

AAR

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Teaching about Religion and Violence

From the Editor's Desk



Tazim R. Kassam
Spotlight on Teaching Editor

IN HER BOOK, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (Ecco: 2003), Jessica Stern raises a question every student has in mind after watching internationally publicized events such as the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India, the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack by Aum Shinrikyo, the suicide bombings of the IRA, Hamas and Tamil Tigers, and the still vivid destruction of September 11. Stern interviewed true followers - Jewish, Christian, Muslim - who took it upon themselves to fulfill the promise of divine justice captured in dictums such as "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!" Showing striking similarities, most of her subjects avow they are doing God's will to defend faith against evil.

The question itself — how and why violence is sanctioned in the context of religions — is intriguing and conse-

quential. Theories abound. Tracing how militant leaders in different faiths found recruits among the disenfranchised, and successfully convinced them that it was their sacred duty to commit violent acts to attain divine order and justice, Stern sees alienation, fear of chaos in a godless world, and social and political grievances as ripe conditions for militants to strike "spiritual dread" in the enemy through terrorist acts. This buttresses the view that not religions but deprivation and humiliation are at the root of violence; so, the former are exploited for their affective and symbolic capital to legitimize violence as a strategy of redress.

But the very fact that religious literatures and histories provide such fodder for terrorizing in the name of God is no minor point. The sanction of violence against women, slaves, and one's kith and kin draw from powerfully embedded religious paradigms: Adam is made in God's image but Eve is not; the devil is black and God is light; Arjuna's duty is to fight bravely not to cringe at killing his cousins. As James Aho describes in *Religious Mythology and the Art of War* (Westport: 1981), world religions have a copious mythology of violence. Burnt offerings and human sacrifice are valorized: Abraham's willingness to give up his beloved son; the devout wife or Sati who immolates herself at her husband's pyre; and Iranian mothers blessing their sons to become Imam Hussayn-like martyrs in the Iran-Iraq war.

Regina Schwartz's provocative study *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: 1997) is another

attempt to theorize the relation between religion and violence. Of particular interest is her idea that divinity in monotheistic traditions is often imaged either in terms of plenitude or scarcity. Exclusive monotheisms premised on visions of scarcity promote a competitive and violent worldview by reducing divinity to a jealous God whose favors are confined within boundaries guarded by insiders against outsiders. This is emblematic I think of the deeper, perennial human challenge of accepting and negotiating difference and diversity. Since an exclusivist vision cannot cope with difference, or does so by trying to obliterate it, religious terrorism signals a rejection of pluralism.

The ambiguity of religions, like the human beings that construct and vivify them, is a difficult concept to sustain in popular discourse in part because virtually every religion fundamentally claims itself to be good. Rudolph Otto's description of the ambivalence of the holy as both fascinating and horrifying, attractive and repulsive, applies equally well to those who interact with the holy. In her embrace of both light and shadow, Kali, the Hindu goddess, manifests an ambivalent image of divine plenitude and stands as a mirror of humanity's promise and peril, warning against the proud certitude that girds the faith of those who hurt and maim in God's name. Speaking pedagogically, the challenge is this: how do we demythologize the sacred without trivializing the profound manner in which human societies have engaged it? The articles in this issue of *Spotlight* offer perspectives and strategies on tackling such complexities. ■

Teaching about Religious Violence without Trivializing It

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ONE OF THE JOYS of teaching is countering students' stereotypes. In the case of religion this allows us not only the perverse pleasure of debunking myths but also the deep satisfaction of helping students to expand their thinking about religion in general. In the old days — oh, say, two years ago — it was religion's pastoral image that we had to challenge. We had to show that despite its bucolic, spineless image, religion could be tough, political, erotic, and sometimes violent.

How quickly all that has changed. Now with newspaper headlines screaming about jihad, suicide bombers, angry priests, and abortion clinic bombers, we are tempted to reverse course and aver that religion does, after all, have a more noble side. It is also about peace, personal redemption, tranquility, and social justice.

But this presents us with an interesting problem: how do we show the different sides of religion in ways that do not make it appear that religion is either totally innocent or totally bad? We want to avoid the kind of simplification that we sometimes find in the news media when they characterize religion's role in contemporary life. This characterization often runs toward two different extremes. On the one hand, there is the image of an innocent religion that is exploited by nasty politicians. This is usually what is meant when reporters and other observers talk about religion being "used" for political purposes. On the other hand, there is the notion that religion itself can be bad — as if the whole of Islam, for instance, supported acts of terrorism. The frequent use of the term "Islamic terrorism" falls into this pattern of thinking, as does the exaggeration of the importance of jihad — as if all Muslims agreed with the militarized usage of the term by unauthorized extremist groups. The term "fundamentalism" — applied not just to Christianity but to a whole host of religious traditions — is another way of excusing "normal" religion and isolating religion's problems to a deviant form of the species. It is used sometimes to suggest an almost viral spread of an odd and dangerous mutation of religion that if left on its own naturally

leads to violence, autocracy, and things too horrible to mention. Fortunately, so this line of thinking goes, normal religion is exempt from such extremes.

We know, though, that this is not the case. The involvement of religion in contemporary public life is more complicated than simply a matter of peculiar religion gone bad or good religion being used by bad people. We know that there are strata of religious imagination that deal with all sides and moods of human existence — the peace and the perversity, the tranquility and the terror. In fact this is what we find so fascinating about religