its religious and ethnic diversity. History is key not only to determining the course of events, but also to see how the Sinhalese understand the past and use it for political advantage. The divisions present in Sri Lankan society are not new, but rather have been present in some degree since the island’s initial colonization by peoples emigrating from India. It must be stressed that the various groups that colonized the island were very different in terms of religion, culture and language. Violent conflict was not, however, a foregone conclusion. While there has always been some degree of competition (both in economic and political terms) between the groups, the violent civil war was largely a result of events that occurred in the 20th century as Sinhalese nationalism developed and the nation moved toward colonial independence.

Ethnic division in Sri Lanka has been present in some form since its earliest recorded history. Sri Lanka was first colonized by successive waves of migration from India beginning in the 5th century B.C. The first identified settlers were Indo Aryans from northern India who established a succession of Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms in the central region and south, a religious division that continues today.² Tamil Hindus from India followed, establishing kingdoms in the north in the Jaffna peninsula. The position of the island along established trade and sea routes made it a natural centre of commerce for a number of ethnic groups, some of whom stayed to colonize. Arab Muslim traders soon became a factor in various coastal areas by establishing centres of trade and slowly spreading their religion into these settled areas. It should be stressed that there is little evidence on record of conflict among these groups, prompting considerable academic disagreement over the source of the current conflict. The ancient chronicle *Mahavamsa* tells of Tamils from South India in conflict with the Sinhalese, but is light on details as to the nature or source of the conflict. Primordialist historians state that there is an oral history of collected memory of conflict that is transmitted through language (Sinhala) and Theravada Buddhist tradition,³ but beyond oral tradition, there are limited written or historical sources for confirmation. This element will become significant when examining the current rationale for conflict.

Sri Lanka's position along established trading routes and its valuable natural resources (including tea, rubber, sugar and coffee) made the island a sought after strategic location for emerging European trade empires from the earliest days of exploration in the region. Since the early 1500s, the island (commonly referred to as "Ceylon" by the Europeans) came under successive Portuguese, Dutch, and then British domination first as a trading route and ultimately as a colony. Colonization was not conducted without resistance. Although many of the records are lost, the first recorded conflict between Europeans and Sri Lankans occurred in 1505. Portuguese traders, originally welcome on the island, soon became jealous of the Arab Muslim monopoly on many elements of trade and took actions to suppress them.⁴ Conflict followed, with Muslims and Sinhalese uniting to attack fortified Portuguese positions. In a pattern that was to become familiar during the colonial period, the Portuguese began siding with various tribal factions on the island and encouraging conflict among the natives, weakening any sense of developing unity and allowing the Portuguese to gain a firm foothold throughout the land. As they were replaced by the Dutch in the mid-1600s (who themselves allied with native factions in the initial guise of liberators) and ultimately by the British, Ceylon slowly became completely colonized under administrations whose common factor was to keep the people separate through overt favoritism to one ethnic or religious group.

British colonization, dating from 1797 to independence in 1948, would have a number of influences on the nation that would prove significant during the civil war. Following practices employed throughout the Empire in places such as India, the British attempted to thoroughly "Westernize" the island through the building of churches, schools, infrastructure and the establishment of a Western system of education. This was not perceived universally as a good thing by the Sinhalese, but rather was later perceived (or used as examples of) a Western assault on Buddhist ideals. This assault was both ethnic and religious. In the early days of colonization the British imported indentured servants from India to work in various colonial offices and plantations on the island. These servants were almost exclusively Tamil Hindus from India. This import of new Tamils into the island caused significant resentment among the Sinhalese population who saw the new arrivals (rightly) as foreigners. In fact, even native Tamils viewed the new arrivals with some suspicion. The positioning of these Tamil Hindus from India within the colonial administration created a perception of favoritism that has never been doubted by the majority of Sinhalese, whether or not it was actually true.⁵ With the British administration came various missionary movements that established Christian schools throughout the island. Although not officially part of the British administration, there was no doubt that these efforts were supported by the colonial government.

These efforts by colonial powers resulted in a perception among Sinhalese Buddhists that their religion and subsequently their way of life was under attack, either from a slow infusion of

SECTION 3.1

western ideals and Christianity or from a deliberate emphasis on other religions in a society that was almost universally Buddhist. Such a perception is remarkable, given that the vast bulk of Sri Lankans are in fact Buddhist. On the eve of independence descendants of the Tamil Indians numbered 6% of the population, ethnic Tamils (or “Sri Lankan Tamils”) numbered 12%, while Muslims descended from Arab traders that settled on the island numbered 7%. A clearly overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans felt that they were in fact being marginalized and must continuously defend themselves.⁶ In the words of one Buddhist monk, “see how tiny, how fragile Sinhalese society is...it is in danger of forever being washed away.”⁷ It is this perception that Buddhist culture (and by extension Sinhalese culture) was being threatened that directly contributed to the development of political Buddhism and the subsequent emergence of Sinhalese nationalism following independence.

Buddhist Revivalism and the Rise of Radical Monks

Sri Lanka was offered independence by Britain in 1948 in the wake of the general collapse of the British Empire following the end of the Second World War. Although there was an anti-colonial movement in Ceylon, it was not a violent effort, nor was it particularly ideological. Sri Lankan secular nationalist movements were quite small, consisting largely of a number of Western-trained elites.⁸ With the sudden granting of independence in 1948, there existed a political vacuum that could be filled by any organized political movement. To a great deal of international surprise, Buddhist monks organized to fulfill this role.

During the first general election in 1947 a group of radical leftist monks known as the *Vidyalkara* exploded on the political scene, agitating in support of newly formed leftist parties. What was surprising about this phenomenon was not only widespread participation in the political process by an established religious order traditionally regarded as apolitical, but also that the groups the monk supported were largely dedicated to secular government and a de-emphasis of religion in the political process. At best the alliance of monks and Marxists made strange bedfellows. This odd turn of events was not a spontaneous outpouring of religious orders suddenly free to participate in the political process, however, but the product of a slow development within the Buddhist community to rationalize and encourage Buddhist participation with the ultimate goal of creating a Sinhalese state.

The *Vidyalkara* movement and similar orders that appeared suddenly in 1947 were not created overnight, but instead were the product of a slow revivalism of Buddhism that had been sweeping the island since 1860. Like many of the roots of the Sri Lankan civil war, this revival had its roots as an offshoot of colonialism. By 1860, continued colonial economic development of Ceylon had created a wealthy bourgeoisie and cultural elite among the Sinhalese whose interests were both political and economic. Although educated in Western-style schools, proponents

of the Buddhist revivalism stressed a philosophy of a “return” to the classical foundations of Buddhism.⁹ These “classical” tenets, as expressed in the writings of Dharmapala and others, had a distinctly nationalistic form. In addition to an established code of puritanical morality and ethical behavior (elements that could in fact be recognized in classical Buddhism), the new revivalist form stressed several elements that were unique. These included a denigration of alleged non-Buddhist ritual practices (specifically Christian and Muslim), a celebration of past Buddhist victories, and infusing the Sinhalese with a nationalistic identity based on Buddhism.¹⁰

Practically, spreading this new revivalist philosophy was accomplished through the establishment of Buddhist schools as a direct counter to Christian schools and through the use of propaganda to unify Buddhists against competing groups. This philosophy fit in nicely with the leanings of the emerging bourgeoisie, which was seeing other groups (especially Muslims descended from the Arab traders) as economic competitors. Agitation by Buddhists eventually led to riots directed against the Muslims in 1915, with a continued call for their ouster from the island. Although Tamils and Christians were not targeted during these riots (the Muslims were the smallest non-Sinhalese group on the island and thus were a logical first choice for attack), the Buddhist revivalists had established both a philosophy and tradition that could be used to target any group that did not conform to their canon. This would soon be directed against the Tamils.

Although the riots were eventually quelled, the revivalist movement had significant effects on the nature of Sri Lankan Buddhism, particularly in regards to monastic orders. The Buddhist revival of 1860-1915 swelled the ranks of the various monastic orders on the island, often with young, idealistic and politically active men whose passions were fuelled rather than quelled both by Buddhist idealism and by a glorification of the real or imagined martial past.¹¹ These men were worldly for their time and particularly interested in emerging anti-colonial movements. India, due to its proximity and cultural links, was particularly significant. Buddhist monks in great numbers began travelling to the continent where they became educated at centres of emerging resistance to British colonial rule. Mahatma Gandhi, with his growing movement, was especially influential in demonstrating that resistance to the West could be successful and that there could be an effective religious base for political action.¹²

The monks returned to Sri Lanka with a number of core beliefs and shared experiences. The first was a sense that as a group they had not only the right but also an implied duty to participate in the political process as it related to nationalization and de-colonization. The second was, literally, “power in numbers.” Gandhi emphasized people power and mass resistance; the lesson was not lost on the Buddhist monks, who began to band together throughout the 1930s and 1940s in groups that promoted a distinct anti-colonial agenda. As many of the anti-colonial movements of the time were socialist or Marxist, many monks began active study to rationalize

SECTION 3.1

compatibility between Marxist ideology and Buddhist tenets – a stretch for traditionalist Buddhists, many of whom labelled this new form of activism “Protestant Buddhism”.¹³ Although the Marxist connection would not survive to the days of the civil war, the methods of protest and the established tradition of Buddhist monks actively participating in the political process would remain a factor.

By 1948 the Buddhist monks had become a significant force in the Sri Lankan political process. Young and articulate, almost all had been to or had some experience with India, were aligned with nationalist movements, and closely associated with socialist leaders.¹⁴ The emergence of the monks as a political force was not without controversy within the laity or many established orders, who questioned the appropriateness of the monks participating in politics at all. The radicals answered this with a careful re-telling of Sri Lankan history, arguing that the goal of nationalism was always a higher purpose of Buddhism and that oral tradition held it was a common stance taken by the monks in the ancient and glorious past. The association with Marxism, however, proved trickier; even the most diehard revisionist had difficulty in the alignment of traditional Buddhist principles to the new radical anti-colonial philosophy. This position was realized by many of the radicals, who slowly shed the Marxist aspects of their philosophy in favor of populist chauvinism and Sinhalese nationalism.¹⁵

The rise of the monks as a political force must not be underestimated in terms of later effect on Sinhalese nationalism. For the first time, “political Buddhism” became an important element both in serving as a rationale for the conflict, couching it both in mystical terms and using references to a Buddhist glorious past to further nationalistic ends, and in mobilizing considerable fundamentalist and organized support for nationalistic ends. The monks had established a political base, were well regarded by the Buddhist laity who were in the majority, and were more than willing to re-write history in mystic or religious terms to rationalize a nationalistic agenda.

Following their initial successes, the widespread development of nationalistic Buddhist groups moved deliberately. Political Buddhism was not conducted in an ad hoc manner, but rather relied on detailed theological tracts to support its nationalistic outlook. In 1956, seven highly respected Buddhist scholars, all of whom had links to radical movements, authored *The Betrayal of Buddhism*, a widely read report that portrayed Sinhalese Buddhism as being constantly under attack, either from Tamils, Muslims, or Christians since its original inception. Pains were taken to portray the ancient form of Sinhalese Buddhism as culturally pure and possessive of nationalistic overtones. The report was deeply hostile toward Christian missions. This was followed by D.C. Wijayawardena’s *The Revolt in the Temple*, a lay reader approach to the historiography of Sinhalese Buddhism. Wijayawardena made the extraordinary claim that not only was Buddhism an established State religion among the ancient kingdoms, but also that it represented the only

true “path to righteousness” and thus it was the duty of modern Sri Lankans to act socially and religiously in a political setting using the tenets of Buddhism as a guide – of the type practiced by the radical monks.¹⁶

This position was expanded upon by a number of writers. The most important of these were written by the internationally famous scholar monk Walpola Rahula. Western educated (for a time he held a professorship at Northwestern University), Rahula was known for his two authoritative texts *What the Buddha Taught* (1959) and *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (1956) before authoring the widely influential *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (1976). Each in their own way steers provides the basis for the idea of political Buddhism and its links to Sinhalese nationalism.¹⁷

Rahula’s argument for political Buddhism was based in a careful reading and interpretation of Buddhist sutras. He stated that as monks always worked for the benefit of the “common man” the leap to politics was not new at all, but rather part of a long (albeit largely unrecorded) tradition. Buddhism and politics are both concerned with social service, so therefore the two may be considered one and the same. Turning to Buddhist chronicles such as the *Mahavamsa*, he notes that as the vast majority of the ancient Sinhalese were followers of the Buddha that the religion is, in effect, a national one, and that thus it is impossible to separate Buddhism from Sinhalese culture and tradition. Phrases such as “religio-patriotism” and “religio-nationalism” become part of his writings.¹⁸ Under this guise, he directs his study toward the colonial period, noting a deliberate conspiracy by the British and Christian missionaries during the period to not only divide and conquer by encouraging competition between various sects but also to deliberately indoctrinate the children of elite Sinhalese so as to make them ignorant of the true role of Buddhist monks within society.

These writings had enormous impact on Sri Lankan society both in terms of establishing a widely accepted political philosophy and also in re-writing history to emphasize nationalistic Sinhalese society and a continued sense of perceived persecution. Sri Lanka, on independence, was a modern nation with a largely literate population and well developed mass media that was used by Buddhist groups to promulgate this message. Unity among the Buddhist orders and laity was created by establishing a common enemy that was easily identifiable. It would not be long before this had a direct impact on the political process of the new nation.

The Social and Political Revolution and its Implications

The year 1956 was critical for the future of Sri Lanka in establishing the basis for the future conflict. As Buddhist monks and extremist groups began to emerge as a political force, the established western trained elite that were the new nation’s first leaders were gradually

SECTION 3.1

eclipsed by a more extreme Buddhist agenda.¹⁹ The first elections in 1947 had been won by the United National Party (UNP) which had attempted to instill a broad anti-communist, secular-style parliamentary democracy headed by a number of members of Western-educated elites.²⁰ The unity was short lived. Growing leftist influence (encouraged by the monks), economic problems, rapid population growth and growing ethnic tensions led to fractures within the UNP and the emergence of political movements driven by the ideals of Sinhalese nationalism. The publication of *The Betrayal of Buddhism* immediately prior to the 1956 elections (it was also the 2500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha) was particularly timely in creating an explosive environment among the electorate. The political opposition to the UNP (the Sri Lankan Freedom Party, or SLFP) used this to great advantage, declaring their intent to return to the ideals of Sinhalese Buddhism as an expression of emerging nationalism.²¹ The issue they chose to emphasize this point was a linguistic one. Following independence, the languages of Sri Lanka were Sinhalese, Tamil and English; the SLFP declared that only Sinhalese would be considered the national language as Tamil and English were “imports”; in other words, Sri Lanka was a Sinhalese nation first and foremost and thus, by extension, Buddhist. This action was clearly discriminatory against the Tamil minority and created immediate widespread social unrest. The emotionalism of the moment and the SLFP’s proposal was directly responsible for their victory in the election. The victory of the SLFP and its radical agenda may thus be seen as the true beginning of the Sri Lankan civil war.

The victory, however, was not without its cost. The Tamil minority in parliament obviously objected to the more extreme implications of the language bill, causing the SLFP to back away from many of its provisions as a matter of intra-parliamentary politics. This action served to mollify some of the Tamil elements while simultaneously enraging Buddhist supporters. This allowed many of the more radical Buddhist groups to claim that the SLFP had “betrayed” its Buddhist ideals. Threats made by these groups against the party had their effect; in 1959 the leader of the SLFP, Bandaranaike, was assassinated by a Buddhist monk unhappy with the SLFP’s progress in making Buddhism the official state religion.²²

Subsequent governments had a difficult time reconciling their actions with this hard-line Buddhist position, one that was completely alien to Sri Lankan Tamils. Demonstrations and outbreaks of violence between Sinhalese and Tamils continued. On its return to power in 1966 the UNP attempted to satisfy both sides, first by replacing the Christian Sabbath with the Buddhist *poya* full moon holiday (an action that, ironically, enraged many Tamils who were in fact Catholic) and then by enacting the Tamil Regulations that gave parallel recognition to the Tamil language, something that caused massive riots by the nationalists, continued civil violence and a state of emergency that lasted for over a year.²³

It is interesting to note that the religious element of violence during this period was almost solely limited to one side, making analysis of the Sri Lankan conflict complex. The Tamil reaction to increased Buddhist militancy was not to respond on a religious basis (perhaps emphasizing Hinduism), but rather to focus on ethnic unity. Although nominally Hindu, many Tamils had converted to Christianity as a result of the missionary period, another group that was targeted equally with Muslims and Hindus by the Buddhists.²⁴ The Tamil Hindus and Christians fore-sware religious differences in the face of the common enemy, stressing Tamil ethnic characteristics versus religious philosophy. Tamil ethnicity became a source of national pride among Tamils in the north who increasingly organized in political resistance movements that called for the establishment of a separate Tamil state.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the secular government became an increasingly common target both for Sinhalese nationalists and the Tamil resistance. The adoption of a constitution in 1973 that openly sanctioned discriminatory measures against Tamils resulted in the formation of the Tamil United Front, the direct forerunner of the Tamil Unified Liberation Front political party that would be expelled from parliament in 1983 for failure to take loyalty oaths to the Sinhalese nationalistic government (precipitating the formation of the Tamil Tigers, or LTTE, and the outbreak of open war). The Sinhalese and Tamils did not just attack each other, but also had an increasingly common enemy in the elected government, which both sides viewed either as a tool for the other side or far too moderate for their relatively extreme positions. In 1971 the secular government began to lose control of the political left, resulting in the formation of the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP), a Maoist and primarily rural movement that attempted an abortive coup. Boasting over 10,000 members, the JVP was composed primarily of youth movements and had strong support of younger Buddhist monks who saw its ideals as a return to many of the revivalist principles of the 1930s.²⁵ Although defeated in a bloody campaign that saw over 1200 dead, the JVP would return in response to the government's invitation to the Indian troops to quell a Tamil uprising in the north (an invitation that would, ironically, lead to Tamil assassination of the Indian prime minister in 1991 in retaliation).

The new JVP was more violent than its predecessor and far more influenced by young Buddhist monks who declared open allegiance in the countryside to the JVP and actively participated in JVP campaigns of intimidation and violence. Many Buddhist monks were publically supportive of the JVP, claiming that they were simply fair minded yet oppressed people. In the words of one, "these people simply want jobs, fair elections, order to be restored...and a peaceful Buddhist rule."²⁶ The government did not see the actions of the JVP in quite as benign terms. Declaring a state of emergency in 1989, President Premadasa unleashed the army in a coordinated campaign of terror that brought the most militant wing of the JVP to its knees. Although significantly reduced as a political force, the effort was not completely successful; Premadasa

SECTION 3.1

was assassinated by a suicide attack in 1993. While Tamil rebels were implicated in the assassination, it remains unclear if the JVP was in fact the instigator.

The political chaos surrounding the assassination of Premadasa and the increasing violence of Tamil attacks allowed the Sinhalese nationalists to regroup. From 1995 to 2001 Sri Lanka was subject to the bloodiest period of its civil war, with battle lines clearly being drawn between Tamil separatists in the north and forces of the “government,” now supported by hard-line Buddhist groups allied in the common cause of crushing the Tamils. While a cease fire in 2001 lasted five years, during that time extremists on both sides sought to break the peace and push the other side to open war. This was exacerbated by competing relief efforts in response to the devastating tsunami in 2004, where both sides accused each other and actively worked themselves to sabotage relief efforts. Coinciding with the tsunami was the rise of another nationalist party (the *Jathika Hela Urumaya*, or National Heritage Party), founded and led by Buddhist monks with a strong religious strand of Sinhalese nationalism. It was these monks who attacked the peace rally on August 17, 2006.

The conflict in Sri Lanka is a complicated phenomenon. The violence of the war, the tactics employed (including mass use of suicide attacks), the deliberate targeting of civilians and complex social interactions make the study of this war challenging. Although the world has long seen the war as a purely ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil with ancient roots, it is in fact far more influenced by Sinhalese Buddhism than it would otherwise appear.

Since the mid 1800s, Sri Lanka has been undergoing a Buddhist revivalism that seeks to instill a vision of religious social order that activists believe to be superior to all other forms of government, including (at many times) that of the elected secular government of Sri Lanka. This movement has alternatively targeted indigenous Muslims, Christians, and Tamils in an effort to enforce one overriding religious philosophy that masks itself in Sinhalese nationalism. In this sense, the war in Sri Lanka was as much a cultural conflict as an ethnic one. While the ethnic conflict was effectively ended with the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers in 2009, the roots of the cultural conflict and the religious motivations for continued violence go far deeper. So long as these exist, peace in Sri Lanka may remain simply a vision.

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SECTION 3.1

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HINDUTVA: INDIAN NATIONALISM AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Rebecca Walker

There is a long-standing history of religious pluralism in India. This religious pluralism was translated into a positive secular democracy when India gained its independence from Britain. The separation of religion from politics is often hard to maintain, however, and the influence of religion frequently permeates even the most avowedly secular societies. Hinduism, as the majority religion in India, has had a particular sway over Indian politics since the time of Independence and partition. Religion and politics in the region have both had their own histories of conflict and violence; due to the now intertwined nature of religion and politics, however, it is often difficult to discern if violent clashes are religious or political in nature. Despite the multivalent character of Hinduism as a religious belief system, to advance its own political agenda, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has successfully fostered a sense of Hindu nationalism in India since its inception in 1980 in a way that has arguably led to several episodes of brutal violence between Hindus and Muslims.

Though the BJP as a political entity came into being in 1980, its roots originally come from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was developed in 1951. It is in turn supported by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which was founded in 1925. Since it became involved in politics, the BJP has been implicated as the instigating force behind multiple acts of violence including those at the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, the riots in Mumbai, and the riots at Gujarat.

The new sense of political nationalism that has flourished since independence and partition began several decades earlier with the formation of the RSS. Founded in 1925 by middle class Hindus, the main mission of the RSS was: “to train young Hindu men to stand up to the temptations of secular society and revive the traditional values of Hindu India.”¹ It did this through activities like weekly meetings in urban homes and summer camps, very much like Boy Scouts “except for their nationalist religious ideology and training sessions in self-defense.”² Over time, the opinions of the RSS became more extreme and they became more physically militant. They have always seen Muslims and secular Hindus as their principal enemies and have fought diligently to oppose the growth of these two groups. They are also opposed to the non-violent posture promoted by Gandhi. As a group, they believe that peaceful non-violence is an imported Christian concept. Consequently, they prefer to adopt the old warrior tradition within Hinduism,

SECTION 3.2

by which they strike down their enemies with force. It was an RSS member, for example, who assassinated Gandhi.³

The RSS has always been known as a militant organization despite the fact that it developed among middle class Hindus in the pre-independence period. It developed as an alternative form of nationalism when Hindus were trying to find a new sense of identity and understanding of their position in a rapidly changing world. As the RSS grew and developed branches formed to take control of various aspects of the group's ideology. The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) was formed in 1964 to take care of the social activities of the group. The Bajrang Dal later developed out of the VHP as the militant youth wing of the RSS. "The Bajrang Dal activists have been involved in many acts of violence...including the spate of attacks against the Christian community in India since 1998 and the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002."⁴

The RSS has always seen itself as a cultural rather than a political entity, which is why it has chosen to support the BJP as the political branch of the conservative Hindu movement. In 1951 the RSS decided to become more political when it allied itself with the Jana Sangh (JS) political party. The party platform was based on strong Hindu unity and a vision of a Hindu nation – ideals that the RSS promoted as well: "The Jana Sangh's plan for unification was interpreted by members of other religions as a plan not to Indianise but to Hinduise them."⁵ In 1980 the JS was reborn as the BJP and the RSS continued to back them as their political ally. The BJP also promoted a Hindu state and made the notion of Hindu unity by means of Hindu nationalism a priority.

The version of Hinduism now expressed by the BJP and its followers is more a political and ethnic construct than a religious movement. Over thousands of years, as Hinduism has spread throughout India, practices and patterns of worship have developed differently in different regions. As a polytheistic and plural religion it has adapted to the cultural ways of life and needs of the people in the area in which it was practiced. Because of the variations in practice, it would be difficult to call for unity of all Hindus under a religious banner by itself. Religion, however, as an element of national identity can be used as a tool to create political unity. As a political party, the BJP has appealed to the religious conservative ideals of urban and rural constituents and has fostered the "us versus them" mentality, especially in regards to the split between Hindus and Muslims. By fostering this division and appealing for both religious and ethnic unity, they have created a sense of "nationalism" that is entirely politically motivated.

Officially the BJP's philosophy is based on integral humanism. The concept of integral humanism was presented by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya through a series of lectures in Bombay in April of 1965. Upadhyaya was a member of the RSS and the JS. He, and consequently the BJP, believed that: "Independence is intimately related to one's own culture. If culture does not form

the basis of independence then the political movement for independence would reduce simply to a scramble by selfish and power-seeking persons. Independence can be meaningful only if it becomes an instrument for the expression of our culture.”⁷⁶ This concept dovetails neatly with the ideology of Hindu nationalism that has developed, known as Hindutva.

Hindutva is based on the ethnic notion of being a Hindu, a citizen of India with Hindu principles. As stated on the BJP’s official website: “Hindutva or Cultural Nationalism presents the BJP’s conception of Indian nationhood...It must be noted that Hindutva is a nationalist, and not a religious or theocratic, concept.”⁷⁷ In 1923, Vir Savarkar published *Hindutva*, defining the term “Hindutva” as “a people united by land, blood, language, religion, culture and history.”⁷⁸ This fundamental definition of Hindutva is strikingly similar to accepted definitions of nationalism, and in essence that is what the movement is promoting, along with uniting religious and ethnic Hindus throughout India. It is largely marketed as an ethnic and nationalist Indian movement so as to appeal to the largest possible group of people, though it is also used as a religious and political ploy to influence voters. Hindutva is Hindu nationalism branded more politely and politically but is still the ideology used to encourage Hindu extremists to perform violent acts against other groups who, while Indian by nationality, are not Hindu. Because Hindutva does not appeal directly to the religious aspect of being a member of a nation, moreover, it has the ability to appeal to a wider audience and, more importantly, the ability to unify and mobilize a larger group of individuals. The violence that has resulted from this mixing of religion, nationalism and politics is the culmination of the “us versus other” division between Hindus and those of other ethnic and religious backgrounds, principally Muslims. This use of religious and ethnic division is the means to a political end for the BJP, in this case holding political power and having the ability to alter the constitution and laws in favor of Hindu traditions and beliefs (including the caste system) and outlawing, permanently, religious conversions.

As Hindutva is a principal mission for the BJP, it is important to understand nationalism more broadly in order to understand it in terms of religious politics in India. A nation is known as a population of peoples united by a similar culture, language, religion, ethnicity, history, or geography. Political borders or governments do not necessarily define a nation though many nations do exist within these boundaries. Sikata Banerjee proposes that “a coherent community comes into being because the *we* are ethnically, linguistically, and/or religiously distinct from the *them*.”⁷⁹ Within this simple division there is an intrinsic sense of unity; within the defined group, there is a sense of community, belonging, understanding and acceptance, while those who are excluded are instantly different, separate, unfamiliar, and potentially threatening.

In the most negative light, nationalism can be seen as “a type of group identification forming the basis of much violence in the modern world.”¹⁰ In India the “us and other” mentality

has deepened divisions between the Hindu and Muslim communities. There are politically-based nationalist, as well as conservative religious tendencies in both camps; the combination of politics, religion and a distrust of the “other” is potentially volatile and has led to violent events.

Expressions of Religious Belief or Acts of Political Violence?

The use of violence for political or religious ends is by no means a new phenomenon, nor obviously does it only occur in India. The most recent spate of violence is not as religiously motivated as it might seem at first glance. It has deep political undercurrents and is perpetuated by select few in government to further their political agenda. The BJP has always had the majority of their support in the places where Hindu nationalism has remained strong, in the north of India in the area known as the “Saffron Belt,” stretching from “Rajasthan to Bihar and encompassing India’s largest state, Uttar Pradesh.”¹¹ This is an area of religiously conservative Hindus who are politically active, akin to America’s “Bible Belt” where a large portion of religiously and politically conservative Christians are concentrated in the southern US (including its largest state, Texas).

The government in the area of Northern India, led by the BJP, has actively fostered this sense of Hindu nationalism and has encouraged and promoted the conservative religious ideals of the area. While the promotion of cultural ideals has served to unite a community around the BJP, this unification of Hindus has also further divided the Hindu and Muslim communities and led to conflict between the two. The BJP has also used this division to serve their political purposes. As Paul Brass notes: “Case after case of Hindu-Muslim violence has been carefully plotted and forcefully instigated by political leaders within the Hindutva movement and the BJP. Incidents tend to occur in the run-up to important political campaigns preceding critical elections.”¹² The politicalization of the religious divide has happened throughout India and has served to promote the political ideology of conservative Hindu groups and advance their position in government, particularly in regards to the aims of the BJP.

The resurgence of politically backed religious violence in India began with the attack at the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. Most scholars agree that the destruction of the Babri Mosque was the first major demonstration of Hindu nationalism culminating in an ultra violent act against Muslims. It was instigated by the “Bharatya Janata Party (BJP), a militant Hindu group, [who] claimed that the Mosque – built upon the ruins of an ancient temple celebrating the birthplace of Lord Ram – was occupying sacred Hindu ground.”¹³ Although the mosque had been at Ayodhya since 1528¹⁴ the claim that Lord Ram had been born there, and thus was sacred Hindu ground, was considered reason enough to mount a political campaign for its destruction.

In 1990 the Vishva Hindu Parishad, also known as the World Hindu Council, encouraged “faithful Hindus throughout the country to make bricks and bring them to Ayodhya to rebuild the temple.”¹⁵ The VHP is a traditional, conservative Hindu organization that works in close association with the RSS. The VHP, like the RSS, are vocal backers of the BJP. In the months before the destruction of the mosque on December 6, 1992 the VHP along with the BJP, the RSS, and the Shiv Sena had been actively calling for the construction of a temple to Lord Ram to replace the mosque. These Hindu-based political groups claimed that destruction of a Muslim place of worship and the construction of a Hindu temple was “integral to their struggle to achieve Hindu rule in India.”¹⁶

In response to this call for united action, 150,000 devout Hindus arrived at Ayodhya,¹⁷ many of whom had participated in the five hundred mile march called the Ratha Yatra, or Chariot Journey, to rebuild the temple.¹⁸ The BJP combined the use of Hindutva with the tradition of long marches for social and political change that was symbolized earlier by Gandhi’s salt march. By using the ethnic ideology of Hindutva to motivate Hindus to fulfill a religious purpose, the BJP was able to mobilize Hindus en masse. It was a feat likely not possible if the BJP had attempted to unite Hindus solely on the basis of their religion alone.

By attracting Hindus from throughout India to work toward a united goal their march through the countryside was symbolic as well functional. The BJP’s aim to tear down the mosque in order to rebuild a Hindu temple garnered “political support from the *Kar Sevaks* (Hindu devotees and activists), but it also caused riots between Muslims and Hindus, jeopardizing the political future of the Janata Dal government.”¹⁹ In one deft move, the BJP and its associates were able to mobilize and unify Hindus from across the country based on religious and nationalist goals; at the same time, they were able to obtain substantial political support and destabilize the government in place.

By raising religious, national and political fervour to a fever pitch, the BJP and its collaborators were both implicitly and explicitly involved in the violence that ensued. Along the streets leading to the mosque, stalls were set up where merchants sold “postcards with photographs of BJP leaders – including current [2002] Home Minister L.K. Advani”²⁰ thus showing the Party’s support for the Hindus who came to tear down the home of one faith in favour of another. After the mosque was razed to the ground, tensions between Hindu and Muslims groups were palpable. While Hindus tore down the mosque, police did nothing to intervene. The government troops who made a modest show of protecting the mosque were perceived as showing favouritism to the Muslim minority instead of solidarity for the Hindu majority.²¹ This attracted criticism from both the Hindus who felt the troops should have allowed them to freely destroy the mosque, as well as from the Muslims who felt the mosque should have been protected.

SECTION 3.2

This single act of politically-motivated religious defilement sparked a series of violent acts across the country. In the ten days that followed the destruction of the mosque, 1700 people were killed, though some estimates put this number well over 2000. “Thousands were injured, and an unknown number of women and girls were raped. The majority of the victims were Muslim.”²² Perhaps most shocking is that the police, working for the Hindu-based government, were involved in many violent acts, particularly those against Muslims who were protesting the destruction of the mosque. As the violence continued, individuals of political parties joined the rioting, contributing physically as well as verbally to the chaos. It was recorded that members of the Shiv Sena, a conservative Hindu group with close political ties to the BJP, attacked Muslim households alongside the police.²³

The riots in Mumbai were a direct consequence of the actions taken by Hindus at the request and encouragement of the BJP and its affiliates such as Shiv Sena. While the initial attacks may have been carried out by Muslims against Hindus, it was the actions of the Hindus in Ayodhya and in the slums of Mumbai that created the atmosphere of division and conflict that led to the riots. “Most local Muslims saw the Shiv Sena’s mobilization of Hindu urban dwellers as the stimulus for the violence raised against their community. In view of the fact that many of the slums experiencing the worst violence in the riots had an active Shiv Sena network, the Muslim impression is empirically justified.”²⁴ The series of killings and retaliatory killings become self-perpetuating and needed only the smallest of motivations to continue.

In 1998 the Srikrishna Commission presented the government with its report on the violence resulting from the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya. The Commission found that: “the attacks were the result of a deliberate and systematic effort to incite violence against Muslims. It singled out Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray and Chief Minister Manohar Joshi as responsible. The Shiv Sena-BJP-led government refused to adopt the Commission’s recommendations and instead labelled the report as anti-Hindu.”²⁵ The BJP and Shiv Sena continue to promote the reconstruction of the Temple of Ram at Ayodhya and its construction remains a focal point of the party platform when its members are up for re-election.

The increased religious, ethnic and political tensions between Hindus and Muslims after the events of Ayodhya lead to an outbreak of violence in Mumbai in 1993. The riots were sparked by the destruction of the Babri Mosque but they were one example of many acts of violence in India that resulted from public demonstrations of Hindu nationalism.²⁶ There were attacks by both Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai. Muslim groups, for example, allegedly locked eight Hindus into a small room in the slum of Jogeshwari and burned them alive.²⁷ Reports of this horrendous act led many Hindus throughout India to believe that the riots were the sole responsibility of the Muslim population of Mumbai. In part in reaction to these reports, Hindus in the

Behrampada slum chose to support Hindu nationalist parties in their area and take part in the riots. The Behrampada Muslim Slum of Mumbai had a population of approximately 50,000. Of that population 12,000 were Hindus belonging to the “New Middle Income Group” (MIG). They were a rising middle class of teachers, bankers and bureaucrats. It was this group of MIGs who supported the Shiv Sena in the area and chose to rise up and riot violently against their Muslim neighbours.²⁸

The Govandi/Denonar slum was a particularly volatile area during the riots, “because of a pre-existing history of Hindu-Muslim animosity centred around a local slaughter house.” The Shiv Sena was particularly opposed to the slaughterhouse and used it as political motivation for local Hindus saying that it was a deliberate slight to the Hindu religion. The political ploy worked beautifully as little was needed to move the population from quiet discontent “into acts of rage.”²⁹ The Shiv Sena often acted as the BJP’s foot soldiers, working on the ground in grassroots operations, speaking publicly in support of conservative Hindu ideals and motivating entire neighbourhoods to take action against those they perceived as threatening a Hindu way of life.

The constant motivation provided by the BJP and Shiv Sena in the form of Hindu unity and nationalism, Hindutva, fanned the flames of the riots. The government was further implicated in the riots when it did not send police in quickly enough to prevent violence from spreading: “The government implicitly sided with the Hindu mobs by not doing enough to prevent their retaliatory killings of Muslims.”³⁰ This was similar to the experience at the Ram temple where police did not appear to be protecting those in need. As the police and the military in India work under direct orders from the government, by not ordering the police to take protective action, the government did in fact assume some implicit responsibility for the killings in Mumbai. When the police did intervene, their behaviour cast even more of the blame on the government for which they worked:

Before, during, and after the riots, much of the government’s contempt was directed at the Muslim poor. Police brutality against Muslims during the riots emphasized the pro-Hindu bias of government already reluctant or unable to alleviate the problem of urban poverty. Most of the anti-Muslim violence was committed by lower ranks of police, poorly paid themselves.³¹

The government was capitalizing on an already volatile situation to increase support for their political party and ideals. By mobilizing a large portion of the Hindu majority and appealing to their religiosity and cultural tendencies, the BJP positioned itself to be the voice of Hindus across the country. By turning a blind eye to the actions of the police force, the BJP and those in government implicitly condoned the violence against the Muslim population.

SECTION 3.2

Once the violence subsided, the Hindu bias within the government remained. While religious groups as well as government agencies helped Hindu communities rebuild, it was principally international NGOs that gave aid to Muslim communities to attempt to rebuild and provide basic services: “After the riots, attempts made by victims, usually Muslim, to rebuild their houses were thwarted by the municipal corporation and/or the Maharashtra government, who ordered huts razed.”³² This bureaucratic favouritism was yet another way in which the government showed its bias toward the Hindu majority, thus suggesting that its “secularity” had a definite religious slant.

Throughout the Mumbai riots, the BJP and Shiv Sena actively garnered religious Hindu support by using idols of Hindu gods and banners featuring a saffron flag. These symbols were meant as a Hindu unifier as well as an aggressive deterrent to possible Muslim foes. They “spread far and wide notions of a monolithic, aggressive, Hindu nation capable of directing righteous popular anger against a common enemy: the Muslims.”³³ Such a rallying cry for a religiously-united Hindu front is particularly interesting, as the character of Hinduism as a broad, far-reaching and polytheistic religion is not so unified. This is more likely an example of religion being intentionally used to promote the political aims of a nationalist government. The BJP is using religion, and religiously based organizations such as Shiv Sena, to unite Hindus under a false flag against a perceived enemy – the Muslims.

On 27 February 2002, several years after the devastation of Mumbai, Hindu-Muslim conflict erupted into violence once again, this time in the northwestern district of Gujarat. A train full of politically active, devout Hindus, returning from the Ram Temple at Ayodyah was attacked by a group of Muslim extremists and set on fire. At least 58 people burned to death. In the days that followed between 700 and 2,000 people were killed.³⁴ While this was not the first example of Hindu-Muslim violence in the area it was the worst case of mass violence since the Mumbai riots nearly a decade before. Gujarat has been a stronghold of Hindu nationalism since the early 1990s. Known over several decades for its conservative Hindu ideals, the BJP has been able to hold power longer in this area than anywhere else in India.³⁵ Here in particular, the potential for fomenting violence against other groups in the name of Hindutva was not restricted to Muslims. In 1998, the BJP chose to target Christians in Gujarat:

Christian leaders, individuals, and institutions nationwide came under attack in India soon after the BJP came to power at the federal level in March 1998. While a majority of the reported incidents that year occurred in Gujarat, attacks were also reported [elsewhere]. . . Attacks included the killings of priests and missionaries and the raping of nuns. Christian institutions, including schools, churches, colleges, and cemeteries, were also destroyed. The intensity and frequency of attacks increased in September and October 1999, just before national parliamentary elections.³⁶

The political ideology of Hindutva creates an atmosphere in which all those who do not conform to the united “us” are by definition the “other” and as such are subject to attack.

While the focus may have temporarily shifted to the Christian faction of the population in Gujarat, the Muslims continued to be the target of BJP and Hindu nationalist animosity there. The Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat were brutally violent, at times sadistic, and entirely politically backed. A report by Human Rights Watch, released in April 2002, found that the Hindu mobs had been clearly directed to Muslim families, properties and businesses. They were “guided by computer printouts listing the addresses... information obtained from the Ahmedabad municipal corporation among other sources, and embarked on a murderous rampage confident that the police were with them.” In many cases it was the police who in fact led the mob. It was reported that at one point in the violence a BJP state minister took control of the police, “issuing orders to disregard pleas for assistance from Muslims.”³⁷ This overt show of solidarity on the part of the minister encouraged the mobs further and cemented their connection to their religiously conservative voters who were taking part in the violence.

The most abhorrent acts of violence were those performed against women and children. Acts of extreme sexual violence against Muslim women were common during the riots. Women were brutally beaten, raped, cut and in several cases burned alive.³⁸ Women were not the sole victims during the riots but the violence inflicted upon them was severe and, in most cases, public. Members of the BJP, RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal, who are the military youth wing of the VHP, are collectively known as the Sangh Parivar and these members carried out many of the terrible acts of violence, all the while knowing that the police would protect them from prosecution because, in effect, “the BJP is the political wing of the Sangh Parivar.”³⁹ In other words the BJP was to the Sangh Parivar as Sinn Fein was to the IRA and thus were directly responsible for the degree of extreme violence that took place during the Gujarat riots.

The police in Gujarat, as in Mumbai, were the government’s major source of power and presence on the ground. Before, during and after the riots the BJP government chose Muslim police as a particular political target. Given that “Muslim police officers have systematically been barred from executive positions,”⁴⁰ Hindus likely occupied most superior police positions, as the BJP was also not fond of other minority groups. The BJP used this Hindu majority to their advantage, acting with impunity during the riots and positioning police where they would protect Hindus and ignore, or even cause harm to Muslims. The state’s Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, ordered the police and military troops to stand by and observe. Modi, as a BJP member later became the head of the parliamentary coalition.⁴¹ Even after the rioting ended, Muslims still found it difficult to file complaints or grievances with the police. In practice, they did not have equal protection under the law and the majority of those who remained displaced after the

SECTION 3.2

riots were Muslims. Unfortunately, “the violence in Gujarat reflects the dissemination of hatred of the ‘Other’ that had never before reached such intensity or had ever been so widespread.”⁴² The violence was a result of long simmering ethnic, religious, and political divisions that have had a devastating impact on the community.

The only victor in the Gujarat riots was in fact the BJP. In December of 2002, the BJP won a decisive victory in Gujarat, using a hard-line Hindutva platform that appealed to the majority after the violence experienced earlier in the year. Although the BJP was implicated in the riots, it was never found legally responsible.⁴³

The violence surrounding the construction of the Temple of Ram, the subsequent riots in Mumbai and the resurgence of violence in Gujarat are only three examples of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India since its independence from Britain. While conflict and violence between the Hindu majority and minority religious groups had existed in the pre-independence era, it was not until recently that political parties, the BJP in particular, chose to capitalize on the division and use it to their advantage. By uniting Hindus under cultural and religious pretenses, the BJP was able to foster a sense of Hindu nationalism that came to be known as Hindutva. While the party claims that it is a purely cultural and political movement, it is founded on principle that secular Hindus and minority religious groups pose a threat to the creation of a united Hindu state.

After independence, India created a government system based on secular democracy. Similar to the Judeo-Christian basis of the Canadian constitution, the Indian constitution included many Hindu ideals, such as the banning of cow slaughter. There were many ways in which the secular Indian state remained very biased toward Hinduism, while still proclaiming that the national government was committed to protecting, respecting and accepting all religions. For example, after independence the Hindu symbols were still used by congress and government officials often attended Hindu religious events.⁴⁴ While conservative Hindus felt that the constitution and the secular government threatened traditional beliefs, those within the Muslim and Christian minority communities felt that they were being unfairly marginalized.

In theory, India is a secular state but it has been strongly influenced by the religions and cultures within the country. As such, conservative Hindus have been drawn to support political candidates that best articulate their beliefs and desires. The BJP is the party that many right wing Hindus choose to support and the party in turn has continued to appeal to this growing group by incorporating Hindu symbolism in campaigns and by promoting Hindutva. Often in secular societies those with extreme religious beliefs “use the very protection given them to argue for a sectarian state.” If and when the policies of the secular government falter, those on the extreme edges are poised and ready to fill the void.⁴⁵

The BJP recognized the discontent and unrest in the Hindu community and used it to their political advantage. By aligning themselves with the RSS and the VHP they proclaimed loudly, without having to say a word, that they supported conservative Hindu ideals. By fostering and promoting Hindutva, the party was able to unite a group of Hindus with diverse beliefs and various forms of worship. The party united them implicitly by their religious affiliations, and then explicitly by claiming it was in fact a cultural organization and movement with political intent. Not only was the party able to unite this otherwise disparate group of people, they were also able to mobilize them into action. Though initially the idea of the party was to mobilize the group to vote, thus electing them to office, the mobilization happened in a very real and physical way when the BJP and its affiliates chose to make the Temple of Ram an issue of national identity.

By utilizing grassroots methods of mobilization and instigation the BJP used its partner organizations to encourage Hindus to fight for a Hindu nation, violently if need be. Their supporters responded en masse. Thousands arrived to tear down the Babri Mosque and rebuild the Temple of Ram and they fought alongside police and allied supporters in Mumbai and Gujarat, killing, abusing and destroying at least in part because of the motivation provided by the BJP and the Shiv Sena. The BJP united a group based on cultural and religious solidarity and used it to pursue its political agenda of a Hindu state. Hindu-Muslim violence continues in Gujarat and throughout the Indian subcontinent and remains a threat to regional peace and stability, both domestically and in terms of India's foreign relations with its Muslim neighbours. Once religion becomes a distinguishing characteristic of national groups, it is then difficult to make it incidental to national identity in the pursuit of more worldly, secular and reasonable goals.

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SECTION 3.2

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DODGING THE MISSIONARY EFFECT: WESTERN NGOS, DEVELOPMENT AND AID

M. McLeod

According to the United Nations' (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a complex emergency is a humanitarian crisis typically characterized by extensive violence and loss of life, massive displacements of people, widespread damage to societies and economies, as well as hindrance of humanitarian assistance by security risks and political and military constraints.¹ A perfect example of a current complex emergency in the world today is Sudan. Sudan has been afflicted by religious and ethnic intolerance and civil war for more than fifty years and, as a result, it has been the centre of major international humanitarian efforts. Unfortunately, it has also become a very dangerous place for humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is no longer a matter of simply being caught in the crossfire. Humanitarian aid workers are now being specifically targeted. This is not only occurring in Sudan, where 19 aid workers were killed in 2008, but is becoming epidemic in complex emergencies around the globe. A recent study compiled by the Centre on International Cooperation (CIC) in New York and the Overseas Development Institute in London claims that 2008 was the most dangerous year on record for humanitarian aid workers, and that more aid workers have been kidnapped, injured or killed while carrying out their relief work than had UN peacekeepers in the same year.²

The reasons for this rise in danger towards aid workers can be attributed to how their intentions are perceived by groups and governments in the countries receiving the aid. In many cases, these countries are afflicted by religious tension, ethnic hostility and institutional instability. They are countries that (depending on the vocabulary chosen) are considered to be "Third World," "developing," "the South" or even "failed States," in which low education levels, extreme poverty and corrupt governmental systems are combined. In Sudan, the population is a mix of Arab and ethnic Africans who are predominately Muslim. Thus, the risks humanitarian aid workers face in places like Sudan do not necessarily result from the conflict itself, but from the perception – warranted or not – that these NGOs (which are almost entirely from the West and often are Christian, faith-based organizations comprised of white aid workers) are in their country in order to convert the people, steal their resources and impose an imperialist regime.

SECTION 3.3

If one Western NGO is seen to be proselytizing while delivering aid, all Western NGOs working in the same theatre run the risk of being painted with the same brush. This can be described as the “missionary effect,” where Christian NGOs that are attempting to proselytize the local population hinder the ability of non-proselytizing NGOs, whether they are religious or not, from effectively carrying out their relief efforts. In addition, increased insecurity in these conflict zones has imposed a more frequent necessity to have military forces such as UN peacekeepers or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) soldiers protect aid workers in order to allow them to distribute relief to the local populations. This has only compounded the perception that foreign NGOs are allied with foreign militaries, and thus are present to promote foreign political agendas. Thus, if a Western NGO is seen to be fraternizing with or dependent upon a foreign occupying force, all Western NGOs might be viewed in the same way. Clearly, delivering aid in today’s complex emergencies can be a lose-lose situation for any “Western” aid organization, given that if they are not seen as Christian missionaries, they will likely be seen as imperialist proxies for Western hegemony.

We Are Ready to Protect Religion! Down, Down USA!

On March 4th, 2009, the Sudanese government revoked the licenses of ten foreign NGOs working in the country following President Omar Hassan al-Bashir’s indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The next day, it added three more NGOs to the list and two weeks later, Bashir announced that within a year, he wanted all foreign NGOs to stop distributing aid in Sudan altogether.³ Bashir claimed that these organizations are Western spies and are in Sudan as part of a “neo-imperialist” agenda that covets Sudan’s oil, gas and natural resources.⁴ In defiance of the ICC arrest warrant, Bashir proclaimed to a crowd of his supporters that “[Sudan had] refused to kneel to colonialism, [and] that is why Sudan has been targeted...because we only kneel to God.” The crowd responded by cheering, “we are ready to protect religion!” and “Down, down USA.”⁵

These sentiments are best understood when examined through a historical lens. Sudan has been plagued with two long-time conflicts. The first is between the Muslim, Arab North, (among whom the Government of Sudan (GoS) is its most prominent actor), and the Christian and Animist South. Religion became a cornerstone of the dispute that erupted shortly after independence in 1956 and could be described as having been promoted and encouraged by British colonialists through intentional segregation and favouritism toward the North. Although there are many aid groups that continue to work in Southern Sudan, this conflict has generally tapered off since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the GoS and the Christian Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in 2005. Since conflict began between the North and the South, however, an estimated two million people have died due to fighting, famine and disease, four million were displaced to other parts of the country and 600,000 were forced

to flee Sudan altogether. Following the signing of the CPA, it is estimated that approximately 2.1 million displaced persons have returned to the South, “taxing scarce resources and weak infrastructure,”⁶ and requiring the relief and development assistance of many foreign NGOs. Given the religious foundation of the civil war, these NGOs are often seen as Western, Christian organizations whose ulterior motive is to strengthen the Christian influence in the country. As a result, they must deal with the “missionary effect” if they want to remain in-country and deliver their aid as intended.

The second, more recent and on-going conflict, which has scourged the north-west region of Sudan known as Darfur since 2003, is between the GoS and its Arab militias (the Janjaweed), and the non-Arab farmers in the area led by the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The SLA and JEM, who draw their support from the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups, took up arms against the GoS to protest what they considered to be the maltreatment of non-Arab Sudanese. The GoS unleashed the Janjaweed militias in an effort to quell the uprisings and a terrible humanitarian disaster ensued. Two years ago, the United Nations estimated a minimum of 200,000 dead in Darfur over 3 years. The Sudanese Government, however, disputed this figure, claiming that the number killed was closer to 10,000. Recently, former UN humanitarian chief, Jan Egeland, who is now a special adviser to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, admits that 200,000 was likely wrong, adding that in fact it was far too small a number. Egeland believes that the actual up-to-date figure is probably closer to 400,000.⁷ The United Nations have estimated the number of displaced persons within Darfur and eastern Chad since January 2008 alone at approximately 220,000 people.

In the case of Darfur, the fighting is based primarily on an ethnic rivalry in which religion plays no significant role. Muslims are fighting Muslims over ethno-racial issues. Yet NGOs are still faced with aggression and resentment, this time due to the perceived imperialist intentions of these organizations, regardless of whether they are faith-based or not. Thus, NGOs working in Sudan are either considered to be Christian proselytizing organizations committed to converting the local population into good Christians, or they are considered to be Western imperialists out to take advantage of the country’s political, religious and economic crises in order to spread Western values. Either way, the delivery of aid is rendered much more difficult than it used to be.

Bible or Sceptre?

Given the political, religious and social conflict that has ravaged Sudan since the middle of the 20th century, giving it a Human Development Index ranking of 147th out of 177 countries,⁸ there is no wonder that it has become a major focal point for humanitarian efforts undertaken by government and non-government, faith-based and secular humanitarian organizations. Further,

SECTION 3.3

given the religious complexities present in the country, it is also not surprising that the majority of the NGOs operating in Sudan are religiously motivated. As of 2006, there were a total of 131 national NGOs with a religious identity working in Sudan – religious identity defined as national, faith-based organizations or individual religious persons with an organization-like network in the country.⁹ Out of these faith-based organizations, the majority are Christian, as Christian NGOs tend to have more of a global outreach than their Jewish or Islamic counterparts who typically serve members of their own religious communities.¹⁰ These Christian organizations are further divided between Catholic and mainstream Protestant, who tend to separate their aid work and their missionary work, and evangelical groups, “who see their humanitarian work as an integral part of their missionary activities.”¹¹ Furthermore, given that some figures put the number of Christian missionaries in Muslim countries at more than 27,000 (as of 2001), where one out of every two is American, despite only one out of every three being evangelical,¹² whether a humanitarian organization is faith-based or not, simply being from a Western country can be perceived as a cultural threat by groups in the recipient country. In this respect, not only are those non-proselytizing, faith-based organizations forced to distance themselves from those that are proselytizing, but also secular organizations are equally faced with the same injurious stereotyping.

As Elizabeth Ferris writes in her article, “Faith-based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations,” “both Christians and Muslims believe that ‘there’s a witness of faith through charity that is a way of life and expression of obedience to God.’”¹³ Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, Regional Chief of Communication for United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), echoes this theme by explaining that Islamic NGOs “do not understand (or do not accept) that a humanitarian gesture, whatever its origin, could be made outside the scope of religious values, considering that religion is the guarantor of morals, charity, good behaviour and virtue. Islamists cannot conceive of self-respecting Western NGOs as anything other than religiously inspired.”¹⁴ In addition, when working in many parts of the Muslim world, representatives from organizations that consider themselves secular and impartial, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), are “increasingly being asked about their own values, and modernism and secularity have become unavoidable subjects for discussion in which individuals, groups and parties argue from an Islamist standpoint.”¹⁵ This is a direct result of people feeling “threatened by an invasion of the political, social and cultural values of the West, perceived by many Muslims as ‘a war against Islam.’ Islamist groups seize on this feeling and criticize the decadence of the ‘unbelieving, secular’ West.”¹⁶ Whether or not it is accompanied by armed force, “the nature of western imperialism in the Muslim world changed in the second half of the twentieth century from a physical, colonial presence to “soft,” virtual, cultural domination. . . . the influence of this latter phenomenon will be far greater in the long term.”¹⁷ What is more, “if for Muslims, late-nineteenth

century European colonialism was a modern siege, the Western cultural campaign of the late twentieth century is a postmodernist blitzkrieg.”¹⁸ Thus, representatives of a secular NGO working in a predominantly Muslim theatre can face just as much skepticism and distrust from the local population as their Christian colleagues, but for imperialistic rather than religious reasons.

Finally, both faith-based and secular NGOs are faced with the ironic problem of receiving too much government funding, which can brand them as imperialist lackeys. “This increasing reliance on government funding raises questions about the extent to which NGOs are really non-governmental,” as some receive over 90% of their funding from government sources.¹⁹ NGOs are finding that if federal funding makes up too much of their operating budgets, they can also be perceived as humanitarian organizations with political agendas, or worse, government agents co-opted to fulfill a particular foreign policy mandate, as has recently been claimed by Bashir in Sudan. Since most NGOs are from North America and Europe, these organizations are then perceived simply as proxies for the United States and other Western countries’ cultural exportation. As a result, many NGOs “have had to impose limits on the percentage of government funds which they will accept.”²⁰

In a report called *Humanitarian Agenda 2015* authored by an interdisciplinary team from the Feinstein International Center (FIC) of Tufts University in the US, a major criticism of humanitarian organizations in a post 9/11 environment is a lack of innovation in finding ways to continue working independently, that is, without government intervention or coordination. The report’s main author, Antonio Domino, explains that “when humanitarian work in Afghanistan that had been separate from the political component was merged together under an integrated UN mission, the Taliban started attacking aid workers, while organizations that were perceived as more independent were less targeted.”²¹ Paul O’Brien, Director of the Aid Effectiveness Team of Oxfam America adds that “the voice of the beneficiaries in humanitarian response is under threat...more so now in a post 9/11 world.” O’Brien further explains that, “it’s partly because humanitarian action and development are increasingly seen as essential instruments of global security agendas.”²² Michael Rewald, vice-President for Global Support and Partnership of CARE USA, agrees, stating that “the war on terror has complicated our work, there’s no question.”²³ What further complicates matters is when governments pressure NGOs to advertise the sources of their funding. For example, “in May 2003, USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios ‘roundly scolded NGOs for not clearly and consistently identifying their aid activities in Afghanistan as funded by the US government.’”²⁴ The potential that recipient countries, as well as US-funded NGOs themselves, will consider their humanitarian work to be supporting US political objectives, has led many US NGOs to decline US government financial support for their programs, further limiting their work due to insufficient funding.

SECTION 3.3

Given the security issues in Darfur, this is a difficult decision. Operating costs are skyrocketing as aid workers are increasingly being flown from one camp to another due to an increase in attacks on humanitarian convoys. Humanitarian workers are claiming that the situation has never been as bad as it has in the last 18 months, as more and more aid workers are being attacked and killed.²⁵ “The role of military forces in providing humanitarian assistance in disaster-stricken countries has also increased pressure on NGOs to think more carefully about just what humanitarian action means in such situations.²⁶ In Afghanistan and Iraq, Western soldiers are not only carrying out military operations, but are also having to protect humanitarian workers and large-scale civilian development projects. This only makes conducting an independent humanitarian operation that much more difficult, since combatants tend to associate western organizations (or those perceived as such) with the military forces they are fighting.”²⁷

Although the “missionary effect” can have negative implications for aid organizations, it isn’t in itself the sole cause of increased violence and danger toward Western NGOs working in complex emergencies such as Sudan. In fact, missionary work in Sudan is not new. In the 6th century AD, a Christian missionary named Julian brought Christianity to the region. “The new religion...[was] adopted with considerable enthusiasm as Christian churches sprang up along the Nile, and ancient temples were refurbished to accommodate Christian worshippers.”²⁸ Islam moved into Egypt following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, but did not encroach on Nubian lands until the Mamelukes devastated the area in the 13th century, destroying with it a peaceful 600-year-old agreement that no Muslims would settle in Nubia, and no Nubians would expand North into Egypt. With no political force keeping the Arabs out of Sudan, the Arabs moved south, intermarrying with Nubians, and introducing Islam to the Christian inhabitants. Then, in the middle 19th century, at the height of British abolitionism, leading opponents of the slave trade “attributed Africa’s poverty, ignorance, and slavery to the ‘degraded’ state of Africans and the ‘false religions’ of paganism and Islam. The answer was the ‘Three Cs’: Christianity, Commerce and Civilization.”²⁹ What followed was an intense mission of converting, clothing and incorporating the Africans into British culture. In more recent times, in the midst of the North-South Civil War, and following the resettlement of 4,000 Sudanese “Lost Boys” in the United States, Sudan was on the radar again of American Christian movements, both evangelical and orthodox.³⁰ Current figures now place Sudanese Muslims at 70% of the population, with 5% to 19% Christian minority, and the remaining practicing an indigenous or tribal religion of some kind.³¹ In other words, unlike countries such as Afghanistan where 99% of the population is Muslim, or in Iraq where 97% of the population is Muslim, Sudan still maintains that portal for Christianity and thus its attraction for Christian missionaries.³²

In Pursuit of Neutrality

One of the basic guidelines followed by non-proselytizing Western NGOs is to “act using the principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality.”³³ They must “actively work on their positions and statements, so as to ensure that these do not provide opportunities for accusation by the Muslim community, which has frequently presented the organizations as ideologically tainted with secular values and materialism. Western military humanitarian actors are obstacles to this dialogue, as they are perceived by many Muslim believers to be aggressors against the ‘ummah.”³⁴ As Dr. Samantha Nutt, founder of the secular aid organization War Child Canada states, “we are in a new reality now and we have to be mindful of it. The lines between military and civilian humanitarian operations have become increasingly blurred in recent years. That changes the way aid workers are viewed on the ground, and it has profound implications for the humanitarian movement whether we want it to or not.”³⁵ Also referred to as the “militarization of humanitarian aid,”³⁶ military personnel are more frequently required to assist in the delivery of aid due to the heightened danger and increased risks for civilian aid workers. The concept of a “Three Block War (3BW)”³⁷, along with other conceptions of the battlespace, has also emerged over the last decade, depicting ways in which military operations have begun to encroach upon humanitarian space, “muddying distinctions of neutrality, impartiality and independence.”³⁷ Never before has this been so clearly set out as in Bashir’s expulsion of the 13 aid organizations from Sudan. Due to what many experts were calling a impending humanitarian disaster, Darfur’s joint UN/African Union Peacekeeping force announced that it was ready to fill the void left by the expelled NGOs. This had many aid organizations worried about the long-term consequences of setting such a precedent. Many feared that it would only further blur the lines between humanitarian work and military presence in Sudan, and thus make everyone a fair target for hostile activity.³⁸

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world’s largest secular NGO. It provides assistance without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. Founded in 1919, the IFRC comprises 186 member Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, a Secretariat in Geneva and more than 60 delegations strategically located to support activities around the world. The IFRC was created from the ICRC, which was founded as the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded in 1863 by Swiss national Henry Dunant and five other men from Geneva. Its emblem, adopted a year later during the Geneva conferences which established the Geneva Convention, was a red cross on a white background.³⁹ “It was intended to be universal and easily recognized in order to protect medical personnel and facilities from attack during armed conflicts. This was not a religious symbol; it was simply the reversal of the colours of the Swiss flag. As such, it was felt it would embody the fundamental requirement

SECTION 3.3

of neutrality.⁷⁴⁰ Then, during the Russo-Turkish wars in 1876-1878, the Ottoman Empire “declared that it would use the Red Crescent to mark its own ambulances while respecting the Red Cross sign protecting enemy ambulances.” During the diplomatic conferences in 1929, it was agreed that only the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Red Lion and Sun (used by Persia, but later replaced by present-day Iran in 1980 with the Red Crescent), would be recognized in international law. Given the current global security environment, especially in recent years, however, the IFRC and its members have been confronted with problems with both the Red Cross and Red Crescent due to negative connotations associated with their use. As a result, “with the adoption of the Third Additional Protocol in December 2005, the Red Crystal is now also a recognized distinctive sign under international law, with the same status as the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The emblems are used in more than 190 countries in the world to protect medical personnel, buildings and equipment in time of armed conflict and to identify national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, the ICRC and the IFRC.”⁷⁴¹

In 1996, the ICRC and the IFRC jointly prepared the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*. “This code seeks to safeguard high standards of behaviour and maintain independence and effectiveness in disaster relief. In the event of armed conflict, its clauses are to be interpreted and applied in conformity with international humanitarian law. It is a voluntary code, enforced by the will of organizations accepting it to maintain the standards it lays down.”⁷⁴² The Code itself was sponsored by eight organizations, six of which are faith-based.⁷⁴³ Among other points, the Code of Conduct states that the humanitarian imperative comes first, that aid is given regardless of race, creed or nationality of the recipients, and without adverse distinction of any kind, that it will not be used to further a particular political or religious agenda and that it will not act as an instrument of foreign governments. Faced with the problem of maintaining and stressing their neutrality and impartiality, many NGOs, secular and faith-based, have decided to become signatories to the Code, and as of October 2008, the Code had 452 signatories.⁷⁴⁴ These NGOs follow this code very carefully and many have incorporated some of the principles into their own working principles and mission statements. This has been a way in which both faith-based organizations as well as secular ones have been able to distinguish themselves from other religious organizations that incorporate missionary activities into their humanitarian work. Unfortunately, subscribing to principles of an organization borne from a legal framework criticized by many as representing western values will not prevent an NGO from appearing to be a proxy for an imperialist agenda.⁷⁴⁵ Thus, both faith-based and secular groups have taken steps to discount any imperialist image by working with local partners whenever possible and by minimizing government funding.

The Secular, the Religious and the Proselytizer Remain

An example of a secular aid organization working in Sudan is War Child. War Child is a Canadian NGO and one of the only Canadian aid organizations currently operating in Darfur. It does not maintain large in-country offices, but rather strives to work with local partners to deliver its aid and services in an attempt to lessen the imperialist perception some have of “Western” aid organizations. War Child only receives 35% of its operating budget from the Canadian government and does not have any religious or political affiliations or agenda.⁴⁶ War Child is an IFRC Code of Conduct Signatory, and its Mission statement reads: “War Child Canada is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to providing urgently needed humanitarian assistance to war-affected children around the world. War Child Canada helps generate awareness, support and advocacy for children’s rights everywhere.”⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that War Child was not included in the recent list of expelled aid organizations by the Sudanese government.

Faith-based, non-proselytizing NGOs, such as American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), World Vision, Mercy Corps International, Lutheran World Relief, the Agha Khan Foundation, and the Catholic Relief Services,⁴⁸ show striking similarities in their mission statements and principles with those of secular NGOs, such as the IFRC and War Child. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was founded in 1943 by the Catholic Bishops of the United States in order to serve Second World War survivors in Europe. The CRS now reach more than 80 million people in more than 100 countries on five continents. The CRS’s mission is “*to assist impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas, working in the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching to promote the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person.*” Although the CRS’ mission is rooted in the Catholic faith, the CRS states that their operations serve people based solely on need, regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity.⁴⁹ They also noted that the fundamental motivating force in all activities of CRS is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it pertains to the alleviation of human suffering, the development of people and the fostering of charity and justice. They do not, however, use their humanitarian work as an opportunity to proselytize. During a speech in June 2005, CRS President Ken Hackett commented that one of the main difficulties CRS faces is:

...perception – the assumption that we are all missionaries with a humanitarian component or that the real purpose of our humanitarian mission is to evangelize. Nothing could be farther from the truth...despite the fact that the U.S. Bishops founded CRS... [it is] an agency that provides humanitarian assistance to people in need regardless of their religious beliefs. Direct evangelization is not a part of [the CRS’] mission. [The CRS does] not proselytize. In fact, to do so, or even to be accused of doing so, could jeopardize [CRS] programs and [CRS] personnel abroad. But despite that longstanding policy...questions still arise.⁵⁰

SECTION 3.3

CRS is one of the largest NGOs working in Sudan, and has been in the country since the end of the first major civil war in 1971. CRS expanded their humanitarian work in 1989 when CRS Sudan became a pioneer member of Operation Lifeline Sudan. “Since May 2004, CRS has been providing humanitarian aid in West Darfur, assisting more than 160,000 people affected by the ongoing conflict.”⁵¹ In addition to working with locally organized food relief committees, to deliver food rations to more than 150,000 Sudanese, CRS is also “providing other essential services, including shelter assistance for displaced families, school construction, training of volunteer teachers, nutrition education, construction of hand-washing facilities and latrines, other health and hygiene activities, livestock health initiatives, and agricultural support through seed and tool fairs.”⁵² Government grants make up 41% of the CRS operating budget with the rest comprised of personal and corporate donations. CRS is also an IFRC Code of Conduct Signatory, and it has also retained its license to remain in Sudan.

Another faith-based organization that does not proselytize while providing humanitarian aid is the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).⁵³ MCC workers share the gospel, but not while giving aid in Muslim countries. They also attempt to maintain an impartial stance and enter into agreements with existing governments where they work. In doing so, MCC takes care not to make agreements that would hinder following its principles of serving those in need, regardless of their race, religion or nationality.⁵⁴ Although MCC appeals to the Canadian and American governments to take action in meeting the needs of the poor, less than 5% of their operating budget comes from government grants. In fact, most of MCC’s operating budget (37%) is fulfilled by the profit MCC makes at their Ten Thousand Villages stores across Canada.⁵⁵ While working in foreign countries, MCC, like other faith-based NGOs, “often works through its in-country counterpart or at the request of a local institution so that its actions are not perceived as external intervention. Consequently, MCC is often well received by foreign governments, [and] many people in the African countries in which the MCC works...accept the agency more readily because of its respect and support for their own cultures and solutions.”⁵⁶ The Mennonite Central Committee is careful about the selection of their volunteers, as such individuals must be culturally sensitive Christians. Finally, unlike other faith-based, usually evangelizing organizations that often send short-term aid/missionary teams to conflict-stricken zones, the MCC primarily focuses on long-term development, (although they do engage in some relief missions):

MCC has worked in Sudan for more than 35 years in areas such as education, relief, community development, water and peace. MCC works through church and faith-based partners by providing personnel, training, funding, food and material resources. Within this context MCC Sudan works primarily through its long history of relationship with the Sudan Council of Churches, individual churches and faith-based organizations, and also finding ways to increase interfaith collaborations and relationships.⁵⁷

The MCC is not an IFRC Code of Conduct Signatory, nor is it among those NGOs recently expelled from Sudan.

Evangelizing organizations differ in that they actively seek to proselytize while providing aid to those in need in conflict or disaster-stricken areas. These organizations realize that in some cases they are breaking the law of the country in which they are conducting missionary work, yet their strong belief in the Great Commission, “therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28), is what drives them. Samaritan’s Purse is such an organization, with a mission statement that proclaims it is:

...a nondenominational evangelical Christian organization providing spiritual and physical aid to hurting people around the world. Since 1970, Samaritan’s Purse has helped meet needs of people who are victims of war, poverty, natural disasters, disease, and famine with the purpose of sharing God’s love through His Son, Jesus Christ. The organization serves the Church worldwide to promote the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

Furthermore, Samaritan’s Purse explains that “evangelism is at the heart of everything [they] do. [Their] most important mission is to provide spiritual help by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. [They] accomplish this by demonstrating God’s love through [their] relief projects, building churches, providing evangelism training and materials, and by supporting local ministries engaged in this vital work.”⁵⁹ As a result of their very overt missionary intentions, Samaritan’s Purse has caused significant controversy among the NGO community. For example, every year, Samaritan’s Purse holds a charity event called Operation Christmas Child, in which people are asked to fill a shoebox full of gifts for the Christmas season. These shoeboxes are then sent to children in need all over the world. Churches, community centres, schools and businesses all across the US, Canada, and Europe participated in the charity drive until it was learned that Samaritan’s Purse was then filling the shoeboxes with Bibles and Christian literature. As these shoeboxes were going to non-Christian countries, many felt that it was in violation of the charity of giving to those in need.⁶⁰

Samaritan’s Purse has been in Sudan since 1997, providing assistance to the people through feeding, education, medical, and construction programs. They claim to have fed 200,000 people in the Darfur region alone. In fact, despite what some people claim as its “dubious” intentions in Africa, the organization has been very successful in its provision of aid. From 2000 to 2003, Samaritan’s Purse was ranked the most efficient religious charity by Smart Money Magazine.⁶¹ Samaritan’s Purse is not an ICRC Code of Conduct signatory, but just as with its secular and faith-based, non-proselytizing fellow NGOs, Samaritan’s Purse was not included in the expulsion list from Sudan, either.

It should be noted that the very fact that faith-based NGOs undertake their humanitarian aid work as a direct consequence of their faith in God and belief in Christian values, whether they are proselytizing or not, gives them access to ready-made constituencies in the area they are working, and allows them “to tap into domestic church groups and congregations, who thus provide these NGOs with access to a grassroots forum. More importantly, the church, especially in Africa, holds a position of reverence, moral legitimacy, and influence.”⁶² In Sudan, given the strong Christian community in the South, this would seem to be the case. Regardless of such advantages, organizations such as Samaritan’s Purse must be aware that their actions can have negative consequences for other faith-based or secular NGOs working in the same area.

Providing Aid, but Nothing Else

War Child, Catholic Relief Services, Mennonite Central Committee and Samaritan’s Purse are all NGOs that provide aid in disaster and conflict-stricken regions of the world, such as Sudan. Each has a very different perspective as to why and how aid work should be conducted, however. “Proselytizing, evangelizing, imperialist, and crusading” are some of the words that have been used to describe foreign NGOs such as these, especially when working in non-Christian regions of the world. Although it might be fair to say that a majority of the NGOs working in today’s complex emergencies are faith-based (and predominantly Christian), it is not fair to say that most have as their underlying purpose to spread the word of the Christian God and to “convert the heathens” in the process. In fact, there are many foreign NGOs that have no religious affiliation whatsoever, and yet these NGOs can be faced with the “missionary effect” simply because being an NGO from a Western country can translate into a Christian proselytizing NGO bent on converting the local population. To make matters worse, even if a Western NGO is not perceived to be providing relief as an extension of their faith, it will undoubtedly be viewed instead as an agent of its home country’s commercial or imperialist ambitions. With the increased insecurity in Sudan, and the necessity of employing military forces to assist in the delivery of aid, this problem will continue until Bashir follows through with his threat of expelling all foreign NGOs from Sudan altogether. Meanwhile, NGOs must continue what they are doing, as there is no arguing that the work being done in Sudan by all NGOs is priceless, whether secular or faith-based, non-proselytizing or evangelizing. Despite numerous difficulties, the many partners working in Darfur alone have continued to bring relief to an estimated 4.2 million people.”⁶³ Unfortunately, in today’s post 9/11 world, where religion and politics are intertwined, the above should emphasize how important it is for NGOs to maintain a principle of neutrality and impartiality. While being religiously-motivated in itself does not directly hinder the ability to provide aid – in some cases it can actually help – undertaking proselytizing activities while providing humanitarian aid only compounds the

belief that Western states are embarking on a new “crusade” to extinguish all that is not Christian and modern, and are using their NGOs to do it. This will only breed further contempt for those persons trying to help, and eventually push aid organizations out of the very countries that need aid the most.

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MOTIVATING AMERICA: POLITICAL RHETORIC AND THE USEFULNESS OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Charlene Piper

The United States has a long tradition of separating church from state. The Bill of Rights explicitly states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”¹ There is a long and complex relationship between church and state, however, one that is both deeper and wider than any institutional arrangements. This relationship reveals a powerful predisposition within American politics that supports, if not encourages, the mixing of the two.² While the Bill of Rights excludes state influence over religious practice, it says nothing about religious influence over the affairs of the state.³ Great political and social movements – the abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, civil rights, and today’s struggles over abortion and gay marriage – draw upon religious institutions for leadership, organizational muscle and (most importantly) moral authority.⁴ If the circle is expanded to include the religious beliefs of the leaders and of the followers of any of these movements, then it becomes very clear that emphasizing a separation of church and state merely disguises a key aspect of American political life. As the United States has become a global leader (and arguably the sole remaining superpower, though other countries like Russia, India and China are starting to flex their muscles), religious elements in domestic American politics have come to influence foreign policy priorities and American involvement elsewhere in the world.

When Presidential rhetoric calls for Americans to fight the “murderous ideology of the Islamic radicals” that front the war on terror,⁵ when the American political system incorporates religion into its own policy formation, it is understandable that people around the world have come to view the Americans as religious extremists in their own right. The Danes, for instance, “link American religion to [former President George W.] Bush’s effort to carry out a worldwide war on terror.”⁶ According to the Al Jazeera website, Osama bin Laden claimed that the American-led war on terror “is a new crusade against the Islamic world.”⁷ Sébastien Fath, a European scholar and specialist in the study of Evangelical Protestantism, states, “[f]rom a European perspective, the White House [under the Bush administration] is thought to be held hostage by a band of religious fanatics for whom today’s international realities cannot be understood except as issuing from the Bible.”⁸

Religion, Politics and the American Colonies

The early American colonies were seen as a beacon of hope and a place of rebirth for many in the Old World.⁹ This New World presented the colonists with a fresh start. It was a place free of institutional impediment where people were able to experiment with new ideas – social, religious and political – that were impossible to attempt back in Europe.¹⁰ The raw vastness of the New World allowed the colonists to give their ideas a serious trial, affecting the religious decisions of thousands of settlers. What is more, some of these new ideas survived decades of civil strife, war and economic depression and persisted within both American cultural memory and the ideals enshrined in the American Constitution, such as religious freedom and the right to own property.

In *America's Battle for God: a European Christian Looks at Civil Religion*, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz compares the dangerous voyage to the New World to biblical narratives, such as the Exodus. Many of the colonists arriving, especially the Puritans, thought of themselves as the new Israelites.¹¹ They were escaping the oppressive religious and political policies of the old kingdom, seeking refuge in what many interpreted to be “the new and uncorrupted land of new beginnings,” akin to God’s Promised Land.¹² What is more, though many of the first immigrants sold most of their possessions in order to pay for the voyage, a majority managed to retain a symbol of their faith: a copy of the Bible. By doing so they retained not only their faith, but hopes for new religious beginnings. It was these biblical narratives that provided strength to the colonists, giving them inspiration and guidance. The Bible managed to provide “the framework for the lives of [many] of these immigrants, for the prospects of their communities, and, at a later stage, for the formation of a union.”¹³

Despite this hope for new religious beginnings and for religious freedom, the first century of settlement saw less religious choice than what was present in the Old World. Many clergymen from the Old World managed to install a system of religious worship similar to that which was present in Europe. It was not until the Revolution and the First and Second Great Awakenings that the trials for new religious ideology could be fully realized. In the 1730s, Virginia and New England witnessed a series of intense revivals – the First Great Awakening – that made these regions more pluralistic than before. In the late 18th century, the effects of Revolution on the delegitimizing of the Church of England were witnessed throughout most of the southern colonies. The church officially lost the power to determine public values and thus left open a vacuum into which public policy would later expand. Then, in the beginning of the 19th century, a continent-wide Second Great Awakening secured “the religious loyalties of most settlers in the South and West and also disestablished the Congregational church in the New England states.”¹⁴

These events ensured that religious toleration and freedom would be embedded within the American political imagination by way of encouraging voluntaristic religion, religious disestablishment and religious pluralism.¹⁵ They also ensured that the moral leadership vacuum into which secular policies would later expand would retain elements of religious influence; the church, and the organizational muscle it possessed, were still factors in political and social life and thus it was impossible to divorce personal faith from public policy formation. As William McLoughlin explains, “[a]wakenings begin in periods of cultural distortion... when we lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions, and the authority of our leaders in church and state.”¹⁶ These are times in which great social, political and religious change take place. It was thus through the Great Awakenings that the American people redefined who they were and created an identity to call their own: an identity that maintained a strong political will, to be sure, but one that also accommodated a strong religious spirit.

The Use of Religious Rhetoric in Early Political Discourse

The founding principles of the United States are the result of the religio-political history of the American colonies. Although the church was disestablished and the formal political role once played by religious institutions diffused, there was a powerful religious predisposition intertwined with policy formation. Elements of the biblical narratives – including the missionary ideals, being God’s chosen people, etc. – beloved by the first settlers were integrated into the American political imagination despite the fact that their biblical origins have often failed to be understood or remembered.¹⁷ Moreover, this religiously-inspired language has been utilized by American policymakers as a means to justify the actions taken by the government in numerous affairs.¹⁸ Furthermore, the idea that the new American people were in fact God’s chosen people¹⁹ echoed strongly throughout the discourse of the early religio-political rhetoric utilized by the founding fathers.²⁰

While much has been written about civil religion in the United States, in particular, that is outside the scope of this discussion, indications of how such rhetoric functions in American society are to be found in comparisons of formal addresses by various American presidents. Especially as one moves into the age of rapid information, no President wants to begin a term (or conclude their presidency) with a speech that conflicts with the general perceptions of the American people. Inaugural speeches set out blueprints and directions, but if they were completely at odds with what people thought or believed, nothing the President proposed would materialize. In the same way, while every concluding address will have some justification for what was done or what went wrong during the Presidency, again, the overall assessment and interpretation needs to be presented in terms that the average American would understand.

SECTION 3.4

For instance, in George Washington's first inaugural address, he invokes the idea of God's current and presumed future blessings on the United States:

I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the benign parent of the human race, in humble supplication that since [God] has been pleased to favour the American people, with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility, and dispositions for deciding with unparalleled unanimity on a form of Government, for the security of their Union, and the advancement of their happiness; so [God's] divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.²¹

By referring to the American people in such a divine framework, Washington begins the long tradition of evoking religious imagery and monotheistic semiotics within American presidential politics. This reference not only provided the American people with a sense that they were divinely inspired in their actions, but unified them under the assumption that “[w]ith slight shades of difference, [they all] have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles.”²² It provided the people with a common characteristic that facilitated their motivation and mobilization toward the ends desired by the President. What is more, by closing his speech with the notion that the success of the American government is dependent upon the divine blessing of the parent of the human race, Washington set the tone for future political discourse about the grounds of legitimacy in democratic government. He uses religious imagery to instill the idea that the American state is dependent upon God, thereby including religion (and specifically Christianity) as one of the reasons for both its current and its ultimate success.

At the end of Washington's second term of presidency he explicitly reaffirmed the notions set forth in his first inaugural address:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports... The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them... Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.²³

Religion and politics are intertwined here in a complex fashion that relates the moral character of the American political and justice systems in religious terms. There can be no morality without religion because, again, according to Washington, “reason and experience both forbid us to

expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”²⁴ This idea was perpetuated by the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson included, and was thus embedded at the very foundation of America’s political system.

From the early days of the United States of America, therefore, there were two rhetorical positions on religious themes that were potentially in conflict. One promoted the institutional separation of church and state in order to fulfill the ideals set forth in the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights; the other promoted the New England colonial belief that there is a sacred union of church and state set forth by God for redemptive reasons.²⁵ This tension between American religious ideology and political will, manifested in the first two presidential terms, continues to be present in policy formation and is often found in contemporary political rhetoric.²⁶

If the early years of the American nation saw the initial use of religiously inspired political language as a means of appealing to the people en masse, as a way to unite, mobilize and motivate the early population, this language provides much more powerful a tool in the Age of Information. Despite the diversity present in the colonies, Americans became “one people” under the nationalistic banner described in the rhetoric of Washington and others after him. Quite apart from any specific theological intentions, religious language was utilized as a means to tie the people together, to unify the diverse elements of the American population in terms of a faith in God and faith in the American nation that had been created out of the wilderness of North America and from the remnants of various European, indigenous and other populations. Centuries later, it is still being used to motivate and mobilize the population in efforts to legitimize American political action.

The continued use of religious language in political speeches is indicative of the influence religious imagery has on the American population. It should be noted, however, that this intersection of religion and politics is reciprocal; it “involves both religious leaders mobilizing political pressure on policymakers and political parties, and political leaders trying to use religious issues to mobilize electoral support.”²⁷ The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press’s survey, conducted in 2001, found that 64 percent of Americans polled say religion is very important, 43 percent attend regular religious service and 90 percent of these pray weekly.²⁸ Furthermore, according to Diana Judd, anxiety over “decaying morality” and deteriorating family values has risen “among neoconservative Republicans in direct proportion to the increasing power of the religious [Christian] Right”;²⁹ what is more, “previously marginalized religious fundamentalist concerns [have] dominated [George W. Bush’s] Republican agenda.”³⁰

The rise of the Christian Right in the United States has accompanied the intensification of the religio-political relationship in political affairs. Religious grassroots mobilization has been used as a means to increase voter turnout, lobby for favoured political candidates and promote

SECTION 3.4

religiously sanctioned moral causes.³¹ For example, in the 2004 election, conservative Christians mobilized to produce an extra four million evangelical votes in favour of then-President George W. Bush.³² They utilized grassroots outreach programs and mailed out “voter kits” to fellow believers.³³ As Dana Milbank, a writer for the *Washington Post* put it: “the president... has become the [religious conservative’s] movement’s de facto leader... Christian publications, radio and television shower Bush with praise, while preachers from the pulpit treat his leadership as an act of providence.”³⁴ Bush’s domestic and foreign policy initiatives were favoured by the Christian Right because they promoted the lifestyles that, in other venues, they advocated on the basis of their religious beliefs. Furthermore, the hard-line foreign policies initiatives taken by the Bush administration in the war on terror tend to be supported by the Christian Right more so than other Americans because these policies are “generally consistent with a belief in “dispensational premillennialism.”³⁵

Dispensational premillennialism is an interpretation based on the books of Daniel and Revelation that predicts “an epic battle between the forces of good (Christians) and evil (the Anti-Christ)” and “will end with the second coming of Christ, who will vanquish the Anti-Christ and establish 1,000 years of peace on earth.”³⁶ In order for this doctrine to hold true, it requires the “existence of an Israeli state and foretells the destruction of Babylon, the ancient city that Saddam Hussein had rebuilt in the 1980s.”³⁷ Thus, to the many on the Right, the war on terror symbolized the beginning of the apocalyptic battle which would bring about the end for which they have been waiting and therefore supported both the Bush administration’s efforts in the war on terror and its policies toward Israel.³⁸

Religious language has been used in the inaugural speeches of American presidents since George Washington to motivate and to mobilize the population in the direction desired by the incoming administration. Mixing together narratives of real political or social problems with a divine mandate, if not directly for the President himself then certainly for the nation that he leads, legitimizes the incoming president by encouraging the population to interpret and to confront those problems (be it civil strife, war, economic recession, etc.) in the same way as the President and his administration.³⁹ Not surprisingly, during the inaugural address the “incoming president will strive to connect his program to the messianic project of the nation.”⁴⁰ We can see this clearly in President George W. Bush’s second inaugural address (one that takes a much stronger religious line than his first inaugural address) when he stated:

America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this Earth has rights and dignity and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and Earth... Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable

achievement of our fathers. Now, it is the urgent requirement of our Nation's security and the calling of our time...it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.⁴¹

This type of language draws heavily upon the American political imagination and works to rally public support for the future plans of the administration. Bush conveniently ties his administration's global mission to democratize other countries to a divine mandate. To be sure, this is a powerful rhetorical device for motivating and mobilizing the American people, but one fraught with risk in terms of foreign policy. Unfortunately, this language also inadvertently threatens the rest of the world by communicating the ethnocentric idea that the American way of life is the correct way of life. All in one moment, this speech poses a threat to the international community, "appears to [divinely] justify the American sense of global power and commitment" and attempts to mobilize the population by reaffirming the unique situation and self-importance of the United States.⁴²

Bush further drew upon religious imagery, and the belief that the political aims of the United States are "divinely inspired and therefore endowed with an element of messianic inerrancy,"⁴³ in his State of Union Address of January 28, 2003:

Americans are a resolute people who have risen to every test of our time. Adversity has revealed the character of our country, to the world and to ourselves. America is a strong nation and honorable in the use of our strength. We exercise power without conquest, and we sacrifice for the liberty of strangers... The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity.⁴⁴

By referring to American liberty as God's gift to humanity, Bush invokes a kind of American messianism, using the element of American sacrifice to convey the message that it is the unique calling of the United States to bring God's liberty and freedom to the rest of the world.⁴⁵ In this sense, the nations that do not conform to American political ideology are not just mistaken in their actions, but potentially heretical. Furthermore, this speech implies that it is up to the United States government (on a mission sanctioned by God) to make sure that this message is heard and understood even by all those that repudiate American political ideology, and that in so doing, they are also denying God's political will.

Henry Giroux was not alone in challenging the American administration's position on this matter when he stated that President George W. Bush did not "see the contradiction between upholding the word of God and imposing democracy on the largely Muslim population of Iraq through the rule of force and the barrel of a gun."⁴⁶ Giroux drew attention to the issue of using

religious language, and thus religious belief, to justify actions that are contradictory to religious teachings. Encoding a certain brand of Christian fundamentalism (one not held by the majority of Americans)⁴⁷ into American foreign policy initiatives thus is comparable to the political philosophy of the Islamic radicals that, according to President Bush himself, are “led by a self-appointed vanguard that presumes to speak for the Muslim masses.”⁴⁸

Using Religious Rhetoric to Justify Political Actions

Religion has become integrated into the American political imagination, reflecting a long and complex history that relates not just religious and political institutions, but the frameworks of meaning within which they are situated. That religious language – or to be more precise, a variant of monotheistic language derived from some elements of Christian theology – is used as a tool by policymakers to rally public support for the administration should come as no surprise. In turn, this support helps to legitimize the political actions of the government in both domestic and foreign affairs. The attacks of September 11th led to an intensification of this pattern and saw the George W. Bush administration deliberately use strong religious rhetoric in order to justify their political actions.⁴⁹ The Bush administration consistently employed a strategy of religious dichotomization in establishing the context of the war on terror and by doing so, depicted it as a crusade in which the conflict was ultimately one between “us” and “them,” the “good” versus the “evil.”⁵⁰ Furthering this dichotomous boundary, in a joint news conference with French President Jacques Chirac, Bush stated: “[o]ver time it’s going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity....You’re either with us or against us in the fight against terror.”⁵¹

Through this dichotomous language, Bush made clear that there were only two sides to the war on terror: there was no neutrality. The rhetorical divide that was created thus eliminated any middle ground, any place that could encourage the formation of a dialogue and further the potential for negotiation and conflict resolution. As Gary Wills, a historian specializing in political ideology and Roman Catholicism put it: “[q]uestion the policy and you no longer believe in evil – which is the same, in this context, as not believing in God. That is the religious text on which our president is grading us.”⁵² Wills suggests that the religious rhetoric used in the war on terror has built an exclusive Manichean divide [between absolute Good and absolute Evil] in which the actions taken by the government are divinely justified. Furthermore, this divide explicitly paints any internal or external objection to this policy as negative and therefore supportive of terrorist activities. By doing this, the Bush administration attempted to simplify a complex situation and turn the war on terror into the preliminaries for the Apocalypse.

The initial strong support for the war on terror radically declined during Bush’s second term in office. Religio-political rhetoric about the war on terror continued to be used, but it became

increasingly ineffective in garnering or maintaining public support. While some support remained for the Bush administration's foreign policy initiatives, the cost in human and financial terms eroded this support to the point that the next administration, of Democratic President Barack Obama, has discouraged the use of the term "war on terror" to describe the current situation (apparently preferring, instead, "the long war").

Thus, while religio-political discourse has been used to mobilize the American population and legitimize the actions taken by the Bush administration in its so-called war on terror, the extreme positions reflected in this kind of discourse may have done more damage than good, both in terms of foreign and of domestic policy. In his farewell address, President George W. Bush's rhetoric fell on the ears of a population perhaps more inclined than any previous generation to distrust conclusions about the divine hand present in directing the affairs of the American people:

America must maintain our moral clarity. I've often spoken to you about good and evil, and this has made some uncomfortable. But good and evil are present in this world, and between the two of them there can be no compromise. Murdering the innocent to advance an ideology is wrong every time, everywhere. Freeing people from oppression and despair is eternally right. This nation must continue to speak out for justice and truth. We must always be willing to act in their defence—and to advance the cause of peace.⁵³

The lack of a middle position, the necessity to find some other ways of interpreting present and future circumstances than those derived from one stream of a particular religious tradition, conspire to make the job of "freeing people from despair and oppression" more difficult now than it needed to be. Religious language can be used to motivate and mobilize, but wielded inappropriately, it can also be used to demotivate and demobilize, forcing the development of new means of communicating what is important to people who have unfortunately ceased to listen.

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SECTION 3.4

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SECTION 3.4

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SECTION 4
THE POLITICS OF
PERSONAL RELIGION

KHOMEINI: RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGUE AND PRAGMATIST

William MacLean



On 1 February 1979, after almost 15 years in exile, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran. His return was preceded by the departure of the Shah of Iran (Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi) on 16 January 1979. Khomeini's triumphant homecoming, celebrated by millions of Iranians, was viewed as the start of a new era for the country that had been ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty since 1925. During his exile in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, Khomeini gave a series of lectures in early 1970 that were recorded and later published under the title *Hukumat-i Islami (Islamic Government)*. In this work he explained his philosophy on government and described how the *fuqaha* (religious scholars or jurists; *faqih*, singular) should be the guardians or rulers.¹ This belief became known as *vilayat-i faqih* (guardianship of the jurist). Just prior to his return, however, during the Iranian Revolution, Khomeini issued statements in which he described how Islam and democracy were basic principles of government.² It is this duality in Khomeini's messages that illustrated how he was both a religious ideologue and a pragmatist. Khomeini was acutely aware that he required the support of secular as well as religious parties to establish a functioning government in the midst of the revolution and therefore did not openly declare his intention to establish a theocratic government. Despite initially creating a government that included secular parties led by a moderate Prime Minister, within a year, Khomeini and his supporters crafted a new constitution and established *vilayat-i faqih*. As will be shown, Khomeini the religious ideologue was also pragmatic when he needed to be and it was this approach that helped strengthen his control over Iran.

It is important at this point to note that Khomeini did not always profess the only true government would be one led by the jurists. In his work, *Kashf al-Asrar (Revealing Secrets)*, written in the early 1940s, Khomeini criticized secular rule and in particular the former Shah of Iran, Reza Shah, for his anti-clerical policies. Khomeini did not advocate the elimination of the monarchy in this work, however, but insisted that the monarchy needed to have more respect for religion. Khomeini believed the number of clerics in Parliament had to be increased to ensure state laws were in line with the sacred laws,³ and that the Shah's powers should be limited.⁴ While he did not consider monarchical government to be illegitimate, Khomeini saw the government of an Islamic state as one that should be "defined in one way or another by Islamic values, and is responsible to a greater or lesser degree to the law of Islam."⁵ From

SECTION 4.1

this early work, Khomeini clearly identified that any government of an Islamic state needed to base itself on the laws of Islam, but had not yet insisted that such a government had to be led by jurists.

Throughout the 1950s Khomeini taught at the Qum seminary under the guidance of Ayatollah Muhammad Husain Burujirdi. Khomeini did not always agree with Burujirdi's philosophies, especially when it came to opinions on how best to deal with the government, but did not openly challenge his senior.⁶ After Burujirdi's death in 1961, Khomeini took on a more prominent role highlighted in 1963 over his objections to the Shah's White Revolution.⁷ Khomeini spoke out against the initiatives of the White Revolution, detailing how they would destroy the markets and adversely impact the bazaars. In March 1963, protests occurred in Qum and the Shah responded by sending in military forces to attack the school at which Khomeini taught. Khomeini continued to lash out at the government and was arrested two days after giving a speech on 3 June 1963. Violent demonstrations erupted throughout the country, martial law was declared and hundreds were killed during clashes with government troops.⁸ As Khomeini's struggles against the Shah became more public, his following increased. He was now seen as a prominent opponent of the government by a great number of the students who had studied in Qum, and more importantly, his support from those in the bazaar was growing.⁹

Khomeini was released in August when the government announced that he had agreed to stop interfering with politics, though he denied ever making such a commitment. Khomeini continued his political activism and after asking his followers to boycott parliamentary elections in October, he was rearrested and held until May 1964. Another clash between Khomeini and the government occurred in October 1964 when a law was passed granting diplomatic immunity to American military advisors and their families residing in Iran. This was followed shortly thereafter by an announcement that Iran would be borrowing \$200 million from the US to purchase military hardware. Khomeini's speech in opposition to these government actions was distributed by pamphlet, after which he was arrested yet again and this time exiled to Turkey.¹⁰ Understanding the increased prominence that Khomeini was gaining in his struggle against the government, Tehran Radio made only a brief announcement stating that because "Mr Khomeini's behaviour and his agitation are against the interests of the people and the security, sovereignty and independence of the country, he has been sent into exile."¹¹

Khomeini spent 11 months in Turkey before the Iranian government permitted him to move to the holy city of Najaf, Iraq. Despite continuing his opposition to the Iranian government, Khomeini was not as yet advocating the concepts of *vilayat-i faqih*. He did however make an effort to turn his religious message into a political agenda by drawing on the Prophet Muhammad, but stopped short of claiming that the *ulama* (religious scholars of Islam, clergy) had an

inherent right to political authority¹² – a concept that would later be a key aspect of *vilayat-i faqih*. Khomeini's arrival in Najaf was marked, on his part, by a respectful and pragmatic demeanor. He was very aware that the Grand Ayatollahs in Najaf did not approve of his politicization of Islam¹³ and Khomeini went to great lengths to ensure his presence was not a source of discontent.¹⁴

The radicalization of Khomeini's views cannot be pinpointed to a single event and appears to have grown over a period of time, particularly during the years 1965-70.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Khomeini still maintained a pragmatic approach when he felt it was expedient. This was exemplified when, in 1968, Khomeini was asked to comment on a conflict between his leading disciple in Iran, Ayatollah Mottaheri, and Ali Shariati.¹⁶ Khomeini, aware of Shariati's popularity, refused to comment directly on the matter. He did make vague references that opposed Shariati's views but did so in a manner that led many to believe he was supportive of Shariati:

Thus Khomeini intentionally propagated a vague populist message and refrained from specific proposals, and thereby created a broad alliance of social forces ranging from the bazaars and the clergy to the intelligentsia and the urban poor, as well as of political organizations varying from the religious Liberation Movement and the secular National Front to the new guerrilla groups emerging from [Shariati's] followers in the universities.¹⁷

Despite using an outwardly pragmatic approach to create a broad base of support, Khomeini's evolving belief in *vilayat-i faqih* became a centrepiece of his lectures in Najaf. His lectures from early 1970 were recorded and later released in *Islamic Government*. It was in this work that Khomeini clearly articulated his true beliefs regarding the role he foresaw for jurists in an Islamic government. In the lectures, Khomeini focused on three main points: first was the need to establish Islamic political institutions to ensure political power was subordinated to Islamic goals; second was the duty of the *fuqaha* to establish an Islamic state where they controlled the three levels of government (executive, legislative and judicial); third and finally were his thoughts on how to go about establishing this Islamic state.¹⁸

To illustrate these points, Khomeini touched on several fundamental principles that clearly identified for his students why an Islamic government, run and controlled by the *fuqaha*, was essential. One point that was addressed several times was how Muhammad considered the *fuqaha* to be the trustees of the prophets. Khomeini claimed that the role of the *fuqaha* as trustees was not just to provide advice and opinions, however, but to assume the roles played by the prophets in ordering men's lives, establishing a government and implementing laws; Khomeini saw this as the duty of all just *fuqaha*.¹⁹ It was not enough for the *fuqaha* to simply interpret the law (Shari'a) but they were to implement it just as the prophets had done. Khomeini stated "that the *fuqaha* must be the leaders of the people in order to prevent Islam from falling into decline

SECTION 4.1

and its ordinances from falling into abeyance.”²⁰ To ensure that his students understood how the messages he was conveying applied to events ongoing in Iran, Khomeini used Iran as a symbol of what happened when a society was not justly run by an Islamic government. He illustrated how the Iranian people were going without proper medical care and how the needs of the poor and hungry were not being met by the current government. He claimed that more attention was being paid to the purchase of military hardware and severely criticized the Iranian government for its close military relationship with Israel. Khomeini explained how an Islamic government could remedy these problems, but only when the *fuqaha* assumed the same roles played by Muhammad and the Imams.²¹

To emphasize the importance of Islamic government and why the *fuqaha* should fill leadership roles, Khomeini challenged his students by asking if they should abandon the concept of Islamic government. He asked if Islamic government (and Islam in general) should be discarded simply because no individual had been appointed to fill the leadership role during the time of the Occultation.²² Khomeini identified how dangerous this would be when they were faced with enemies against which they had to defend the honour of Muslims. He stated how the *fuqaha* had the required qualities of knowledge of law and justice to lead the government and “if a worthy individual possessing these two qualities arises and establishes a government, he will possess the same authority as [Muhammad] in the administration of society, and it will be the duty of all people to obey him.”²³ At this point Khomeini’s message was clear: the *fuqaha* were not only the trustees of the prophets but also had, in some cases, the qualities to assume leadership and act as the rightful authority in the absence of the Imams.

Even though Khomeini now openly discussed with his students the concept of *vilayat-i faqih*, he cautioned them as to the dangers of speaking about these principles to a wider audience. He was aware that not all shared his vision and beliefs. He described to his students the concept of *taqiya* (concealing of the truth) and how even the Imams had to embrace this concept at certain times during their struggles with the *taghut* (illegitimate regimes).²⁴ Khomeini advised them that if one wished “to speak about Islamic government and the establishment of Islamic government he must observe the principle of *taqiya*.”²⁵ At the time when Khomeini discussed this with his students he mainly referred to the dangers faced by his followers from the current Iranian regime. Khomeini would draw upon *taqiya* in the period shortly before and after his return to Iran in 1979 when not only dealing with those that opposed him but also with some that supported him.

Throughout the 1970s, Khomeini continued to lecture his students in Najaf but only periodically spoke out publicly against the Iranian government. There were many in Iran who supported Khomeini, however, and they established a strong foundation of support for him and his movement.

It was through these people that Khomeini's lectures on *vilayat-i faqih* were distributed (albeit in limited numbers) within Iran. In June 1975, marking the 12th anniversary of the Qum protests, a pro-Khomeini group participated in large-scale demonstrations, and despite the ban on mentioning his name in public, the students chanted his name and praised Khomeini's 1963 uprising.²⁶ After these protests were violently put down by paramilitary forces, Khomeini denounced the actions of the government and subsequently supported an initiative amongst his supporters in Iran to organize militant clerics and Muslim activists. The group's activities included the printing and distribution of pro-Khomeini propaganda and the recruitment of local youth. In the late 1970s the size of the group grew and numerous branches formed what would become the basis for Khomeini's revolutionary committees, otherwise known as Komitehs.²⁷

At the time these groups were growing in number, the Shah's control over Iran started to decline. The election of the Democratic President Jimmy Carter in the US brought with it mixed messages to the Shah's regime. Publicly the new US administration called on the Shah to improve its human rights record but at the same time the most hawkish of Carter's staff, including his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, encouraged the Shah to follow a hard-line approach to any opposition. At this time, the Shah was in the biggest fight of his life, as his battle with cancer was taking its toll on his body. As opposition to the Shah grew, so too did the calls for the return of Khomeini. In early January 1978, the Shah's regime made an ill advised attempt to discredit Khomeini. An article appeared in the leading government newspaper attacking Khomeini for his lack of faith and making accusations that he was a supporter of colonialist regimes, particularly the British. The article was met with outrage by many people, including the moderate clergy. In Qum, the scene of previous demonstrations in 1963 and 1975, seminaries and the bazaars shut down and over 4000 marched in protest over the article. Security forces were called in and according to the government two protesters were killed, while the opposition claimed 70 died.²⁸

These events can arguably be seen as the trigger for what would eventually begin the march toward the Iranian Revolution and the return of Khomeini. Outrage from Khomeini was to be expected; however, moderate clerics such as Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari,²⁹ the senior theologian at Qum, also spoke out against the violence. Shariatmadari, along with other clerical and bazaar leaders, called for the traditional 40th day of mourning for those killed at Qum. The impact of these events on the overall protest movement against the Shah was significant. Until this time the more moderate clergy, along with secular political forces, had the most influence over opposition activity; now these organizations, as well as the bazaaris,³⁰ were being supplanted by the more radical religious element led by Khomeini and his supporters. These events helped accelerate the transition in leadership of the opposition and permitted Khomeini to use the opposition movement to accomplish the goals outlined in his *Islamic Government*.³¹ The

SECTION 4.1

opposition took full political advantage of the Shia tradition of mourning the dead on the 40th day. If the Shah prevented the gatherings he would be open to criticism, and the 40 day period allowed those in charge to organize massive demonstrations against the Shah.³²

The day of mourning for the Qum victims took place on 18 February with the universities and bazaars closing down. In many cities, demonstrations were for the most part peaceful; in Tabriz, however, violence erupted and lasted for two days. Reports vary on the number of protesters killed – the government claimed six, the opposition 300. Again, 40th day mourning demonstrations were planned and carried out on 29 March. Once more there were confrontations between protesters and the Shah's security forces; demonstrations lasting three days, during which time calls for the Shah's death and the return of Khomeini were heard. On 10 May, mourners gathered again to mark the 40th day, once more clashing with the Shah's forces. Despite both sides claiming wildly different figures for the number of dead over these series of protests, the true impact of these clashes was not in the number of demonstrators killed but in the perception that the Shah's grip on Iran was slipping and Khomeini's was tightening.³³

In an attempt to stem the protests, the Shah offered some concessions to the moderate forces within the opposition; however this was a case of too little too late as demonstrations and strikes were now frequent events. In August 1978, a fire at a cinema took the lives of over 400 men, women and children. The government blamed the opposition, who in turn blamed SAVAK, the Shah's secret police. Regardless of who was responsible, the reality was that the relatives of the victims blamed the regime. Less than a month later when over 500 000 rallied in Tehran, the Shah declared Martial Law. The next day (Friday 8 September) when the crowds returned there were clashes with security forces that left between 700 and 3000 dead. After this, the moderate opposition became more radicalized and calls for strikes by Khomeini eventually brought the entire Iranian economy to a standstill.³⁴

During the fall of 1978, in an effort to curb Khomeini's influence on the opposition, the Shah pressured the Iraqi government to expel Khomeini and he was forced to leave in October. At first he attempted to go to Kuwait but was refused entry and eventually ended up in France. This strategy backfired on the Shah as Khomeini was now more accessible to the world media and he took full advantage of this opportunity. It was during this short stay in France that Khomeini demonstrated just how pragmatic he was in dealing with the media and members of the Iranian opposition. With an increasing number of demonstrations calling for the Shah to leave, it appeared likely that his regime would eventually fall. Khomeini understood that if he were to return and establish an Islamic government he would initially require the help of moderate clerics and secular groups and to accomplish this, adjusted his messages accordingly. Khomeini realized that a temporary alliance with moderates would be expedient at this time for they were,

as mentioned above, becoming more radicalized. He therefore needed to be vague on specifics of the type of government he desired. “As a shrewd politician, Khomeini only gave general guidance, leaving others to interpret his works in the light of circumstances.”³⁵

The opportunity for this type of pragmatic alliance presented itself less than one month after Khomeini arrived in Paris. In early November members of the moderate opposition flew to Paris to meet with Khomeini where they agreed to recognize him as a leader of the revolutionary movement and stated that there could be no negotiation with the Shah. In a joint declaration they acknowledged the Shah’s monarchy lacked legitimacy and that the form of government to replace the Shah would be decided by a referendum.³⁶ In addition, the statement made reference to how both Islam and democracy were basic principles in government. This was the public face that Khomeini wanted to portray and as a result many of the secularists believed that he would support their desire to rule Iran. Khomeini made a conscious effort not to openly discuss his theories surrounding *vilayat-i faqih*; therefore, most moderates in Iran were unaware of his goal to establish a theocratic government.³⁷

One of Khomeini’s closest advisors while he was in Paris was Abol Hassan Bani-Sar, who would become Iran’s first post-revolutionary President. Bani-Sar was a supporter of Islamic government but not as Khomeini envisioned through his *vilayat-i faqih*. For Khomeini’s purposes, however, Bani-Sar was another moderate who attracted many supporters wanting an Islamic government balanced with a degree of liberty.³⁸ One of Bani-Sar’s responsibilities in Paris was helping prepare Khomeini’s answers to questions submitted by the throng of reporters who came to visit. In response to questions concerning cleric involvement in government, Khomeini “insisted that the mullahs would not interfere in government affairs.”³⁹ Just as Khomeini found it convenient to make joint declarations with moderates, he also believed that a modified form of *taqiya* was appropriate when dealing with the press. Even when questioned on the extreme views expressed during his lectures in Najaf, Khomeini’s advisors claimed it was an attempt by SAVAK to show Khomeini in a bad light or that it may have been poor note taking by one of the students.⁴⁰ According to Bani-Sar, during Khomeini’s time in Paris he “abandoned...*vilayat-i faqih*...and accepted that government was accountable to the governed and not to God.”⁴¹ In reality, Khomeini never did abandon this belief. After his return to Iran, when he gained control over the revolution, he would tell Bani-Sar that “in Paris, I found it expedient to say certain things. In Iran, I find it expedient to refute what I said, and I do so unreservedly.”⁴² It was this type of approach that Khomeini would use to achieve control over the revolutionary forces and implement his vision of Islamic government.

After returning from exile, one of Khomeini’s first attempts to consolidate control over the moderate groups was the appointment of Mehdi Bazargan as Prime Minister on 4 February

SECTION 4.1

1979.⁴³ Khomeini realized that he could not turn to the ulama initially as they lacked experience and a move such as this would have created opposition, not only from nationalists but also from the orthodox clergy who did not favour the ulama's active participation in government. There were some conservative clergy who believed that any involvement of the ulama in government would be seen as usurping the rights of the hidden Imam (Muhammad ibn-Hasan al-Mahdi).⁴⁴ Bazargan was a safe choice for he was not seen as power hungry, had religious credentials and was respected by all sides. Khomeini later stated that the choice of Bazargan was made because he did not have a better alternative.⁴⁵ This appointment by Khomeini was clearly a shrewd political move considering the fact that Bazargan did not agree with clerics playing a significant role in the government and more importantly he did not share Khomeini's view that "Islam should take precedence over Iran."⁴⁶

While Bazargan was the public face of Iran's new Provisional Revolutionary Government, Khomeini created the Council of Islamic Revolution, henceforth referred to as the Revolutionary Council, which acted at times as a parallel government behind the scenes. Many members of the Revolutionary Council also belonged to the Islamic Republican Party (IRP); a political party formed by Khomeini in an effort to garner support from within the ulama for an increased role for clerics in the government. In addition, Khomeini built powerful religious structures and appointed Friday prayer leaders who would spread his vision of *vilayat-i faqih*. While Bazargan was a member of the Revolutionary Council, it was dominated by those that supported Khomeini's goal of creating a theocratic government. In effect, the Provisional Revolutionary Government was kept in check by the Revolutionary Council.⁴⁷ By balancing these parallel structures, Khomeini maintained the support of the middle class and bazaaris while at the same time increased support amongst the ulama for his vision of an Islamic government. His greatest challenge and subsequent accomplishment would be to entrench this in a new constitution, but before he could do this, Iranians first had to determine what type of state Iran should become.

As promised in Paris, Khomeini announced that a referendum would be held at the end of March 1979 to determine what type of government Iran would have. In the period leading up to the vote, Khomeini and his closest advisors were not talking publicly about a theocratic government, but chose instead to discuss how the new Iran would be one that recognized fundamental rights and individual freedoms. Khomeini even gave the impression that he would not hold an official role with the government when he moved to Qum to resume his work as a jurist. These moves were a concerted effort by Khomeini and his people, leading up to the referendum, to reduce any criticism concerning attempts by the jurists to gain control of the government. The culmination of this disinformation campaign occurred just three days before the referendum when Khomeini authorized the release of select portions of the draft constitution. This release once again mentioned individual and collective rights, political freedoms and emphasized that

the leadership of the country was in the hands of the public as it would be the public that governed the state.⁴⁸ Notably, the question on the referendum only asked: “Do you favour an Islamic Republic or a monarchy?”⁴⁹ There was no other choice offered and considering the monarchy had been overthrown, there was no real choice at all other than to vote or not to vote. In addition, despite alluding to it in Paris, Khomeini refused to have any reference to democracy in the question. Over 98 percent of those that turned out to vote supported the Islamic Republic. The true success for Khomeini, however, was that only a handful of groups boycotted the referendum and those that participated included secularist organizations and moderate clerics.

After the referendum, the next step in the process toward creating an Islamic government centred on the constitution. The first draft of the constitution was worked on while Khomeini was still in Paris, which was followed by subsequent revisions after his return to Iran. As with other initiatives, Khomeini ensured a broad base of support for this effort by including members of the Provisional Revolutionary Government within the group that produced the official preliminary draft in June 1979. Other than within the Guardian Council, this draft did not recognize any official positions for Islamic jurists nor did it make any reference to *vilayat-i faqih*. Khomeini publicly endorsed this version of the constitution on more than one occasion and the IRP unanimously approved the draft.⁵⁰ The next step in the process was supposed to be the creation of the Constituent Assembly – elected officials (numbering in the hundreds) that would determine the final version of the constitution. A debate ensued as to whether such a body was needed and a proposal was made to put the constitution, as it was, to the public in another referendum. A compromise was reached in July to elect, in August, what would become known as the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution.⁵¹ This body was to be representative of numerous groups and was charged with reviewing the constitution so it could be presented in a referendum.

Khomeini and his senior advisors now had their opportunity to ensure the constitution would take the form they wanted, which included establishing the type of Islamic government outlined by Khomeini while in Najaf. In the period leading up to the election of the Assembly of Experts there were many irregularities and out of 72 recognized seats within the Assembly, 55 of those elected were clerics who supported Khomeini – this after assurances had been given that only one-third of delegates for the Assembly would be clerics.⁵² With this kind of strangle hold on the Assembly, Khomeini did not have to concern himself with balancing and gaining support from various groups, and could ensure the concept of *vilayat-i faqih* would be clearly delineated in the constitution. One of his first steps in doing this occurred during his opening address to the Assembly when he told them they could remove or change any part of the draft constitution that was not in line with Islam. This was not the role initially envisioned for the Assembly when the compromise had been reached in July. The Assembly was to be elected to review the constitution but Khomeini had now given them the mandate to completely rewrite the draft. With the

SECTION 4.1

principles of *vilayat-i faqih* entrenched in the constitution, Khomeini would have the authority to implement the type of Islamic government he wanted.

When the Assembly of Experts finally approved in mid-November 1979 the version of the constitution that would be put to a referendum, it clearly stated Khomeini's *vilayat-i faqih* concept. In article 5, the constitution identifies that during the Occultation the just *faqih* will assume the responsibility for governing and then goes on in article 107 to recognize Khomeini as the first *faqih* for life.⁵³ There was some opposition within the Assembly during the process, but with the vast majority being Khomeini supporters, the result was never in doubt. There was greater opposition voiced outside the Assembly by moderate clerics and leftist parties (both Islamic and secular) claiming that Khomeini was usurping authority and establishing a dictatorial regime.⁵⁴ The only hurdle that Khomeini faced in taking what he thought was his rightful place as Supreme Leader was approval of the referendum on the constitution which was scheduled to take place the first week of December. While it was very likely, owing to Khomeini's popularity, that this version of the constitution (which he endorsed) would have been approved by a majority of the population, Khomeini demonstrated once again his shrewd pragmatism in rallying support for the constitution, even from some of those initially voicing opposition.

The opportunity came on 4 November 1979 when a group of pro-Khomeini students stormed the US embassy in Tehran. This was the second time the US embassy had come under attack since the overthrow of the Shah. In February 1979, a group of Marxists took control of the embassy and held the Ambassador captive. As this occurred shortly after his return from exile and before he could secure a firm powerbase, Khomeini chose not to throw his support behind this action. Without his support, the incident was resolved quickly and peacefully.⁵⁵ The situation was much different nine months later. Khomeini had verbally attacked the US several times because of its support to the Shah and when the Shah entered the US for medical treatment on 22 October, Khomeini stepped up his rhetoric against the US who he had called the Great Satan.⁵⁶ When the students first entered the Embassy in November, Khomeini "did not enthusiastically support the takeover, but soon, recognizing its potential benefits, called it Iran's second revolution, more important than the first one."⁵⁷

The main benefit that came out of this crisis for Khomeini was an increase in support, and he exploited this in advance of the Constitutional Referendum.⁵⁸ The first opportunity to exploit this crisis occurred when Bazargan resigned his post as Prime Minister after the students refused his demand to leave the embassy. Khomeini had been slowly sidelining Bazargan and his government in favour of the Revolutionary Council, and his acceptance of Bazargan's resignation was widely supported by leftist parties who had considered the former Prime Minister to be a liberal who supported maintaining ties with the US.⁵⁹ Khomeini's framing of the embassy takeover as

another example of Iran's anti-imperialist struggle also won him high praise from the left. As a result of his "us versus them" approach to the crisis, Khomeini rallied many who had been upset over the constitutional process. Khomeini had manipulated the situation throughout the month of November so that, when it was time to hold the Constitutional Referendum, he was able to secure a wide range of support for a document that many vowed to oppose.

Through a pragmatic approach to many of his challenges, Khomeini the ideologue was able to succeed in establishing an Islamic government based on the principles of *vilayat-i faqih*. Prior to return from exile, he balanced his goal to establish a theocratic government with a need to maintain the support of many secular parties and moderate clerics. Once he had established a solid foundation within Iran he manipulated the elections for the Assembly of Experts and then through his supporters within the Assembly drew up a constitution that appointed him *faqih* for life in a government based on the theory of *vilayat-i faqih*. While moves such as supporting the moderate Bani-Sar's candidacy for the Presidency in January 1980 could be viewed as further attempts to patronize those still opposed to his theocratic government, within 18 months Khomeini dismissed Bani-Sar after several clashes with the IRP. Khomeini dedicated his life to Islam, but exercised pragmatism to establish his vision of Islamic government in Iran. No account of the history of Iran thus can exclude the role that his personal religious belief, matched to political conviction, played in shaping the future not only of Iran itself, but of other countries with predominantly Muslim populations.

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SECTION 4.1

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Notes

1 Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 25.

2 Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 233.

3 Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 20-21.

4 Hossein Bashiriyeh, *The State and Revolution in Iran: 1962-1982* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 59.

5 Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 104-105.

6 *Ibid.*, 53. At this time the ruling monarch was Muhammad Reza Shah, son of Reza Shah. His father had been removed following a joint British/Soviet invasion in September 1941 due to his close relations with Germany in the Second World War.

7 In an attempt to transform Iran into a leading economic power, the Shah introduced numerous economic and social reforms; the most significant among them was land reform. These initiatives became known as the White Revolution.

- 8 Martin, 62.
- 9 Bashiriyeh, 61. As Bashiriyeh put it, “Khomeini was the hero of the bazaar petty bourgeoisie and the bazaar was the stronghold of opposition to the Shah.”
- 10 Keddie, 148.
- 11 Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 128.
- 12 Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 427. Khomeini talked of how the Prophet translated his religious message into a political agenda and the need for all that followed him to do the same.
- 13 Sepehr Zabih, *Iran’s Revolutionary Upheaval: An Interpretive Essay* (San Francisco: Alchemy Books, 1979), 23. As Zabih states, “Khomeini saw politics as the logical extension of the Shia religion.”
- 14 Moin, *Khomeini*, 141. Moin describes how Khomeini even admonished a seminarian when he tried to elicit a comment from Khomeini regarding well wishes sent by Iraqi clerics to the Shah on the silver jubilee of his accession to the throne.
- 15 Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 22-3.
- 16 Shariati was a Muslim sociologist who was immensely popular with the youth of Iran. He was a politico-religious thinker who saw women having a role in society and was critical of the religious traditionalists. Shariati was criticized over the fact that he was not a theologian and was accused of being an agent of Marxism and Communism. Shariati’s appeal to his students centred on his knowledge of numerous ideologies including liberalism, capitalism and Marxism to name a few. Shariati died in 1977 but his popularity continued to grow and at some anti-government rallies, his picture was carried next to Khomeini’s – see Keddie, 200-208 for a more detailed view on Shariati’s background and influence.
- 17 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran: Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 479.
- 18 Khomeini, 25.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 77-78.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 120-124.
- 22 The Occultation is divided into a Lesser and Greater period. In this denomination of Shia Islam (commonly labeled in the West as ‘Twelver’ and comprising over 80 percent of Shias world wide), to which Khomeini belonged, they believe that there were 12 Imams that descended from Muhammad. The last of these, Muhammad ibn-Hasan al-Mahdi, after the death of his father, the 11th Imam, departed from this realm thus beginning the period of the Lesser Occultation. Mahdi communicated through four deputies and when the last deputy died the period known as the Greater Occultation commenced and continues until this day. It is believed that when Mahdi returns, he will bring justice and establish Islam throughout the world.
- 23 Khomeini, 62.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 26 Charles Kurzman, “The Qum Protests and the Coming of the Iranian Revolution, 1975 and 1978,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Fall 2003), 287-288.
- 27 Moin, *Khomeini*, 175-181. The Komitehs would prove to be an important group for Khomeini. As the Shah departed and Khomeini returned, these Komitehs formed the basis of an internal security force. They eventually encompassed clerics, craftsmen, retailers and numerous young Iranians. These Komitehs were opposed by the Provisional Revolutionary Government initially appointed by Khomeini; nevertheless, the pragmatic Khomeini saw a use for them. As Khomeini tightened his grip on power, he had his Revolutionary Guard purge the Komitehs of all left wing elements and brought them under control of his trusted allies. See Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 148-149.
- 28 Abrahamian, *Iran*, 505.
- 29 Shariatmadari’s importance centred on two critical facts – he was a moderate and an Azeri cleric. As a moderate cleric he did not advocate the overthrow of the Shah but rather called for the application of the 1905/06 constitution (much

SECTION 4.1

like Khomeini did in the 1960s) that would limit the authority of the Shah. In addition he was the leading Azeri cleric which meant that he was the unofficial spokesman for the Azerbaijani clergy. See Abrahamian, *Iran*, 474.

30 The term bazaaris includes not only those that own shops in the bazaar but also those who were involved in retail and export trade. See Keddie, 226.

31 *Ibid.*, 225.

32 *Ibid.*, 226.

33 Abrahamian, *Iran*, 506-508.

34 Bashiriyeh, 115.

35 Baqer Moin, "Iran and Islam," *Iran: The Khomeini Revolution: Countries in Crisis*, ed. Martin Wright (Chicago: St. James Press, 1989), 72.

36 Bashiriyeh, 116. Two of the opposition members were Karim Sanjabi and Mehdi Bazargan. Khomeini would eventually appoint Bazargan as Iran's Prime Minister and Sanjabi would become Foreign Minister.

37 Keddie, 233-234. Of note, as Keddie identified, Khomeini would later refuse to have the words democratic or democracy associated with the future Republic or constitution once he returned.

38 *Ibid.*, 208-212.

39 Abol Hassan Bani-Sar, *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution & Secret Deals with the U.S.*, (Washington: Brassey's, 1991), 1. It needs to be pointed out, as is identified in the forward by Ambassador L. Bruce Laingen (charge d'affaires in Tehran during the hostage crisis) that Bani-Sar's book is "a personal, obviously self-serving, but very important view of a major event in world history" and while it is at times sensational, it does provide "an important insight into [the] revolution." Therefore, when reading the book these caveats must be kept in mind. For the purposes of this chapter it will only be used to discuss the pragmatism displayed by Khomeini while in Paris, a topic, which I believe, is not affected by these caveats identified by Ambassador Laingen.

40 Abrahamian, *Iran*, 479.

41 Mazlum Uyar, "The Concept of Sovereignty and the Position of the 'Ulama' in Both Constitutions of Iran (1906 and 1979)," *Ekev Academic Review*, Vol. 11, No. 31 (Spring 2007), 23.

42 Bani-Sar, 2.

43 Of note, at this time there were two governments in Tehran. Shapour Bakhtiar was still considered the Prime Minister of the government that existed under the Shah. The struggle between the two governments (one left over from the Shah and one created by Khomeini) lasted for one week and when the army declared itself neutral in this struggle, Bakhtiar resigned on 11 February.

44 Martin, 150.

45 Milani, 143.

46 Eric Rouleau, "Khomeini's Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Fall 1980), 8.

47 See Milani, 147-151 for a detailed breakdown of the political structure within Iran immediately after Khomeini's return. Milani also discusses the creation of Khomeini's Revolutionary Guard (Pasdaran) and radical groups such as the Hezbollah.

48 Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 25-27.

49 Milani, 154.

50 Schirazi, 22-24. The Guardian Council is a body of 12 individuals, six Islamic jurists appointed by the Supreme Leader and six jurists appointed by Parliament. This Council has the responsibility to determine if laws passed by the legislative process are in accordance with Islamic Law (Shari'a).

51 The Assembly of Experts for the Constitution is not the same body as the current Assembly of Experts (on the Leadership). This latter body was created by the constitution.

52 Schirazi, 29-32. Some of the irregularities included acts of violence against certain candidates, the aligning of districts to favour the election of pro-Khomeini candidates and falsification of results – which included two Shia candidates

winning in Sunni regions where the number of votes counted was greater than the number eligible to vote.

53 An English version of the Iranian constitution is available through their Ottawa Embassy website. For Article 5 see, <http://www.salamiran.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=41&Itemid=77> and for Article 107 see, <http://www.salamiran.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=49&Itemid=90>.

54 Schirazi, 48-49.

55 Milani, 163.

56 Moin, *Khomeini*, 220.

57 Milani, 166.

58 As mentioned previously, the final version of the constitution for the referendum was not agreed upon by the Assembly of Experts until mid-November. By early November, details of the constitution were being discussed openly and opposition to the process was beginning to increase.

59 A widely publicized meeting between Bazargan and the US National Security Advisor Brzezinski in Algeria on 1 November 1979 did nothing to ease the concerns expressed by leftist parties in Iran.

EYES RIGHT: RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN THE SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AFTER 9/11

David M. Hodson

When the terrorists struck the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, it was the opening act of a drama that has since unfolded around the world. If we were to believe the rhetoric that some people have used to talk about it, we are now involved in either a war on terror, or a crusade against Islam. When we hear the language of good versus evil in casual conversation, or when media outlets provide the juiciest sound bites possible to inflame public opinion in support of some cause or another, we tend to discount what is being said. When similar language is used by the President of the United States, however, it is cause for concern. Even a cursory examination of the speeches of President George W. Bush in the time after the attacks of 9/11 makes one wonder how much the rhetoric reflects his own personal religious convictions, and how much those convictions, in turn, might have determined the course of the American ship of state.

For all the legislative and administrative checks and balances in the American political system and despite the constitutional separation of the institutions of church and state, there is nothing in place that deals with how the personal religious convictions of the American President might affect the decisions taken by his administration. In the United States, supreme political authority – whatever qualifications the constitutionalists might make to this statement – is effectively invested in a single person. What the President believes is his business – personal religious freedom surely should apply in the White House as it does in any other American house – but this freedom assumes that personal religious convictions remain personal, rather than serving as the basis for policy decisions by the American President, through the American government, and on behalf of the American people. In any senior government appointment, the candidates presented are grilled on their personal and professional conduct, and no doubt questions of what they believe in religious terms are likely to be interwoven with the questions of fact. Apart from the incessant media frenzy surrounding Presidential campaigns, however, in which noise quickly drowns out content, there is no such examination of the religious beliefs of the would-be President, nor, in the end, do these beliefs seem acceptable fodder for serious campaign altercations.

Religion has always been important to American Presidents. For example, Ronald Reagan referred to “the Soviet Union as an ‘evil empire’... [which reference], for some, was a direct

SECTION 4.2

allusion to the Biblical foreboding in which a great, but evil army comes from the North to destroy Israel and to inaugurate the coming battle between the Antichrist and Jesus at the Battle of Armageddon.”¹ Few Presidents have relied upon religion, or facilitated a religious agenda, however, more than George W. Bush, although, interestingly enough, there has not been any sustained or investigative interview in which George W. Bush was asked perceptive and informed questions about his religious beliefs. As a result, we know little about his Christian faith that is not handicapped by speculation and innuendo. What is known is that President Bush was “born again” when he surrendered to Jesus Christ, but despite his conversion, he refrained from referring to himself as an evangelical. Yet out of his personal and political associations and out of the religious rhetoric in many of his public speeches, it is possible to build a circumstantial case in support of the argument that President Bush facilitated a fundamentalist Christian agenda that not only labelled, but defined and perpetuated, the war on terror. While there are many reputable observers who maintain this is what happened, in this chapter, my aim is much more modest: in a country that holds to the separation of church and state, how can the average American citizen be sure that life-and-death policy decisions are not being made on the basis of personal religious convictions, when the President uses right-wing Christian religious rhetoric to illustrate his understanding of world events and what the United States must do in response? Is it realistic (or perhaps even fair) to expect that personal religious convictions can be excluded from the political arena, and if not, how do we find the necessary checks and balances to ensure that these life-and-death decisions (perhaps for more than the American people) reflect the necessary political discernment, sober judgment and wisdom they require?

Fundamentally about Good and Evil

In order to appreciate how intertwined religion and politics were during the Presidency of George W. Bush, it is important to understand and clarify the various religions that may have influenced him and, accordingly, the American political process. The religions to be discussed, and very broadly, are Christian evangelicalism and Christian fundamentalism, together comprising the Christian Right. There are many varieties of each, but all generally believe that there is a battle between good and evil throughout the world. Further, this battle is fought daily within Christian individuals, as well as in the world, in order to defeat Satan, realize redemption from sin and experience eternal life with Jesus Christ.

Christian evangelicals, especially those considered to be more fundamentalist than others, cherish many such beliefs, including the idea that “the [American] government should protect religious heritage; the United States was founded as a Christian nation; [and that] democracy should be promoted throughout the world.”² Their numbers within the United States are not insignificant as “around 40 percent of Americans describe themselves as evangelical Christians, and opinion polls regularly indicate that a quarter of all Americans believe that they

are living in the end times.”³ With regard to George W. Bush, in his first election, “roughly fifty-five percent of Bush voters were Armageddon believers.”⁴ These Christian evangelicals supported George W. Bush, and later the war on terror, as “they support state violence that deters what they label as ‘evil.’”⁵ More accurately, “state conflict that deters evil and spreads freedom is morally necessary.”⁶ None of this conflict is aimed toward the realization of peace, whether personal, regional or world, however, because “only Jesus in his Second Coming can bring true and permanent peace.”⁷

To note some of the vocabulary that is being used to depict the issues, there are two major brands of end-time Christians: the “dispensationalists” and the “dominionists.”⁸ The dispensationalists “hold that true believers will be “raptured” into heaven just before the cataclysmic war fought between “left behind” believers and the forces of the anti-Christ,”⁹ while the dominionists believe that the United States, as a Christian nation, “will play a special role representing God in the final battles.”¹⁰ Further, dominionists “work towards the construction (or ‘reconstruction’) of an American theocracy to fulfill God’s end-time plan.”¹¹ The difficulty is that the beliefs of each significantly overlap. Further complications are created when the media wrongly labels the apocalyptic or theocratic ideas as “evangelical” as not all evangelicals are end-time Christians. Not all evangelicals believe in the radical interpretation of scripture, nor do all evangelicals advocate the use of military force to realize God’s word. “Dominionism” captures a number of doctrines, such as dominion theology, “kingdom now” and reconstructionism. Each doctrine is a form of fundamentalism and may, with justification, be labelled as falling within the territory of Christian extremism.

Christian fundamentalists such as dominionists or reconstructionists believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation, the devil actually exists, the Bible is God’s word, and rapture, as prophesied, will be take place.¹² Further, religious fundamentalists have “cultivated theologies of rage, resentment and revenge” and, ultimately, “fight and kill ... [in order to] bring the sacred into the realm of political struggle.”¹³ In essence, fundamentalists “display religious militance by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular behaviours.”¹⁴

Dominion theology is derived from the Bible’s Genesis 1:26-31 in which God grants humans dominion over all creation, and as such, dominionists seek to politicize faith through the realization of political power. With regard to realizing power through the exertion of influence, there are few communications media more aggressively effective than television or radio. Consequently, “dominionists control at least six national television networks ... and virtually all of [the United States’ total of] more than two thousand religious radio stations.”¹⁵ The ultimate goal of these believers is ostensibly a repressive, theocratic Christian society in which all enemies of God

SECTION 4.2

are destroyed.¹⁶ More specifically, the movement is marked by its infatuation with apocalyptic violence and military force, with dominionist leaders fostering a belief in a holy war throughout the world.¹⁷ This ecstatic belief in the cleansing power of apocalyptic violence blinds believers to the horrors of war and suffering, perhaps even the annihilation of the human race, because their beliefs suggest that God protects faithful Christians as they eradicate the enemies of God.¹⁸

If possible, Christian reconstructionism, the other most influential form of dominionism, is even more extreme. For example, while dominion theology seeks the realization of fundamentalist Christians throughout the American government, reconstructionists “look forward to nothing short of a complete remaking of society, one based on Old Testament law in all its minute detail and modeled on ancient Israel as the blue-print for a God-centered nation.”¹⁹ Reconstructionists are the most fundamental of the fundamentalists, demanding “that every aspect of human life submit to God’s law and that every non-Christian be eradicated as evil.”²⁰ With regard to the war on terror, reconstructionists believe that “the [American government’s] function is to do little more than ‘punish and restrain evil.’”²¹

The significance of the dominionist movement after 9/11, especially the reconstructionist variant, was not in its numbers, but in the power of its ideas and their surprisingly rapid public acceptance.²² Many evangelicals and others on the Christian Right, including George W. Bush, however, were likely unaware that they were perpetuating dominionist beliefs in their public responses to the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. Yet we are left with the troubling problem that any assumption that Bush and others did not understand or mean what they said requires us to believe that something that looks like a duck, and talks like a duck, is in fact anything but a duck.

Birds of a Feather Flock Together?

In order to understand George W. Bush as a man of faith, how his faith was expressed in his speeches and the influence that his faith might have had on the war on terror, it is useful to identify those people who influenced him throughout his presidency – more precisely, those people, including his inner circle at the White House, who were deeply religious or tied to the religious right. Further, George W. Bush’s political appointments and his involvement with leaders within the Christian Right might be seen as allowing dominionists to infiltrate the American government. This has been called consistent with the reconstructionist agenda to operate strategically and with stealth in order to convert the whole of government and society into a Christian nation.²³

The television evangelist Billy Graham brought the Bible’s message to George W. Bush in 1985 and was instrumental in leading him down the road to salvation. President Bush stated that “Reverend Graham planted a mustard seed in my soul ... He led me to the path and I began

walking ... a new walk where I would recommit my heart to Jesus Christ.”²⁴ As a “born again” politician, George W. Bush cultivated relationships with key ministers within the evangelical broadcasting community, like Pat Robertson and other activists on the Christian Right and “refused to condemn the growing demonization of Islam by the Christian Right leadership, ... [such that] Mr Bush’s silence [was] deafening.”²⁵

George W. Bush did not hold a press conference or conduct an interview to address the extremist comments of prominent evangelicals from whom he may have sought guidance, nor did he publically discuss Armageddon, prophecy and the relationship of these concepts to his political agenda. He did select Reverend Jack Hayford, a supporter of reconstructionism or dominionism, however, to provide the benediction to the fifty-fourth inaugural prayer service.²⁶ As well, Reverend Anthony Evans, “a friend and confidant from whom Bush often sought spiritual guidance” and who writes books on prophecy as a dominion theologian, was a key speaker at President Bush’s 2001 Washington Prayer Luncheon.²⁷ We are left to wonder whether the influence of any of these people lay behind President Bush’s comment (later withdrawn) that the war on terror was a “crusade.”²⁸ In fact, “so close did [George W. Bush] draw to evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant leaders from 2000-2002 ... it was suggested that [he] had virtually replaced evangelist Pat Robertson as the leader of the U.S. Religious Right.”²⁹

We continue to wonder what was being said behind closed doors in the Bush Administration when members like his former Attorney General, John Ashcroft, commented that “civilized people – Muslims, Christians and Jews – all understand that the source of freedom and human dignity is the Creator” and that [the United States] “will defend His creation.”³⁰ Echoing the ideology of the dominionists, deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, Lieutenant General William Boykin, stated, “the enemy is not a physical enemy. The enemy is a spiritual enemy. It’s called the principality of darkness. We ... are in a spiritual battle, not a physical one.”³¹ While it may be nothing more than the choices of words involved, in presidential speeches drafted by speechwriter Mark Gerson (an evangelical Christian), words such as “whirlwind” mirror the voice of God as expressed in the *Books of Job* and *Ezekiel*; a “work of mercy” references Catholicism’s seven works of mercy; and phrases like “safely home” and “wonder-working power” are derived from gospel hymns.³² President Bush’s famous reference to an “axis of evil”³³ is a powerful use of language guaranteed to inflame the American people: “The words associated Saddam Hussein with both Nazism (*axis*), the modern embodiment of horror for Jews, and Satan (*evil*), the ancient embodiment of horror for Christians.”³⁴

Onward Christian Soldiers: America Confronts Evil

In his Inaugural Address in January 2001, George W. Bush articulated his belief in his own and America’s divine calling to lead the world in an apocalyptic struggle between the forces of good

SECTION 4.2

and evil.³⁵ He did not shy away from referring to the “sacred origins” or the “sacred calling” of the United States. Similarly, many of President Bush’s speeches end with “God Bless America,” but on 7 October 2001, his Address to the Nation ended with “May God Continue to Bless America” which suggests that President Bush and his speech-writers “gave serious thought to the phrase and decided to emphatically reaffirm the notion that the United States has enjoyed divine favour throughout its history. [The words] provide sufficient reassurance that American policy is rooted in a faith so profound it need not be trumpeted.”³⁶ Together with the idea that America had been mandated by God to bring the celestial gifts of freedom to everyone in the world,³⁷ it is not hard to argue that President Bush believed that the United States government was the instrument of God, and charged with the responsibility to spread freedom and democracy throughout the world. In his first Inaugural Address, George W. Bush said:

We will confront weapons of mass destruction so that a new century is spared new horrors. The enemies of liberty and our country should make no mistake: America remains engaged in the world by history and by choice, shaping a balance of power that favours freedom.

President Bush went on to say “and to all nations, we will speak for the values that gave our nation birth.” Regardless of the struggle, for President Bush, the United States would flourish, because “it is the angel of God who directs the storm.”³⁸ The former President “believe[ed] that Providence had assigned him the arduous task of rescuing America from the satanic forces of evil, as if he, himself, were the embodiment of the generalized will and the unalloyed spirit of the American people.”³⁹

There is no room for compromise in the cataclysmic battle between good and evil; George W. Bush reminded the world of this reality on 7 October 2001 when he stated that “there is no neutral ground ... and every nation has a choice to make in this conflict.”⁴⁰ President Bush believed he was fighting for goodness in the conflict, but his primary opponent at the time had similar thoughts. Osama bin Laden told the world after the attacks on 11 September 2001, that “these events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of the infidels. May God shield us ... from [the infidels].”⁴¹ The language used by bin Laden to justify violence reveals significant similarities with the language used by George W. Bush. Both men preached about the concept of a tragic conflict in which “the sons of light confront the sons of darkness.”⁴² In order to accelerate the supremacy of God and eradicate evil from the world, the conflict demands that the faithful within the Christian fundamentalist movement create the conditions for the second coming of Jesus Christ. President Bush was alleged to have stated, “God told me to strike at al Qaeda and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam [Hussein], which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle

East.⁷⁴³ Despite international publicity of this comment allegedly made by George W. Bush, he never qualified or denied the remark. The remark raises the troubling idea that George W. Bush committed his country to two wars, which are still costing American soldiers their lives and the country billions of dollars, at the specific urging of a transcendental being.

George W. Bush repeatedly reminded the American people and the world of God's involvement in the war on terror. For example, on 11 September 2002, he stated that "the ideal of America is the hope of all mankind" and "that hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it."⁷⁴⁴ The concept of "America" may have replaced the concept of "God," but the words are Biblical in character.⁴⁵ When George W. Bush declared an end to combat in the war in Iraq, he honoured the American dead who "died fighting a great evil"⁷⁴⁶ and reminded those still living and fighting to spread God's word. He identified the word of God with democracy when he said to American military personnel, "and wherever you go, you carry a message of hope ...In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'to the captives come out, and to those in darkness be free.'⁷⁴⁷ Although George W. Bush was Commander-in-Chief of the American military and, as President, the head of a secular institution, his words were suggestive of a minister preaching from the pulpit, an association strengthened by his continual references to prayer.

George W. Bush believed in the power of prayer, and started each day, regardless of his location, with a prayer session. With regard to the war on terror, and following the 9/11 attack, it is interesting to note that President Bush attended a church service at Washington's National Cathedral in which he clarified that he would rid the world of evil. At the service, George W. Bush said:

I would like America ... to pray for God's protection for our land and for our people ... to pray that there's a shield of protection, so that if the evil ones try to hit us again, that we've done everything we can physically, and that there is a spiritual shield that protects the country.⁴⁸

He considered his words more of an expression of his spirituality than a war cry, however, when he stated that he "looked at [his speech] from a spiritual perspective, that it was important for the nation to pray. [Further, the speech was] really a prayer. I believed that the nation needed to be in prayer."⁷⁴⁹ This belief in the power of prayer, together with the reality that George W. Bush read the Bible every day, sought and received God's guidance as President and had some sympathies for apocalyptic theology, lends troubling credence to the accusation that President Bush and his administration were an "evangelical menace."⁷⁵⁰

God Bless America?

It is hard not to see why people have concluded that George W. Bush saw himself as an agent of God, leading God's chosen people as he rescued the world from evil. Given his repeated use

SECTION 4.2

of “biblically inflected language about good and evil, one can almost hear the words of Daniel and Jeremiah.”⁵¹ His desire to rid the world of evil through the “export of death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of this great nation” has been called a grandiose dream comparable to God’s Master Plan.⁵² This is not surprising as “it’s pretty clear that Bush’s role as a politician, president and commander-in-chief was driven by ... faith.”⁵³ If George W. Bush had been an average American citizen exercising his right to freedom of religion and expression, the world would not have been at risk, but as the leader of the most powerful country on the planet, the personal belief that he was chosen by God to battle evil without compromise leads to the more frightening possibility of plans to bring about an Armageddon on other terms than those intended by the God whom more reasonable Christians might recognize.

While religious rhetoric is nothing new in the realm of American politics, whether or not George W. Bush intended to represent right-wing Christian, evangelical – even dominionist – ideas is in a sense irrelevant to the larger problems such religious language posed for global peace and security. As President, he tried to persuade the American people that the United States’ military enjoyed divine favour, that their actions in the world had divine sanction, and at the very least associated American foreign policy with Christian concepts and ideas. Whether or not he stoked the fires of a crusade in America against Islam, he at least provided in his language ammunition for those opposed to the United States to use in support of their own versions of jihad in response. Claiming to be the instrument of divine wrath against the evildoers of the world, to be charged with building up the kingdom of heaven upon earth, or to be seen preparing for the final Apocalyptic battle, is to place a cosmic interpretation on current events that quite literally blows them out of proportion and renders a volatile situation that more dangerous for everyone involved. Perhaps it goes to show that no President is ever “just” a private person when he steps up to the microphone, and he (and his speech writers) should consider that carefully before it is too late to call the words back.

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Notes

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- 2 Wellman, 197.
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SECTION 4.2


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- 50 Leo P. Ribuffo, "George W. Bush and the Latest Evangelical Menace," *Dissent*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2006), 42-49.
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SECTION 5
RELIGION AND WAR IN
THE 21ST CENTURY

TECHNOLOGY, RELIGION AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Peter H. Denton

uman security is clearly one of the most compelling and troubling issues of our time. However human security is construed or constructed, the tendency of globalized western scientific culture is to use technological means to maintain security, or at least to minimize insecurity. In a post 9/11 environment, moreover, religion – all religion and not just Islam – seems to be regarded as a negative or destabilizing force.¹

I argue, however, that the reverse is actually more accurate: we will never achieve any significant measure of human security in the 21st century by technological means alone. Further, the uncritical reliance on technology (and the marginalizing of religion) is more likely to decrease such security. Only a better understanding of our own technology, and a willingness to acknowledge and incorporate existing religious beliefs in the context of human security on a global scale, will make it possible for the 21st century to be less bloody at its end than it has been to this point.

These conclusions emerged out of two incidents in a course I taught on technology and warfare to military personnel in the Canadian Forces Officer Professional Military Education program in 2003. In the first incident, to demonstrate the nature of technological systems and their fragility, I had challenged the class to a counter-terrorism exercise. Mayor Glen Murray had threatened to annex neighbouring municipalities, like St. Andrews, to the city of Winnipeg as a way of making them pay for the city facilities they used. On the spot, I became a member of the St. Andrews' Liberation Front, and for \$50 and a trip to Home Hardware, I told them I would terrorize the city – no one would be hurt, but they could have been – and challenged them to stop me. The confident smiles of the professionals faded as, time after time, I struck and got away unscathed. It was a quieter group, at the end of our session, when I observed that I had no specific technical training, just an awareness of the ways in which systems of technology go together.

In the second incident, a few weeks later, as the invasion of Iraq continued to unfold, I was elaborating on my opinion that the Middle East would be more dangerous without Saddam Hussein, and that it was a huge mistake for the American coalition to invade Iraq, when a student erupted in response. Angrily, he vented for several minutes on religious extremists, how they didn't care who they killed, that they were a threat to all that was good and decent, that their world was

SECTION 5.1

not one in which reasonable people had a right to exist, and how we had to do something about them. He eventually wound down, and went a little pale when he realized how intemperate he had been. The class looked at me for my response, and there was disbelief on their faces when I calmly said, first, “You’re absolutely right. I agree with everything you’ve said.” Then, in the stunned silence, I followed with the punch line: “Of course, there is also the problem of what to do about the *Muslim* extremists.” From the looks on their faces, no one had considered that in the Iraq conflict, as in every other conflict in which religion plays a role, there are fanatics of all sects and sorts on all sides who are equally a menace to the rest of us. In the first incident, the issue is the extent to which we can plan and act in ways that in fact make us secure. In the second incident, the issue is the role that belief, particularly religious belief, plays in shaping our view of the world and our response to its problems. Whether it is the tools of technological systems or the processes which employ these tools, the unsettling reality is the more closely we observe the operations of these systems, the less secure we are likely to feel.

I remember taking a history class from the University of Winnipeg on a tour of the federal virology lab in Winnipeg, and having to spend time later helping them overcome their consternation at the inadequate level of security we observed. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, we were not reassured to find that security there had been increased by putting a security guard on the roof with a pair of binoculars.

We would like to feel secure, let’s say when we travel by air; whether it is more secure or not as a result of the measures taken at airports, it has certainly become more inconvenient to fly. Yet every time I fly, I can’t help but identify a number of ways I could bring down the flight myself, knowing that I have no special training or tools, and knowing it would be impossible to stop me. I am left to conclude that it is the appearance of doing something, and the feeling of security which results, that is the most important.

Perhaps this is why 9/11 was such a shock to the North American psyche – not that the tactics or targets were a surprise, but it was the way the delusion of security was stripped away, over and over again, and in full colour, that hit us so hard. We could liken it to emergency preparedness or public health – it’s not that either will actually function in the event of a serious problem, but the optics are such that we feel more secure, provided we don’t look too closely at the systems involved. It is ironic, therefore, that when we speak of security, we are effectively operating in the realm of belief. We believe what we are told, we believe that the measures taken will keep us safe or healthy, we trust the pronouncements of those in charge, and little effort is expended on investigating the veracity of the claims that are made. Even when investigations take place and holes are exposed, somehow the belief continues that “things will be different” when something bad happens to us.

Pronouncements about security are usually couched in the language of science. We live in a culture in which popular belief in western science and technology seems, on the whole, more simplistic and naive than any equivalent set of religious beliefs. If we are told the situation is under control; that we are spraying mosquitoes to control West Nile virus; that we have a flu pandemic emergency plan; or that there is indisputable proof of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, most people believe it.

From a distance, as the song goes, the situation looks stable and reasonable and trustworthy, but the moment our views and beliefs are scrutinized in the light of events, or the contexts themselves are deconstructed, to our consternation the sense of security evaporates, along with confident predictions of what will come next. We may couch our predictions in the language of probability or hide behind the statistical veil, but there is rarely a day when nature in some guise does not render human measures futile in the face of forces we can neither predict nor control. But, like weather forecasting, as long as you can explain after the fact why you were wrong, people continue to have faith in the forecast, no matter how many times it is incorrect. The alternative – that we can neither predict nor control despite the technological tools we have at our disposal – is too frightening in its implications for us to accept.

After all, if there is one characteristic of western science and technology that we celebrate, it is predictability; using the same method and materials, we get the same answer or result, every time. One could easily argue that the only reason our systems continue to function despite their obvious flaws is because we live in what Ursula Franklin called a culture of compliance. Air travel is only possible because the overwhelming majority of people, not only in western society but around the world, want to arrive at their destination and comply with whatever the rules and regulations happen to be, however pointless. We don't examine too closely their reasons for compliance, however; it might be habit, or good nature, but it could be that the majority of people simply believe crashing domestic airliners to be wrong, particularly when they are on board. Overall security, therefore, depends more on the goodwill of the population than upon coercion or any type of technological intervention. The moment the population chooses not to cooperate, refuses to believe or changes what it believes, the system disintegrates.

Security in a connected or wired society thus depends primarily on the compliance of all participants. Anyone who uses a computer, for example, is educated or coerced into compliance in order to use the technology. To log-on, we must put in the right password to run a program, we must install it in a certain way, and if we forget the updates or a myriad of related support activities, we will be pestered repeatedly until we comply. Whether we need or want any of these things is increasingly irrelevant, as the decisions are taken by the makers, not by the users. In effect, we are surrendering our autonomy, not merely in terms of choice (which is an old

SECTION 5.1

complaint) but also the autonomy that comes from knowing and understanding the choices we might make and why.

As citizens of a globalized western scientific and technological society, we have come to live in a culture of not just of compliance, therefore, but of surrender, where in order to get something new, we must surrender what is old, preferably without thinking very much about whether our surrender is a good idea. As technological and social systems have become increasingly inter-related, this culture of surrender has meant three things: first, the loss of knowledge and skills gained by cultures over thousands of years; second, the abdication of individual responsibility for the daily choices humans make; and third, the exclusion of religious beliefs from their traditional place in the social sphere of those societies that have accepted the epistemological parameters of western science and technology.

To begin with the first, one of the tragedies of the residential school experience for Aboriginal people in Canada was the loss of language, and the resulting loss of culture. Language and culture are intimately interwoven, and never more so than in an oral culture, where the stories and what they mean are passed down from generation to generation. In oral culture, those stories are always one generation away from extinction; all it takes is for one generation to neglect or be denied its cultural responsibilities, and the next generation has lost most of the cultural heritage that has accumulated over a period perhaps of thousands of years. Lose the language, take away the social and cultural opportunity for the stories to be passed along, and the knowledge is lost forever.

While we now can see the tragedy of the residential schools, we still seem blind to what has happened to many families and local communities in Western society as a consequence of our culture of surrender. In a generation or two, we have lost the skills and abilities, the stories and even the languages that have accumulated over many generations, and we neither notice nor mourn their loss, much less take steps to reverse it. The cumulative knowledge of thousands of generations has been replaced by the latest Google search results, produced by some mysterious epistemic algorithm, and the language of Shakespeare has been truncated into a globalized English missing more vowels than it uses. One might say we are facing the MSNd of civilization as we know it!

I have surveyed classes for twenty years about knowledge and skills commonplace in my parents' and grandparents' generations – how to make bread; grow a vegetable garden; make soup from scratch; milk a cow; build a fire; make jam; preserve fruits and vegetables. Twenty years ago the results were troubling – fewer than half of any class could do or had done any of the sorts of things I mentioned. Today, the numbers are less than 20% and dropping. When I tell students that my father learned to team oxen as a child, and that I worked in a blacksmith shop, they jump

to extravagant conclusions about my age or his, not really grasping the rapidity of technological change in the last century.

We lament the extinction of species, and worry about the loss of genetic diversity, yet we have already experienced the extinction of much of what humans have learned, the hard way, and the loss of epistemic diversity is far more catastrophic than anything the biosphere has yet to endure. As the tide of western science and technology sweeps away the knowledge and skills of other cultures around the world, we face the reality that even what we have received in exchange for our own cultural heritage makes Esau's deal for the bowl of pottage look like a bargain. Go to any rummage sale, and there will be piles of knitting needles and yarn left at the end, things no one will pay a nickel for, because they don't know how to knit. Ask young people to write a set of instructions on how to make soup from a can, as I do in some of my courses, and prepare to be shocked at the level of cooking incompetence; I can only imagine the havoc they would wreak on a kitchen should they try to make it from scratch!

The answer I get in response to my critique always in some way involves the word "progress," that progress toward the new and better requires the loss of whatever is old and out of date. We don't need to know how to knit, I'm told, because there now are machines that can do it for us. People in our society often say they believe in progress, but as I ask my students, what's your unit of measure? Progress requires measurement, and any measurement requires some kind of unit, some benchmark. When we look at the implications of whole systems, or at supposed advances in the light of life-cycle costs and their environmental or social implications, the confident statements we tend to make about progress are less than persuasive. That there is change is indisputable; that many changes constitute progress is a fish of another colour. Uncritical acceptance of these changes, and the absence of any real concern over what is being lost, is a result of the second element of the culture of surrender, the abdication of personal responsibility for the choices individuals make, every day.

Most people would agree that there are social and environmental problems today. Too few, it seems, recognize these problems are a consequence of the choices they make, nor do they accept responsibility for making different and better choices as part of any solution. Someone else should do something; they don't see that they have any real choices; the choices they make are submerged in habits of thoughtlessness or the imitation of others equally thoughtless; and the excuses for inaction multiply like the plague. In the end, their own individual responsibility is transferred to external agencies, whether it is the government, or industry, or whatever else seems to be a likely candidate. Individual responsibility is replaced by a dependence upon other, often technological, agencies. So there will be an answer to environmental problems, as long as science and technology can devise one. The 1950s image of the superhero engineer still

SECTION 5.1

remains part of our cultural psyche (as do the heroic images of the doctor and the scientist) and so we live out our poor choices, oblivious to the damage we do, because we expect someone, from somewhere else, will rescue us from disaster just in time.

In teaching students about ethical choices and challenging them on their philosophy of technology and the values reflected in it, I have been impressed by their responses. Once they have been confronted with the choices they are making, they are able to identify ways of making different choices, with different outcomes and according to different principles, even if sometimes they do it while kicking and screaming. The troubling reality that confronts us when we take a close look at environmental problems, however, is that we already have all of the technology we need successfully to address them. We don't need more science or better technology; we just need the conviction and determination to use what we already have, to do what we know needs to be done. In similar fashion, the social ills of our global society, whether they are identified in terms of food, water, healthcare, conflict or economic disparity, are equally amenable to solution with the tools at hand. Once again, we lack the conviction and determination to use what we already have to solve them.

This brings me to the third element of the culture of surrender, and by a circuitous route back to the discussion of religion with which I began. We have excluded religious beliefs from their traditional place in the social sphere of communities that have accepted the epistemological parameters of western science and technology. As a result, we can't decide what we know or what we should do because we seem unable to discuss in the social sphere what we believe. It may seem like a stretch to tie issues of human security and the troubling nature of the technology upon which we rely to a dispute between science and religion, but bear with me.

In the last 125 years, the separation between church and state in North America has led to the articulation of laws, structures and educational systems that, for the most part, were proclaimed to be independent of the influences of Christian religion. The tacit if not explicit assumption, of course, is that these influences somehow were malignant, that the presence of religion – and particularly Christian religion – somehow undercut the advancement of the true knowledge that came to be associated with the activities of science. As we attempt to divide the sacred from the secular, however, I would argue we have created not only a false dichotomy that is not shared by other cultures around the world, but a dangerous one within the context of global society in the 21st century. The myth of secularity, which we bundle together with the scientific method, the root myth of our culture, has two functions: first, the substitution of “the facts” for belief and second, the disabling of any critical function in society relating to the assessment and validation of beliefs.

In the myth of secularity, a separation between fact and belief is not only possible, but desirable and even necessary. While it would take considerable time to unpack this dichotomy, suffice it to

say that the popular view would hold that science deals with the facts, where religion deals with belief. The popular view asserts the social character of the knowledge derived through science, that a fact about nature is a fact regardless of who happens to learn it, while religion is about belief that is expressed in the life and from the perspective of individuals. Science therefore takes on the mantle of the social, while religion remains in the realm of the personal. Bertrand Russell wrote that personal religion can survive and even thrive in the most scientific of ages, as long as it remains in the realm of the personal.

While this illusion may be maintained from a distance, up close the social sphere is indistinguishable from the personal. The personal religion of any individual, to a greater or lesser extent, shapes, guides – perhaps even determines – his or her actions in the public sphere. This can be said as much of the operations of science and technology as of any other area in western culture. In *The Religion of Technology*, David Noble asserts “modern technology and religion have evolved together and that, as a result, the technological enterprise has been and remains suffused with religious belief,” especially in the United States. Looking in particular at the space program, he cites example after example of the prominent roles believers have played in the development and operation of NASA, along with religious statements they have made interpreting their works and its significance. He goes on to say, “Beyond the professed believers and those who employ explicitly religious language are countless others for whom the religious compulsion is largely unconscious, obscured by a secularized vocabulary but operative nonetheless.”²²

If we look at our educational institutions, it is one of the ironies of our time that while religious believers have been sequestered into obscure corners of the academy, believers in science and technology have entire faculties devoted to furthering their beliefs as well as their knowledge and skills. Where courses and programs catalogue the skills and knowledge a graduate in science or engineering should possess, there is little time, space or faculty effort devoted to questioning the fundamentals of the scientific faith. To be fair, one also does not find courses in a Christian seminary devoted to explaining why Christianity is a false religion, nor do the educational institutions of any other faith tradition make a point of dissuading the believer. What will be different, of course, is the outraged reaction of those who profess the scientific faith, as members of faculty or as students, to the notion that they are engaged in furthering the faith rather than acquiring true and useful knowledge about the universe and how it works. I am regularly assailed with a ferocity normally reserved for heretics and apostates, and it doesn’t make my position any more secure to point out the religious fervour with which my opponents approach the subject.

Yet science or engineering graduates will have few or no courses in the philosophy of science, the sociology of science, the anthropology of science, the philosophy of technology, or any of

SECTION 5.1

a host of other academic fields in which the fundamental axioms of science and technology are considered. Nor are they likely to be challenged in any formal way about the ethical, environmental or social consequences of the science and technology they have learned to propagate. Like the religious believer, faith is a prerequisite for admission; continued faith is a prerequisite for satisfactory performance; and maintenance of the faith tradition is expected of those whose missionary zeal propels them into the calling they have chosen. Examine the language of the secular world, and wonder, as I do, about the origin of the concepts, principles and ideas that are used. You may well conclude, as I do, that these are all derivative of the religious traditions that spawned them, historically, and are infused at an individual level with the personal religious beliefs of the practitioners.

Yet despite this, we continue to live out the myth of the secular, especially in science and technology, and exclude beliefs, especially religious beliefs, from the realm of social utility. While the disabling of belief within the public sphere – and the denial of its force and efficacy – does not remove it from play, it does make it difficult to use constructive beliefs or to defend against destructive ones in the pursuit of the collective social good. Instead, the beliefs that for good or ill characterize our society have been driven underground where they remain either disguised or inarticulate, if nonetheless powerful. When we make claims about social knowledge and deny the social character or value of belief, we therefore define knowledge as what we have found to be useful, and social knowledge as that which is useful to society. If such knowledge turns out not to be useful– like weather forecasting – then we have no grounds for maintaining its status as knowledge. Left with the epistemic dilemma of whether to choose belief or nothing, it seems we are willing to choose nothing, continuing to act in the social sphere without assurance that our actions will lead to a meaningful or desirable end.

Thus, we have a dual problem: the knowledge we derive from western science and technology is not as useful as it needs to be, either in securing our future as citizens of the planet or in defending that security against the forces of politics or nature. At the same time, thanks to the myth of secularity, we have excluded from the public sphere, the social value or utility of the religious beliefs we hold, however inarticulately, as individuals, thereby undercutting the means by which we can assess the validity of our own beliefs or those of other individuals or societies.

As a result, when we are confronted with the simple, forceful and often ruthless recitations of “what I believe” from extremists or fanatics of all sects and sorts, whether or not their statements are punctuated by bomb blasts or their economic and political equivalents, we stand by helplessly as they take the high ground in the intellectual, social and cultural battlespaces of the 21st century. As a scientific and technological society, we have little or nothing to say in response to

extremism, because what we believe as a society or as a culture has been excluded from public debate, and we are left instead trying to find something to do.

This has not always been the case, as I discovered reading in the popular intellectual literature of the period between the two world wars, the interwar period as it came to be called. In the aftermath of the Great War, the war that was to end all wars that saw instead the end of most of the world's empires, the fundamental assumptions of all belief systems, including religious ones, were shaken to the core. I was intrigued by the flood of popular writing, from intellectuals as well as relatively obscure people, on the nature of humanity, the problems of society, the future of civilization, and the role that values and beliefs needed to play in the brave new world that had dawned.

One of these writers was Raymond Blaine Fosdick, brother of the famous radio preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick, a friend of the Rockefellers. In 1928, he published a collection of commencement addresses and lectures he had given on a variety of themes, collected under the title of *The Old Savage in the New Civilization*.³ His theme, and the theme of many other popular authors, was that technological development had outstripped moral development, that science and technology had given dangerous new weapons to the same old savage, and that for civilization to survive, the old savage had to grow up. It is a thoughtful book, and eighty years later Fosdick's commentary is just as relevant on the issues our society continues to face. What makes it an interesting book, however, is the role Fosdick went on to play to put some of his ideas into practice. First as trustee and then as president of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1936 to 1948, Fosdick was instrumental in changing the funding priorities of the Foundation toward the support of the social sciences, or as they were called at the time, the sciences of man, and away from the hard sciences. The old savage had quite enough tools, it seems, but he needed to learn more about himself and how he should use them. This funding shift made significant progress possible in the fledgling fields of modern sociology and anthropology, in particular.

Looking at what else was said and done in the 1920s and 1930s obviously leads to the conclusion that people like Raymond Fosdick failed in what they attempted. Yet once the dust settled in 1945, we may find their principles and ideas reflected in everything from the United Nations, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the Marshall Plan, the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal and eventually to the work of Lester Pearson and the peace-keeping activities for which Canada would like to be known. The old savage continues to live in the new civilization, and though the tools and specifics may have changed, the same basic problems and concerns remain.

While in the 1920s and 1930s there were many religious and philosophical reflections on what the new civilization should mean and what beliefs it should embody, however, there is little such public discussion today. The middle ground of discussion has given way to the polarities of debate.

SECTION 5.1

While Islamic extremism tends to make the headlines these days, extremism in general is alive and well in the rhetoric and activities of many other individuals and groups. To pick up again on the second incident I mentioned at the beginning of the lecture, extremists are fanatical in their beliefs, some of which might be religious, some political, some economic, but all of which are ideological in nature. (That all such ideologies are not considered religious in nature as well is somewhat perplexing, as they tend to demonstrate the same psychological and sociological characteristics, though in the extreme.) As a society, we are paralyzed by extremists because we are unable to have a reasonable discussion about what we believe. Instead, we skip straight to what should be done, assuming that in the application of our tools, we will find the answer we need. So, we polarize the country for a decision about whether or not the troops in Afghanistan should be brought home; we apply the tools of a political commission, a referendum, or a rally in the streets. We don't ever take the debate into the public arena where it belongs, and instead ask what we believe our responsibilities as Canadians should be when it comes to grappling with the problems of our world.

Yet it is no real help for us just to ask the question, "What do we believe as Canadians?" and hope for some obvious consensus. Expressions of belief in the social sphere have been trivialized into what people believe about who will win the next football or hockey game, or which actor will win some award, or who would make the best prime minister. We should instead begin with communities of conscious practitioners in the realm of belief, the various religious communities, and ask how what they believe, as Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists living in Canada, can be reflected in what we do together as Canadians. As First Nations and Aboriginal communities heal and rediscover their spiritual and cultural voice, out of what they believe, they will also speak clearly about what Canada should do in the world.

Unfortunately, however, religious belief has been excluded from the social sphere with the acquiescence of the religious groups themselves. Religion in Canada has not only become personalized, it has become ghettoized, as well. Whether it is a United Church ghetto, a Jewish ghetto, a Muslim ghetto, or a Catholic ghetto, what goes on inside is isolated from what goes on outside, sometimes within sight of its own walls. Christian groups, in particular, are so focused on their own survival or on internecine conflict that there is little time, energy and thought left over for the social engagement that used to be a central element of institutional Christianity. Yet while religious groups may have an important role to play in articulating and focusing what we believe as a society, even when they emerge from the ghetto to speak, society has little interest in what is said. As an example, I spent a couple of years working with a fine group of articulate and knowledgeable people within the United Church developing a policy statement on genetically-modified foods. It was the most thorough and balanced document I have seen on the subject before or since, and yet when it was released, there was no response or comment from anyone

outside the church. The work that was done, and the wisdom that was offered, vanished without a trace, because of its origin within a religious group. While not all that religious groups have to offer is necessarily wise, by bringing belief back into the realm of public discourse, we have the means to consider, reflect and assess the value of what, at the moment, remains private conversation.

So, to bring things to a close, I offer four final points: First, we need to affirm the importance of belief in the public sphere, not as an indication of fanaticism, but as a collective expression of the values and choices we make every day as individuals. Even in the world of science we so carefully construct, we cannot escape the essential role played by what we believe. Moreover, whether we hold or oppose religious beliefs, both our support and our opposition frame our personal perspective on the nature and value of the knowledge we gather in the secular world.

Second, we need to recognize that Western science and technology, however they are globalized, are still white, Western, European and North American capitalist Judaeo-Christian science and technology; they are not universal expressions of truth about the universe, but expressions of the culture that produced them, with the values of this culture embedded in everything from the axioms at the root of the scientific method to the applications of the technology that science has spawned. We therefore need to unpack, consider, sort and judge these values, and be willing to relinquish or to change those values that threaten our future or the future of the planet.

Third, we need to refocus our educational institutions, and the research they support, in the direction of philosophical and social scientific analysis of who we are, what we know, and what we are doing, tying this analysis to a similar understanding of the nature and importance of religious belief. While it would be nice to find another Rockefeller Foundation to divert in this direction, the same choices can be made by educational institutions that commit faculty and program resources, not merely rhetoric, to a more holistic, multidisciplinary assessment and study of the fundamental assumptions that lie at the heart of the scientific and technological society. We don't need more tools, the consequences of whose use we don't really understand; nor do we need more ingenious ways of reshuffling the financial deck or constructing a more profitable business plan. Instead, we need a vision of a world in which it is possible for us all to live, and then to select and use the tools we need to create it.

Finally, for there to be security for all the citizens of Earth in such a future world, we need to enable the language and power of religious belief that is common to all of us, whether we are comfortable or familiar with using it or not. Concepts like peace and justice, equality and individual worth, children and family, good and evil, need to be reclaimed from the personal religious repositories in which they have languished, and brought back out into the community where they belong. Religious groups need to articulate what they believe, not just to themselves, but to the society in which they live. In its turn, society needs to respect and listen to the

SECTION 5.1

wisdom, particularly the wisdom of the elders, that is offered. Only by doing this will we be able to silence the extremists whose narrow and selfish view of economics, politics or religion threatens all of our futures.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was first delivered as a lecture in the 40th Anniversary Special Lecture series sponsored by the University of Winnipeg Alumni Association, 2 November 2007.
- 2 David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 5.
- 3 Raymond Fosdick, *The Old Savage in the New Civilization* (1928; rpt. Garden City, NY : Doubleday and Doran, 1929).

PEACE FOR OUR TIME

Peter H. Denton

The picture of Neville Chamberlain waving a piece of paper in September 1938 on his return from Munich as an indication of the pact made with Adolf Hitler has become an icon of political and psychological misjudgement. The “peace for our time” he proclaimed led almost immediately to the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis and then to the outbreak of a war in 1939 for which Great Britain was perilously ill prepared.

As an icon of such misjudgement, the picture and its accompanying proclamation frequently have been used to dismiss the efforts of those since the end of the Second World War who seek some other path than military confrontation to resolve the impending conflicts of our own time. Appeasement serves no purpose, we have been told, because it leads to a weakening of one’s own position when the inevitable conflict begins; appeasement does not lead to peace, but to eventual and inevitable defeat.

As the argument tends to go, wishful thinking is not a parameter of successful strategy, whether political or military; only a realistic assessment of the situation and a willingness vigorously to protect one’s interests can lead to an acceptable resolution. If the choice seems to oscillate between “Peace is Victory” (Chamberlain) and “Victory is Peace” (Winston Churchill), it is the not the path of the dove but the path of the bulldog that ultimately such iconography represents as preferable.

This preference for the bulldog over the dove involves an interpretation of Chamberlain’s efforts that steps outside what we now know of the events of 1938. Historians and other commentators have been quick to observe that while Chamberlain clearly misjudged Hitler’s intentions, the misjudgements of Munich were but the last in a string of worse mistakes going back to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles that concluded the Great War of 1914-1918. What is more, Chamberlain and Great Britain were hardly alone in misjudging Hitler’s intentions, as the events of 1939-1941 demonstrated. The iconography of Chamberlain’s picture and proclamation thus is ultimately of little real value in evaluating strategies for avoiding or resolving conflicts in the context, not just of his time, but of our own, as well.

Yet the iconography persists. Chamberlain’s ineffectual response to the Axis powers is used as a powerful example of what we should not attempt in order to end terrorism. Whether it is a refusal to negotiate with terrorists, or to entertain peace talks with the Taliban, or Hamas,

SECTION 5.2

or Hezbollah, or any of a series of doctrinaire stances by Western countries in response to the asymmetries of current conflicts, a bulldog (however toothless) trumps a dove (however attractive or reasonable). Reconciliation, compromise and negotiation as a result may be too quickly dismissed as “appeasement,” and once these sound bites are abroad on the internet, intractability becomes a political virtue, if not a necessity, for those who might otherwise have been willing to take another path.

In the midst of what used to be called the “Global War on Terror” and facing the other wars and rumours of wars of the 21st century, such dichotomies between the iconographies of peace and war are ultimately unhelpful. Representations of “peaceniks” and “warmongers” may serve rhetorical purposes and political ends, but they are not useful tools toward achieving “peace for our time.” Finding some other way than threat and counter-threat to manage potential conflict, given the potentially lethal consequences of such a conflict for global economic, environmental and social stability, should be the preferred foreign policy option on all sides. More mature political leadership is required to guide joint decisions in a direction where national and global interests are balanced for the greater good – not merely for the good of those who swing the biggest stick, but also for the interests of those who have, at present, no stick to swing.

This is not merely wishful thinking. Competing interests and desires, whether focused on traditional areas of competition or new ones relating to diminishing resources, even water, seem inevitably to lead to conflict between parties who may choose, at some point, to resort to violent means to achieve their goals. A realistic assessment of current possibilities for global conflict not only identifies the catastrophic consequences of total war, but also the impossibility of achieving total peace in the 21st century.

Total peace seems to be impossible in large part because the boundaries and conditions of “war” in the 21st century have been altered beyond recognition. “War” is now a term more useful in the abstract than in reality, given the amorphous nature of 21st century conflict, especially when that conflict is undeclared or when it takes place between nation states and some much less definable “other.” In the 21st century battlespace, deniability is a useful *modus operandi*, given the variety of forms in which conflict, equally or more lethal than open hostilities with guns and armies, can take place without the character of previous warfare between nation states in the industrial age. The indistinct boundaries of conflict are not new (witness the various advice in the ancient and oft-cited Chinese military texts that relates to tactics other than those confined to the battlefield), but the amorphous nature of 21st century warfare emerges out of the heritage of the Cold War, in which people died by proxy or by indirect means – and even at the hands of their own government.

“Peace versus war” is therefore not merely rhetorically unhelpful. It is a paralyzing distinction. The iconography of peace and war, of peaceniks and warmongers, serves only to end any useful conversation. Such polarities are founded not in reals but in ideals, in icons of how one side chooses to represent its antagonists. Neither describes the parameters of conflict in a way that leads to either its avoidance or its resolution. Rhetorical positions are easy to maintain because they are rhetorical, and are as incapable of being defended by reason and evidence as they are impossible to overcome. Rhetorical polarities make untenable any intermediate position, however reasonable it might be, because the person who proposes it is assailed from both sides.

“Peace versus war” is thus an unhelpful dichotomy in more than one sense. To assume there is “peace” when there is no formalized state of “war” is to ignore the plight of those who continue to be victims of conflict. War is only “declared” when such a public declaration serves the purposes of the combatants – or (more precisely) the purposes of their leadership. Because peace is nominally preferred and war shunned by those whom society would consider competent to choose between them, reasonable leaders who do not publicly declare war are assumed to be maintaining a state of peace when – from the victim’s perspective – nothing might be further from the truth.

What is defined as “war” (as deliberate and organized violence, rather than casual violence) may depend entirely on one’s situation. War is defined very differently from the victim’s perspective than from any other. Politicians, generals and historians might have sufficient distance from what is going on to debate the character of war or the reasons for fighting one, but – whether death comes by bomb, bullet, blockade or bludgeon – their distinctions are meaningless to the victim. Nor is slaughter in our time necessarily high tech. The most horrific recent example of the greatest number of victims in the shortest time came in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, in which machetes, knives and spears were the chief instruments. Although the time-frame is not as compressed, there are already more victims of the ongoing “war” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than in all of the declared conflicts of the last sixty years combined. Whether or not there is an academic consensus as to whether these situations are “wars,” by expanding the definition to include ethnic and economic violence, it is easy to understand them as both organized and deliberate.

Given all the discussions about how the nature of war has changed and how the battlefield has become the battlespace, it must therefore be said that the nature of peace has changed, as well. Once peace was the absence of formal conflict, a time when nation states were not engaged in open and formalized warfare on the battlefield. There was still conflict at a lower level between nation states, and especially within them. Yet the struggles of a class system, the life of the peasantry, slaves in the fields, women and children abused and at risk, all of these could be seen

SECTION 5.2

as elements of a normal society, not evidence of a lack of peace within it. Border skirmishes localized conflict far from the centre of societies, making “peace” a product of geography as much as of intention.

In a European context after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, what we label genocide today was then considered merely unfortunate. It was not a reason for one country to go to war with another to protect citizens not their own, whatever the scale of such slaughter. What we call human rights today might have been the subject of after-dinner chastisement at an embassy dinner, but it was not sufficiently important to jeopardize trading relationships or to sow the seeds of formal conflict. (A fusillade of diplomatic notes was always preferable to real broadsides.) While to the victor went the spoils, there was no thought of erasing or irrevocably damaging the country that had been vanquished, because it was bad for business. In Clausewitzian terms, war was a continuation of political relations by other means and, while aimed at victory, victory was not understood to be annihilation.

As the battlefield has become the battlespace, the nature of conflict and how it is fought has also changed; there are now few (if any) true non-combatants, as wars are fought in ways they were never fought before. The tools of war have also changed since the days of overt plunder and pillage. Building bridges and digging wells for the locals might have once been accidental by-products of an occupying army that moved on, but they were never before seen as a means of defeating the enemy. Support of partisans might have involved weapons, training and cash, but not promises to rebuild their society or improve the educational opportunities of their children as part of the strategy to “win the hearts and minds” of the general population.

From other perspectives, such a holistic approach to resolving conflict (as opposed to winning on the battlefield) is entirely reasonable. A culture in a state of real peace needs to reflect a right relationship among all its members, with each other, and with the world in which they live. It cannot just be peace for a few; it must be peace for all. In the same way, it cannot be justice for a few, either, who have the rank and privilege to assert their rights; it needs to be justice for all. It cannot be the freedom of a few to define who they are and what they wish to do; it must be possible for all to experience and to wield such freedom. It cannot be hope only for those who have the power to affect change; it must be hope for change embodied in the lives of all people that tomorrow will be different than today. There can be no peace without justice; without justice, there can be no peace.

If this kind of rhetoric is unsettling, it is because in the 21st century what constitutes “peace” has changed as certainly as the concept of “war.” Peace can no more be defined and determined by the articles of a treaty than war can be defined and determined by an order of battle. The place where there must be peace is now as indeterminate as the place where war may be fought. Just

as the battlespace is no longer bounded by geography and time, neither is the space in which there must be both peace and justice.

Having fixated too long on the economic nature of globalization, we have been drawn (if protesting) into the globalization inherent in the environment and its problems. No longer are we able, intellectually and emotionally, to be isolated from the consequences of environmental degradation; it is not an eco-field that is destroyed, but an eco-space, one with no fixed boundaries. Global warming is, after all, global. In the same way, opportunities for peace and justice are no longer able to be confined to one part of the globe; artificial boundaries that attempt to divide off peace from war and justice from injustice are as ineffectual as attempts to stop the global flow of money or of warm air. Global peace and justice are, after all, global.

This kind of social globalization has profound implications not only for how we see the rest of the world, but also how we see our own country and how we behave as citizens of it. It is no longer reasonable to assert only national limits to responsibility, and so we find ourselves discussing “the responsibility to protect” as justification for armed intervention on behalf of those people whose national governments cannot or will not provide them with what we consider to be essential levels of justice and peace. The abuse of minority populations is no longer excusable on any grounds. Genocide or “ethnic cleansing” may be sufficient reason for intervention by a coalition of international militaries, even if there is merit to the accusation that the threshold for such intervention is determined by racial bias or economic geography.

Yet without a broader consensus (and better understanding) as to what those necessary levels of peace and justice must be, not just elsewhere but here at home, such interventions are bound to create more problems than they solve. To make armed intervention the preferred tool for expressing international concern in the 21st century is to render ourselves clumsy and destructive, the well-intentioned bull in china shop whose best option before very long is to get out before more damage is done.

As the rhetorical debate has so often gone, war fighters are not peace keepers; peace keepers are not peace makers; you can neither make nor keep peace, except by counter-productive force, in a place where the people themselves don’t want it. All these truisms are just that – true – but they are also insufficient and therefore ultimately unhelpful in the space that now shapes both war and peace in our time.

We need a new vocabulary to operate effectively on the global stage, to negotiate the complexities of inevitable conflict in the 21st century battlespace. We need to concretize the rhetoric without polarizing the debate past any reasonable conclusion, or “peace for our time” may be as illusory and as elusive as it was for Chamberlain. As the “battlespace” replaces the

SECTION 5.2

“battlefield” in cognitive as well as in tactical terms and the boundaries of conflicts become less and less distinct, using past iconographies to dismiss certain strategies of reconciliation, negotiation or compromise as “appeasement” is thus not only unwise, but potentially catastrophic.

Winning and Losing

Two of the words that have outlived their usefulness in relationship to war are “winning” and “losing.” From the victim’s perspective, there are neither winners nor losers, just victims; for others, what constitutes winning and losing depends entirely on the perspective from which the measurements of progress or regress are made. Wars are unlikely to be either “won” or “lost” in the era of “war among the peoples” (to use Rupert Smith’s term) or in “fourth generation warfare” (to use Thomas Hammes’ term). A war is more than a single campaign; any battle, however tremendous a victory or crushing a defeat, is still only one battle among many, and the lessons of history remind us that the tide inevitably turns. In the context of the 21st century battlespace, in which the battlefield has been rendered indistinct by the circumstances of conflict in our time, the tides are less discernible and the changes less dramatic. President George W. Bush’s victory speech in May 2003 aboard the *USS Lincoln* may be remembered as the most public misjudgement of whether or not a war had been won, but smaller examples of the same mentality are to be found almost daily in reports from Iraq or Afghanistan. From the perspective of the average North American citizen, winning or losing depends entirely on what yardstick is being used. Increasingly, the person doing the measuring is distrusted.

However much a struggle for existence is natural to the human condition, armed conflict (whether between or within societies) is never inevitable. It is a product of specific choices among the warring parties, some more obviously related to the outbreak of hostilities than others, but choices, nonetheless. If choices are involved in initiating armed conflict, then other choices could have been made, but weren’t. History provides any number of examples of wars that end badly for their instigators. After all, it is always easier to start a war than to predict its length, its outcome or to direct a winning script. The history of warfare is at its heart the history of unintended consequences.

Perhaps the starkest example of misjudgements and disastrous outcomes is the Great War of 1914-1918. Within a little over four years, four empires disappeared (German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian), two more were shattered or exhausted (British and French), and two new countries stepped in the global power vacuum in a way that set the stage for a later war in the Pacific (America and Japan). The extent of the catastrophe was imagined even less than its possibility was foreseen, no doubt leaving the instigators wishing they could turn back the clock and do things over again.

In the more complex context of the 21st century battlespace, we thus need to discount easy claims of the gains to be realized from war, just as we need to dispute the inconceivability that a potential war might be lost. A real cost assessment is likely to make reconciliation, negotiation or compromise (“appeasement” to the bulldog) a cheaper and more practical option; a rush to judgement (and thus to war) ignores the inevitably longer timeline for any predictable resolution of the conflict and does not calculate the resources that will be required in any war, regardless of outcome.

In 1938, it was not “appeasement” for which Chamberlain and other European leaders should have been blamed, but their mixed messages and indecisions – the faulty criteria by which potential combatants had to choose whether it would be wise or profitable to fight a war, following decades of ineptitude that stemmed from the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The key failure of their time was the collapse of the League of Nations (despite the lessons scarred into a generation by the Great War) and the inability of its leaders to find some other means than combat to resolve the disputes between nations inevitable in the post-war period. Were anywhere near the same social resources expended on keeping the peace as had been expended on prosecuting the Great War, one wonders whether it might have been “the war to end wars” after all.

Ninety years later, the point is moot, because the trajectory of the world’s political and economic relationships has effectively been determined in response to the conditions of 1919. We make our own choices and mistakes to be sure, but the homage we pay to the now-gone veterans of the Great War for their sacrifice continues to sidestep the historical assessment that those sacrifices were unnecessary – blood spilled on the altar of arrogance, incompetence and ignorance, because of the mistakes which others made thinking that there could ever be a “winner” in an industrial war. There are always losers, just as there are always victims, but “winning” that kind of a war makes a Pyrrhic victory pale by comparison. As the weapons of war improved, the consequences of engaging in what could be called “total war” worsened, raising the question even before the atomic bomb as to whether there could ever be a “winner” at all – or just greater or lesser numbers of victims. The last person left standing on a battlefield might in some sense be called the winner, but in the battlespace, that “last man standing” scenario is too horrific to contemplate. Total war in the 21st century can never lead to total victory, but it can certainly lead to total devastation.

While the spectre of nuclear annihilation has (unwisely) faded to the back of our collective memory, despite ongoing nuclear stockpiles and sloppy international controls, inter-state warfare – marked by boundaries in time and space – has been replaced by Smith’s “war among the peoples,” or Hammes’ “Fourth Generation warfare.” These different types of wars (not

SECTION 5.2

entirely new in their execution) are undertaken by insurgencies that use the tools of what has been inappropriately tagged as “asymmetric warfare” simultaneously to pursue military and political objectives.¹

While in the case of armed conflict between nation states it has always been the leadership – not the people – who have chosen to fight a war, it would be interesting to research whether “war among the peoples” reflects a wider (and thus more democratic) social and cultural decision to fight. If so, it is a troubling development on all sides, because where in past societies the leadership made decisions for war and social convention or laws compelled the cooperation of the people, the prospect of populations socialized toward war (and against peace) makes the cessation of armed conflict much more difficult to negotiate. War promoted toward material goals can be either won or lost; war promoted toward an indeterminate enemy to achieve indefinable goals can never create winners, only victims. To use the current jargon, these days we talk about “winning hearts and minds,” even though we are not sure how to go about it, because at some level it is acknowledged that violence, short of annihilating “the enemy,” will not bring insurgencies to an end. Given the complexities of the 21st century battlespace, there needs to be a global refocusing of the various actions that result from answering the question “What to do in our world?”

What To Do in Our World?

The days when nation states might have separate and compartmentalized operations responsible for military affairs, foreign policy, the environment, or the economy are long gone. There is no longer a need for “inter-departmental cooperation”; there needs to be a complete recasting of how we see the inter-relationships of life in a globalized society in which all of the tools at our disposal, both in terms of analysis and of intervention, are able to be used in concert. Assuming we want “peace,” “justice” and “prosperity,” we need first to benchmark them in terms of past experience, current circumstance and some plausible future condition, and not only for ourselves but also for the other people with whom we share the planet. If, on such examination, these objectives are simply unattainable, then the search for “peace for our time” is rebadged into an inquiry as to who benefits from the instabilities that generate those wars and rumours of wars that make the objectives it requires impossible to achieve.

In the 21st century, we face the dual problem of having a social political system, but a private economic system. Social change requires the consensus and mobilization of large numbers of individual citizens, but exploiting the metaphorical “village commons” leads primarily to private profit. Whether the “private profit” is individuals, corporations or national states, the global commons that is at environmental risk yields benefits only to fewer and fewer of the globe’s citizens, as the gulf between rich and poor people continues to grow. Apply the same assessment to warfare, and it seems war is a profitable activity for those who are not its victims. For

manufacturers of the materiel required for industrial warfare in the electronic age, peace is bad for business; long-term peace and stability would mark the end of their business entirely. As long as it seems possible to profit from the economic activities of war without becoming its victim, there are economic disincentives to peace.

It is interesting how the Western world shies away in horror from allowing the generals to choose between war and peace, ensuring civilian control over military operations, but continues to be oblivious to the problems inherent in allowing the merchants to choose instead. Even in a military junta scenario, the generals are at some future point held to account, if only by each other; in the merchant system, such eventual accountability is simply not present. The corporation-turned-citizen maintains its rights and profits by its activities regardless of whom, at the moment, might be nominally responsible for its direction and so – to paraphrase Clausewitz – war becomes the making of a profit by other means.

If there could be a serious economic and environmental cost assessment of any potential conflict within the battlespace, there might be some utility in a business model for weighing the benefits of peace against the risks of war, provided the profit-takers are not the ones doing such an assessment. In terms of “what to do in our world,” however, the risks of economic imperialism are the same as the risks of political imperialism in earlier times; if there is no corresponding benefit for all parties involved, the arrangement is unsustainable whoever supposedly “wins.” In the battlespace, wars will not be fought by any rational player for purely economic gain, either in the short or long term, because the real costs will always outweigh the intended benefits. Though 21st century wars are more likely to be fought for the land on which resources are to be found, short of a global monopoly on something crucial and irreplaceable, economic gain within the battlespace depends on the acquiescence even of those who might in fact have been the victims of the conflict. Global economics translates into global economic insecurity, for the victorious player who pushes too hard by force of arms might be forced by its victims to concede on the stock market what was won on the battlefield.

In the end, while it would be nice if we could wave a piece of paper and make pronouncements, peace in our time will result from the equivalent of what leads to victory in war – boots on the ground. The real estate of peace and security needs to be won a foot at a time, and at a cost that may be measured not just in dollars but also in lives. What concerns me is the inability of both the leadership of our society and its members to recognize that in the 21st century, this real estate is more likely to be won by other means than conventional warfare, and by other people than the military. If there are few (if any) non-combatants in the battlespace, in the equivalent “lifespace” everyone is certainly a participant. Every day, as citizens we each make ethical choices that either increase or decrease global tensions, damage or heal the environment and

SECTION 5.2

either fuel conflicts or encourage their resolution. Many of those ethical choices go unnoticed, made unconsciously as we accept the flow of events around us instead of understanding what is going on and making deliberate, responsible and accountable decisions.

To accomplish “peace for our time,” average citizens thus need to be overtly engaged in economic and political decisions that lead to global distribution of the intangibles of peace and justice as much as to the tangibles of clean air, clean water and sufficient food. However significant “hearts and minds” might be to controlling the battlespace to one’s own advantage, in the lifespace there is little point in winning hearts and minds while leaving the stomachs empty. Pragmatic answers are required to lifespace issues, and not ones weighed primarily in terms of immediate effects on “jobs” (which can both appear and vanish for any number of reasons unrelated to security issues) either at home or abroad. Nor should general economic benchmarks be more important than any other. After all, however profitable the activity, one needs to live to spend the profits.

In a larger context, there is an equivalent need for international laws accepted by all nations regarding the responsibilities of national governments to their own citizens, to the global community, and to the planet as a whole. This may seem like pie in sky, but the universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations in 1945 is an example of a very different scrap of paper that has led to a more secure future than the League of Nations was ever able to achieve. Unless the circle of concern can be widened beyond ourselves – either ourselves as individuals, as a community, or as a country – then the collective enterprise which is the lifespace of the 21st century will be cluttered with unintentional global actors, making potentially catastrophic decisions for the rest of us by pursuing their own selfish interests. If the lifespace irretrievably becomes the battlespace, we will not have “peace for our time” nor will we see it in any future time, either.

In 1928, Raymond Blaine Fosdick published a collection of commencement addresses and lectures entitled *The Old Savage in the New Civilization*. Out of his experience with the United States delegation to the League of Nations, and his reflections on the relationship between science, technology and society (which led eventually to him first becoming a trustee and then, in 1936, President of the Rockefeller Foundation), Fosdick’s title captured the contemporary concern that moral development had not kept pace with technological development. Whatever the new tools, whatever the technological marvels, it was still the same old savage, capable of causing the devastation of the Great War of 1914-18 and with the potential for much worse if a new personal and social morality could not be developed in time.

European culture, and by domino effect cultures around the world, had suffered a collapse of its structures of meaning as a consequence of the Great War. Whether these structures had been primarily moral, or political, or religious, their replacement by the ideologies of the 20th century

proved to be as catastrophic as anything that was lost in the trenches of a global, industrial conflict. Unfortunately, the problem of “the old savage in the new civilization” continues to haunt the great grand-children of the Lost Generation, who have watched the promises of fascism, communism, socialism, capitalism, liberalism and democracy ring hollow since 1919.

How the old savage might survive in the new civilization continues to be a religious and moral problem in our time, just as it was after the Great War. Political, economic or military efforts to resolve conflict in the 21st century battlespace will fail if the religious and moral dimensions of that conflict are not also addressed at the same time. Structures of meaning are cultural constructs; we need to create a new global structure of meaning that enmeshes the individual and the local in a larger understanding of what all those immediate and often painful experiences might mean for civilization as a whole should they not be resolved (where possible), or transcended (through forgiveness and reconciliation).

If we are in need of a new vocabulary to shape that global structure of meaning, “believers in the battlespace” represents the potential of belief for social and cultural transformation, not merely the presence of believers in situations of conflict. As the face of war has changed, so has the opportunity for the application of religious belief to the way in which the battlespace is manipulated. It would be a lost opportunity, and potentially a catastrophe, however, if these believers were only identified as those who seek an Apocalypse of their own making, as a result of the way they have misinterpreted the principles of their religion – whether Christianity, Judaism, Islam or some other tradition.

“The fanatics of all sects and sorts” today are those believers who interpret (and manipulate) current events in terms of some “end time” situation or who take it on themselves to become soldiers in some physical version of a cosmic war. The “Apocalypse” in Greek means “the revealing”; in every generation since the Book of Revelation was written there have been believers who choose to interpret what is supposed to be revealed in terms of their own experience. The attempts to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem or to destroy the Dome of the Rock, the efforts to maintain the state of Israel or to eliminate it, as two examples, are dangerous misinterpretations of what in Christian and Jewish tradition the return (or arrival) of the Messiah might mean. The notion of some cosmic war between Islam and Christianity is equally wrong; as a global community, we cannot survive the consequences of either jihad or crusade in the 21st century, regardless of who instigates it or who ultimately is left standing in the midst of the rubble to claim “victory” for God, Yahweh or Allah. It can be argued that prophets foretell, but that those who try to enact those prophecies are merely fanatics, revealing nothing about the Divinity but only just how far these individuals are from truly understanding and living out the core beliefs of their religious tradition. Instead, we must use what we believe to make the changes necessary to

create a “peace for our time” that will allow future generations to search for wisdom and meaning on their own terms. To do this, we need new tools, new vocabulary, and more wisdom in the analysis that we undertake of the challenges and conflicts of the 21st century.

From Battlespace to Battlesphere?

While “battlespace” tries to depict the dimensions of 21st century warfare that extend beyond the conventional parameters of the battlefield, it is ultimately unsuccessful. Its chief inadequacy as a concept is its lack of specificity in relation to the other elements of 21st century life. “Battlefield” has specific geographical and tactical dimensions that, by its very nature, “battlespace” leaves indistinct. This vagueness is made more problematic by considerations around society and culture (including religion) that are even less capable of definition. The analysis of current systems through the use of the concept of “battlespace” is thus dimensionally and operationally inadequate. We know, in other words, that we are dealing with something more than a battlefield and so we call it a battlespace instead, but we are unable to take positive steps to demonstrate how this new concept applies to operational considerations without raising more questions than we answer. To cast all 21st century life and its issues in terms of the “battlespace,” moreover, presumes a level of conflict that is both inevitable and perpetual and is therefore pessimistic in the extreme. In analytical terms, “battlespace” is thus a blunt instrument; however inadequate “battlefield” might be to describe current situations, the revised concept creates new problems even as it solves other ones.²

If instead we were to use the term “battlesphere,” it would provide us with some useful conceptual and analytical tools for understanding 21st century conflict and enable us to discern ways in which we might work toward “peace for our time.”

Ecologists have long proposed the idea of a biosphere to capture the web of organic interactions that comprise life on earth (hence the “sphere”). To capture the more complex relations of both organic and inorganic systems, the term “ecosphere” was coined. (To be clear, to conceive of the ecosphere in planetary terms is not to claim the concept of Gaia is more than a useful metaphor for dynamic system interrelationships.) While both terms incorporate human life, neither reflects the web of cultural and social interactions that make us “human,” however, something that in its turn Wade Davis dubbed the “ethnosphere” – “the sum total of all thoughts and intuitions, myths and beliefs, ideas and inspirations brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness.”³ Extend that definition, in terms of the sociology of knowledge that would hold the impossibility of this consciousness without its embodiment in some form of practice, and the ethnosphere becomes the totality of human motivations toward personal, social and cultural activities and the interpretation of what they mean.

Each of these spheres has its own self-sustaining interrelations, as a system in its own right. Yet if we consider the intersection of the spheres in the manner of Venn diagrams, where the intersection represents the intensity and extent of their interrelation, the greater the area of intersection, the greater is the intensity of their interrelation. Thus the biosphere is wholly surrounded by the ecosphere, because organic life cannot exist outside of the physical parameters of the ecosphere that the habitable parts of the planet provide. Should for some reason the ecosphere happen to shrink, where the overlap ceases, life ends.

If we intersect the ethnosphere with the ecosphere, there are elements of the ethnosphere that exist independent of biological or physical processes. (Religious belief, for example, would fit here, though its practice obviously also is part of the intersection with the ecosphere.) Thoughts, beliefs, ideas, those perceptions of meaning in the universe that lead to human activities, are not necessarily correlated with anything organic or inorganic. Yet many of these ideas and beliefs are related to activities, and the argument may be made that as human populations have increased, along with their area of habitation and the environmental effects of their operations, the intensity of the interrelation has grown as the two spheres have increasingly overlapped.

Intersect the ecosphere and the ethnosphere, and the area resulting is where human beliefs, culture, ideas and society affect in a material way their relation to the planet and the life it contains. (Take, for example, the idea of “globalization” as applied to the exploitation of natural resources for human consumption – this overlaps the ethnosphere and the ecosphere absolutely.) The area of intersection or interrelation between these two entities is more a product of the ethnosphere than the ecosphere. While it can be argued that the ecosphere is shifting as a consequence of global climate change, the ethnosphere is more dynamic in its expression because it is in large respects a product of humans thinking. Thus, in terms of spatial dynamics, the ecosphere is relatively static, in one place, while the ethnosphere moves more dynamically, constrained by and anchored in the activities of those humans who do the thinking or believing. It is for this reason that issues of environmental sustainability must be approached in ethnospheric terms – the social and cultural dimensions of human life – rather than only in some technical fashion. In the absence of the ability to apprehend and understand the overlap of the ethnosphere and the ecosphere – how ideas, beliefs, society and culture affect our interrelations with the ecosphere – environmental sustainability is impossible.

If we add the battlesphere to the intersections of ecosphere and ethnosphere, the resulting intersections provide a means of characterizing the critical issues posed by 21st century warfare and the corresponding need for “peace in our time.”

The battlesphere is the operational sphere surrounding a particular conflict, including within that sphere the dynamic relationships of the geographical, logistical, tactical, strategic and human

SECTION 5.2

elements involved, and bounded in all directions by its causal effects. It is larger or smaller, depending on the elements of a specific conflict, and can both grow and shrink over time. Combining as it does elements both of the ecosphere and the ethnosphere, the battlesphere is a self-perpetuating system, at least as long as there is conflict (real or potential) around which it can be drawn – something that critics of military culture have often maintained, as they consider the perpetuation of concepts, ideas, behaviours, tactics, etc., in military institutions long past the point they are warranted in terms of practical relations to the outside world or its ideas. Such archaisms have a place that is defined and maintained within the battlesphere and are unassailable until they are intersected by either the ethnosphere (making them intellectually, socially or culturally untenable) or the ecosphere (making them physically impractical or impossible).

To identify the most obvious interactions, battlesphere operations have direct effects on the ecosphere. Whether it is the debris of battle, the use of materials, the effects of production or the diversion of resources, in addition to the obvious implications of where and how battles are fought, the larger the intersection of the two spheres, the greater the intensity of the overall ecological impact. These spheres move in relation to each other; total war in the 21st century would involve the virtual overlap of the two, making the intensity such that environmental systems would be devastated and the longer the conflict, the more devastating it would be. Further, the more of the ecosphere intersected by the battlesphere, the less there is for anything else; planetary war requires planetary resources. (This of course is quite apart from the catastrophic scenarios linked to the use of nuclear weapons and the concept of “global winter.”) The intensity and kind of these physical interactions between the battlesphere and the ecosphere can be counted and measured – and should be, as a decision-making parameter of the nature and character of any conflict that might be undertaken. Failure to consider (or to monitor) the boundaries of the battlesphere could easily translate into both ecological and battlespherical disaster.

When we superimpose the third sphere, the ethnosphere, however, we create another set of inter-relations that is perhaps even more crucial. Intersect the ethnosphere and the battlesphere, and the resulting area is where human beliefs and ideas, reflected in social and cultural practices, affect the shape and character of any conflict. In reciprocal fashion, battlesphere operations contribute beliefs, ideas, as well as social and cultural practices to the ethnosphere – or perhaps perpetuate them. (An example of this would include the formation and perpetuation of a “warrior culture,” quite apart from whether this is any more wise or useful in the new civilization than the Old Savage himself.)

A sphere maintains its shape and rigidity without dependence on other elements outside; in fact, the pressure from inside and outside is balanced, in order for that shape to be maintained.

A sphere may grow or shrink, but the proportions remain constant or the shape is lost. Because each sphere is therefore an entirely separate and self-contained system, it can compensate for negative interactions from the other spheres through shifting to reduce the areas of overlap or interrelation and exclude the elements from other spheres that endanger the internal operations of its own sphere. Thus, if the intersection between the ecosphere and the ethnosphere becomes too intense, the ethnosphere might rotate away and reduce the interaction to lessen environmental destruction by emphasizing the realm of ideas more than the realm of their enactment. In the same way, if we consider the ethnosphere in terms of religion, where people are confronted by absurdity or catastrophe, certain religious beliefs may be rotated out of the intersection to permit those beliefs to continue in the ethnosphere unaffected by physical reality (ecosphere) or by conflictual reality (battlesphere).

The scale and intensity of our relations with the planet constrains human activities in both the ethnosphere and the battlesphere, however, leaving less and less of those spheres outside the area of intersection with the ecosphere. In other words, unless we live entirely in the world of ideas and beliefs (an impossibility for humans) or pretend the battlesphere is independent of the physical world in which its effects are felt (an equal absurdity), environmental sustainability must be the crucial consideration in all things. Of course, battlesphere planning may disregard intersections with the physical elements in the ecosphere and the social, cultural and intellectual (or religious) elements in the ethnosphere. That such planning is short-sighted and dangerous to the point of utter folly should be obvious; that it is happening is equally obvious. If we consider that conflict in the 21st century can just as easily be economic and industrial as military or political, the nature of battlesphere operations is thus as multi-faceted and as extensive as any conflict in the “battlespace.” Yet, instead of the boundaries indefinite in terms of space and time that the battlespace concept requires, there are distinct boundaries to the battlesphere in terms of the specific effects resulting from any particular conflict that takes place.

The greater the overlap between ethnosphere and battlesphere, the more intense is the conflict and the more difficult it will be to resolve it. “Peace for our time” requires minimal intersection between these spheres; the smaller the battlesphere and the fewer things we have to fight about, the more likely this is to happen. Similarly, the smaller the battlesphere in relation to the ecosphere, the less are its environmental effects.

Outliving the Old Savage in the New Civilization: Some Closing Thoughts

Religious language has long been co-opted into various kinds of conflict; religious beliefs have long been used as tools to manipulate and motivate people toward destructive ends. We must realize those beliefs are only some of the beliefs present in the ethnosphere (which is their origin and the place they belong). It is the area of their intersection with the battlesphere and the

SECTION 5.2

ecosphere that both needs to be identified and understood if we are to learn the moral lessons that are required to survive in the new civilization of the 21st century.

Ultimately the human person is the pivot around which the three spheres move and which determines their relation. Even if there is only one individual person linking the three in a particular way at a particular time, they are inextricably related. The more people stand together, the larger the area of interaction becomes and thus the more intense the interrelationships that occur. Individual belief, individual choice, individual responsibility, individual action, these become the locus of the universe as we understand it, and everything else unfolds outward from that point.

You may note that nowhere in this narrative has the word “truth” been used in relation to religious beliefs. This is intentional. However much we might believe that Truth exists, it exists in the ethnosphere, and efforts to bring it into relation with the physical world or embody it in the lives and decisions of individuals is guaranteed to involve the operations of power, one of the fundamental parameters of the battlesphere. Simply put, the desire to assert Truth in a religious context is an exercise of power, one that unnecessarily creates a battlesphere that entirely overlaps the ethnosphere. If we could stop insisting upon Truth in religion, politics or science and focused instead on wisdom and understanding – which are partial and developmental, not absolute – we would live in a more peaceful and sustainable society.

The most celebrated “atheist” of the 20th century, the brilliant philosopher, Bertrand Russell, had little good to say about the social expression of religious belief, which in terms of its historical trajectory in European contexts had yielded little of the kingdom of heaven on earth. To be more accurate about what he believed, however, Russell did not deny the existence of God so much as he denied our ability to know, in absolute terms, whether or not God existed. In similar fashion, he disputed philosophical claims to the knowledge of Truth. Yet his dedicated work against the perils of nuclear warfare right to the end of his life reflected an operational metaphysic, a metaphysic that *functioned* as though it were true in order to guide his decisions and his actions, as opposed to one that *could be proven* to be true.⁴ Such proof was irrelevant in terms of what he considered to be important and what he chose to do as a result. In effect, his understanding of the ethnosphere intersected with both the ecosphere and the battlesphere in ways that required him to act against the ideas and decisions of those who did not adequately understand the catastrophic outcomes that would inevitably result from such assertions of “Truth,” whether the ideologies they held were political or religious in nature.

If Sir George Mackenzie’s main assault in *Religio Stoici* (1663) and in his professional career as Lord Advocate of Scotland was against the fanatics of all sects and sorts in 17th century Scotland, he had the right idea. The real enemy was not the Covenanting Presbyterians themselves, but the fanaticism on all sides that makes the assertion of religious truth dominant over all other

concerns, or which seeks to impose limits on the way we should live other than with what Albert Schweitzer much later would call “reverence for life.” In a similar sense, this is precisely what ecologist Thomas Berry wrote about more recently, as he depicted the new age into which he believed we were moving, whether it was an Ecozoic age or some other term for it. The quantum leap of hope required to take humans out of the despairing circle of climate numbers we now face is a religious or metaphysical leap, requiring faith in something bigger than individuals – or individual religious traditions. Yet that quantum leap may not be in the direction of fanatical claims to certainty or “Truth” by one religious tradition or by one group of people, at the risk of rendering the ethnosphere, the ecosphere and the battlesphere into one all-encompassing entity that culminates in some catastrophic global conflict.

We need to understand our role as humans within a story much larger than that of our generation, that we are the most recent part of a narrative that has been woven together out of all of the disparate threads of what has been in the process of creation for so long. The language – the vocabulary – we need to express that understanding may seem to be metaphysical and religious, and thus much less “certain” than other words we might like to use. Yet in the lifespace this is the language that is required if we are to outgrow the moral character of the Old Savage and demonstrate the wisdom we need to bring about peace not just for our time, but for our children’s children, to a point long past the seven generations that indigenous peoples would name as the necessary time frame in which to consider what we do together as keepers of the Earth.

Notes

1 Rupert Smith castigates those who misuse the term “asymmetric warfare” to describe the conditions of what he calls “war among the peoples.” For a similar assessment and the suggestion of a different term, see my “The End of Asymmetry: Force Disparity and the Ends of War,” *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 2 (Summer 2006), 23-28. Reprinted in *The Difficult War: Perspectives on Insurgency and Special Operations Forces*, ed. Emily Spencer (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 43-52.

2 While there are glimmers of some of these problems as far back as 1996, in Stuart E. Johnson and Martin C. Libicki, *Dominant Battlespace Knowledge* (1996: rpt. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2003) – especially Paul Bracken, “The Significance of DBK,” 64 – the glimmers are overpowered by an emphasis on the marvels of modern RMA-style military hardware, something that (in the absence of better intellectual and cultural tools) will be operationally ineffective where it is not extremely hazardous.

3 Wade Davis, *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World* (Toronto: Anansi, 2009), 2

4 As I have argued elsewhere, in *The ABC of Armageddon: Bertrand Russell on Science, Religion and the Next War, 1919-1938* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

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INDEX

A

Abdallah Pasha 39
Abdullah, Zain 65, 74, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*
Afghanistan xi, xii, xiii, 137, 138, 202, 210
Africa xx, 25, 65, 74, 75, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*,
138, 139, 143, 144, 145 *notes*, 147 *notes*
African Religious Traditions (ATR) 65, 68-70
Agha Khan Foundation 141
Akarli, Engin 44, 46, 48 *notes*, 49 *notes*
Aksan, Virginia 28, 32, 33, 35 *notes*
Al Jazeera 149, 159 *notes*
Al-Aqsa Mosque 52, 54-57, 61 *notes*
Al-Bashir, Omar Hassan 134, 137, 139, 144,
145 *notes*
Al-Jazzar, Ahmad Pasha 43
Allan, David 17, 21 *notes*
Armenian Genocide 33
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
141
Americans 149, 153-156, 180
Animists 65
Apocalypse 156, 188 *notes*, 215
Aretina 3
Ashdown, Paddy 86
Assembly of Experts 171-173, 176 *notes*, 177
notes
Austro-Hungarian Empire 210
Axis Mundi 51-56, 59, 60 *notes*
Ayodhya 119, 122-124, 130 *notes*

B

Babri Mosque 119, 122, 124, 129
Bajrang Dal 120, 127
Balkan War 27

Bandaranaike 114
Bani-Sar, Abol Hassan 169, 173, 176 *notes*
Bashir, Amir 39-41, 43
Battlefield 206-208, 210, 211, 213, 216
Battlespace 139, 206-216, 219, 221 *notes*
Battlesphere 216-221
Bazargan, Mehdi 169, 170, 172, 176 *notes*,
177 *notes*
Berry, Thomas 221
Bhararitiya Jana Sangh 119, 120
Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) 119-129, 131
notes
Bill of Rights 149, 153, 158 *notes*
Bin Laden, Osama 149, 159 *notes*, 184
Biosphere 197, 216, 217
Bond, Levon xix, 23, 223
Bosnia 79-90, 90 *notes*
Bosnia Herzegovina 79, 80, 83, 85, 89
Bosniaks 80, 81, 87
Boykin, William 183
British Mandate 54, 58
Browne, Sir Thomas 4, 13, 14, 18, 19 *notes*,
21 *notes*
Broz, Josip Tito 80
Buddhism 107, 108, 110-114, 116, 117, 117
notes
Buddhist xiii, xvii, 91, 92, 97, 107-116
Bulgaria 29, 31
Burāq 54
Burujirdi, Ayaltollah Muhammed Husain 164
Bush, George W. xx, 149, 153-158, 158-160
notes, 179-187, 187-189 *notes*, 210
Byzantium 23

INDEX

C

Caliph Abdul Malik 54
Caliph Al-Dhahir 54
Canada 17, 19 *notes*, 139, 141-143, 147 *notes*, 196, 201, 202, 223, 224
Canadians xi, xii, xviii, 202
Carter, Jimmy 167, 189 *notes*
Catherwood, Christopher 33, 34 *notes*, 45, 46, 49 *notes*
Catholic 28, 32, 38, 80-82, 85, 87, 93, 94, 98, 99, 114, 136, 141, 144, 147 *notes*, 202
Catholic Patriotic Association 98, 99
Catholic Relief Services 141, 144, 147 *notes*
Central Committee 91, 98-100, 102 *notes*, 142, 144, 147 *notes*
Chad 66, 71, 72, 135
Chamberlain, Neville 205, 209, 211
Charles II 3
China xx, 91-101, 101 *notes*, 102 *notes*, 149
Chirac, Jacques 156
Christian xiii, xviii, xx, 8, 10-12, 15, 16, 23-29, 32, 33, 37, 40, 42, 45, 47, 53, 56, 59, 66-69, 71, 72, 74, 75, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*, 91-98, 100-102, 102 *notes*, 107, 111-114, 116 *notes*, 117 *notes*, 119, 120, 126-128, 133-138, 143-146, 150, 153, 154, 156, 158, 158-160 *notes*, 180-184, 186, 187, 188 *notes*, 198, 199, 202, 203, 215, 226
Christianity xv, 9, 23-25, 28, 29, 39, 40, 43, 59, 60 *notes*, 65-67
Church of England 66, 150
Church of Scotland 3, 18, 19 *notes*
Churchill, Winston 205
Communism 94, 95, 99, 175 *notes*, 215
Confucianism 92
Confucius 92
Congo 66, 207
Côte d'Ivoire 66, 71, 72
Covenanters 4-6, 8, 9, 15, 16
Creole 66

Crimean War 27, 28, 34, 34 *notes*
Croatia 80-82, 89, 90, 90 *notes*
Croats 80, 81, 83-85, 87
Cultural Revolution 91, 96, 97
Czechoslovakia 79, 205

D

Danilevskii, Nikolai 30
Darfur 135, 138, 139, 141-144, 146 *notes*, 147 *notes*
Davis, Wade 89, 159 *notes*, 216, 221 *notes*
Dayton Peace Accords 79, 83, 85-88
Denton, Peter H. xix, 3, 17, 19 *notes*, 193, 205
Dharmapala 111
Dispensationalists 181
Dome of the Rock 52, 53, 56, 215
Dominionists 181-183, 188 *notes*
Domino, Antonio 137
Dostoevsky, Fyodor 31, 33, 34 *notes*
Double Qaymaqamate 41
Druze 37-47, 48 *notes*
Dryden, John 3, 19 *notes*

E

Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) 70
Ecosphere 70, 216-221
Egeland, Jan 135
Egypt 39-41, 43, 59, 60 *notes*, 138
Eliade, Mircea 51, 53, 59, 60 *notes*
England xxi, 21 *notes*, 66, 89, 150
Ethnosphere 216-221
Evangelical 56, 136, 138, 143, 147 *notes*, 149, 154, 180, 181, 183, 185, 186, 187 *notes*, 189 *notes*
Evans, Anthony 183
Extremism 181, 201, 202

F

Fanatics 8, 15, 17, 149, 200, 215, 220
 Fawaz, Leila 44, 46, 47-49 *notes*
 Ferris, Elizabeth 136, 145, 146 *notes*
 Filiki Eteria 27
 Fosdick, Raymond Blaine 201, 204 *notes*, 214
 France 27, 28, 44, 86, 168
 Freetown 66-68, 75, 75 *notes*
 Fuqaha 163, 165, 166

G

Gandhi 111, 119, 120, 123
 Gaza xiii, 57
 Genocide 33, 44, 49 *notes*, 207-209
 German Empire 210
 Gerson, Mark 183
 Giroux, Henry 155, 158, 160 *notes*
 Globalization 209, 217
 Goodman, Alan 56
 Graham, Billy 182
 Great Britain 27, 29, 59, 60 *notes*, 90, 205
 Greek Revolt 27
 Guinea 68
 Gujarat 119, 120, 126-129, 131 *notes*

H

Hackett, Ken 141
 Hadith 54
 Halakha 56
 Hammes, Thomas 59, 61 *notes*, 210, 211
 Harding, Sharlene xix, 65
 Hayford, Jack 183
 Hindu 107, 115, 119-130, 130 *notes*, 131 *notes*
 Hindutva 119, 121-123, 125-129
 Hitler, Adolf 205
 Hodson, David M. xx, 179

Holy League 26

Hosking, Geoffrey 30, 33, 35 *notes*

Hukumat-i Islami (Islamic Government) 163, 165-173

I

Ibrahim Pasha 40, 41, 68, 70, 150
 Immigrants 68, 70, 150
 India xvii, xx, 79, 107-109, 111, 112, 119-126, 128-130, 130 *notes*, 131 *notes*, 149
 Intifada 51, 57
 Iraq 138, 147 *notes*, 155, 163, 164, 185, 189 *notes*, 193, 194, 210
 Islam 23, 24, 28, 32, 47, 48 *notes*, 52-54, 59, 60 *notes*, 65-71, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*, 90 *notes*, 136, 138, 145, 146 *notes*, 163-166, 169-171, 173, 174, 174-176 *notes*, 179, 183, 186, 193, 215
 Israel xiii, xv, 20 *notes*, 52-58, 61 *notes*, 154, 160 *notes*, 166, 180, 182, 215

J

Jackson, Clare 18, 20 *notes*
 Jaffna 108
 James II 3
 Janata Dal 123
 Janjaweed 135
 Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party) 116
 Jefferson, Thomas 153
 Jerusalem 28, 51-60, 60 *notes*, 61 *notes*, 215
 Jews xv, 51-56, 58, 183, 202
 Jogeshwari 124
 Judaism ix, xiii, xv, xviii, 51, 52, 55, 59, 60, 215

K

Kar Sevaks 123
 Khalaf, Semir 38, 46, 47, 47-49 *notes*

INDEX

Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah 163-174, 174-177 *notes*
Khomiakov, A.S. 30
Kosovo 82, 90
Kosovo Polje, Battle of 82
Krio 66-68, 70, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*
Kucuk Kainardji, Treaty of 26

L

Lang, Andrew 6, 18, 20 *notes*
League of Nations 211, 214
Lebanon xiii, 37-48
Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei 96, 97, 102 *notes*
Li 59, 92
Lifespace 213, 214, 221
Likud 57
Lost Boys 138
Lutheran World Relief 141

M

Mackenzie, Sir George, of Rosehaugh 3-18, 19-21 *notes*, 220
MacLean, William xx, 163
Magas, Branka 81, 82, 89, 90 *notes*
Mahavamsa 108, 113
Makdisi, Ussama 42, 47, 47-49 *notes*
Mao Zedong 91, 94-97, 99
Maronite 37, 39-45
Maroons 66
Marxism 95, 112, 175 *notes*
Masovni pokret (Maspok) 80
McLeod, M. xx, 133
Mecca 52-54
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) 142-144, 147 *notes*
Mercy Corps International 141
Millet 81, 90 *notes*

Milošević, Slobodan 82
Missionaries 40, 43, 67, 68, 91, 92, 95, 96, 98, 113, 126, 134, 136, 138, 141, 146 *notes*
Modi, Narendra 127
Mongols 92
Mottaheeri, Ayatollah 163, 165
Mount Lebanon 37-45
Muller-Fahrenheit, Geiko 150, 158, 159 *notes*
Mumbai 119, 124-129
Munich 205
Muqata'ji 38
Muslim 23-26, 28, 29, 32, 37, 38, 40, 45, 53-56, 58, 59, 60 *notes*, 66, 68, 70-72, 80-83, 85-87, 107-109, 111, 122-129, 131 *notes*, 133, 134, 136-138, 142, 145, 146 *notes*, 155, 156, 167, 173, 175 *notes*, 194, 202

N

Najaf 163-166, 169, 171
Nationalism 23, 24, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 47, 48 *notes*, 53, 55, 80, 82-84, 88, 89, 90 *notes*, 93, 96, 107, 108, 110, 112-114, 116, 119-122, 124-126, 128-130, 130 *notes*, 131 *notes*
Natsios, Andrew 137
New Middle Income Group (MIG) 125
Nigeria 66, 71, 72
Noble Sanctuary 51-56, 58
Noble, David 199, 204 *notes*
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) xi, xx, 133, 140
North America 66, 73, 137, 153, 198
Nova Scotia 66, 67
Nuclear Weapons 218
Nutt, Dr. Samantha 139, 146 *notes*

O

O'Brien, Paul 137
Orthodox 23-30, 32, 61 *notes*, 80-82, 85, 87, 138, 170

Ottoman Empire 24-29, 31-33, 34 *notes*, 37, 39-41, 45, 47, 48 *notes*, 81, 82, 140

Owen, David 79, 83, 84, 89, 90 *notes*

P

Pahlavi, Muhammad Reza Shah 163

Pakistan xvii

Palestine xiii, 54, 58-60, 60 *notes*, 61 *notes*

Palestinian Liberation Organization 57

Pan-Slavism 30

Peace vii, 20 *notes*, 23, 25, 27, 31, 33, 37, 38, 41, 46, 48 *notes*, 57, 68, 71-73, 79, 83-89, 90 *notes*, 92, 107, 116, 129, 134, 142, 145, 146 *notes*, 154, 157, 181, 186, 203, 205-209, 211-214, 216, 217, 219, 221

Pearson, Lester B. 33, 35 *notes*, 201

Piper, Charlene xx, 149

Porter, Arthur T. 67, 75, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*

Poya 114

Presbyterian 3, 8, 20 *notes* 188 *notes*

Protestant 8, 9, 20 *notes*, 67, 93, 94, 98-100, 102 *notes*, 112, 136, 183

Provisional Revolutionary Government 170, 171, 175 *notes*

Q

Qibla 54

Qum 164, 167, 168, 170, 174, 175 *notes*

R

Rahula, Walpola 113

Rashtriya Swatamsevak Sangh (RSS) 119, 120, 123, 127, 129

Ratha Yatra 123

Reagan, Ronald 179

Reconstructionists 181, 182

Red Crescent 139, 140, 147 *notes*

Red Cross 136, 139, 140, 145, 146 *notes*, 147 *notes*

Red Crystal 140

Reid, Nancy xx, 91

Religio Stoici xix, 4, 6-10, 12-17, 19-21 *notes*, 220

Republika Srpska 85-87

Restoration Scotland 3, 6, 7, 17, 18, 20 *notes*

Revolutionary Council 170, 172

Revolutionary United Front (RUF) 70, 71, 75, 76 *notes*, 77 *notes*

Rewald, Michael 137

Robertson, Pat 183, 188 *notes*

Rockefeller Foundation 201, 203, 214

Rohan, Dennis 56

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 30

Russell, Bertrand 199, 220, 221 *notes*

Russia 23-34, 34 *notes*, 35 *notes*, 82, 95, 149

Russian Empire 25, 28, 34, 34 *notes*

Russian Revolution 95

S

Saffron Belt 122

Samaritan's Purse 143, 144, 147 *notes*

Sangh parivar 127

Sarajevo 85, 87, 89

Savak 168, 169

Savarkar, Vir 121

Schweitzer, Albert 221

Scott, Sir Walter 4, 17, 19 *notes*

Serbia 80-83, 97

Serbs 30, 80, 81, 83-85, 87

Shahin 42

Shariati, Ali 165, 175 *notes*

Shariatmadari, Ayatollah Kazem 167, 175 *notes*

Sharon, Ariel 57, 58

Shia 38, 168, 175 *notes*, 176 *notes*

Shiv Sena 123-126, 129, 131 *notes*

Sierra Leone xix, 65-75, 75-77 *notes*

INDEX

- Sikhs 202
Sinhalese 107-116
Slaves 66, 159 *notes*, 207
Smith, Anthony 23, 34, 81, 90 *notes*
Smith, Rupert 210, 211, 221 *notes*
Sri Lanka xx, 107-111, 113, 114, 116, 117, 117 *notes*, 129
Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) 114
Srikrishna Commission 124
Staub, Ervin 44, 49 *notes*
Stoic 13, 14, 20 *notes*, 21 *notes*
Story, Robert H. 4, 18, 19 *notes*
Sudan xi, 133-139, 141-147
Sultan Abdul Hamid II 28
Sultan Mahmud II 27, 32
Sunni xiii, xiv, 24, 29, 32, 176 *notes*
Sūra 54, 60 *notes*
Syncretism 69, 70, 73, 74, 76 *notes*
Syria 37, 39-41, 47, 48 *notes*
- T**
Tabriz 168
Tamil 107-110, 114-116, 129
Tamil Tigers (LTTE) 115, 116
Tamil United Front 115
Taoist 91
Taylor Innes, A. 5
Taylor, Charles xxi *notes*, 70, 76 *notes*
Taylor, Charles (RUF) 71
Tehran 164, 168, 172, 176 *notes*
Temple Mount xix, 51-59, 60 *notes*
Temple of Ram 124, 128, 129
Theravada Buddhist 108
Therriault, Sylvain xix, 37
Three-Self Patriotic Movement 95, 96, 98
Tolerance vii, 38, 65, 68-73
- Tsar Alexander I 26, 27
Tsar Nicholas I 27, 32
Turkey 23, 25-29, 31, 33, 90 *notes*, 164
Tylor, Sir E.B. 69
- U**
Uduvicki, Jasminka 81, 90, 90 *notes*
United Church 111, 202
United National Party (UNP) 114
United Nations 55, 56, 58, 60, 61 *notes*, 77 *notes*, 133-137, 139, 146 *notes*, 201, 214
United States of America 134, 137, 153
Universal Declaration of Human Rights 201, 214
USS Lincoln 210
- V**
Van Evera, Stephen 84, 90 *notes*
Vance, Cyrus 83
Vance-Owen Plan 79, 83, 84
Versailles Conference 93
Vidyalankara 110
Vilayat-i faqih 163-167, 169-173
Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) 115, 116
Virtuoso 13, 14, 18, 21 *notes*
Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) 120, 123, 127, 129
- W**
Walker, Rebecca xx, 119
War vii, 6, 7, 9, 26-29, 31-34, 34 *notes*, 41, 42, 44, 46, 47 *notes*, 49 *notes*, 55, 57-59, 61 *notes*, 65, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75 *notes*, 76 *notes*, 79-90, 90 *notes*, 93, 94, 98, 107-110, 112, 114-117, 133-139, 141-144, 146 *notes*, 147 *notes*, 149, 150, 154-157, 159 *notes*, 174 *notes*, 179-187, 187-189 *notes*, 201, 205-215, 218, 221 *notes*
War Child Canada 139, 141
Washington, George 152-154, 159 *notes*

Watt, Francis 4, 5, 18, 19
Watts, Robert B. xx, 107
Weisbloom, Becky xix, 51
West Africa 66-68, 71-74, *75 notes*, *76 notes*
West Bank xiii
Western Wall 52-54, 57, 58
White Revolution 164, *174 notes*
Wijayawardena, D.C. 112
Williams, A. M. 5, 18, 19 *notes*, 20 *notes*
Wills, Gary 156
Wodrow, Robert 3, 6, 7, 17, 18, 19 *notes*
World Vision 141

Y

Yuan Dynasty 92
Yugoslavia 80-83, 86-90, 90 *notes*

Z

Zubrinic, Christine xx, 79

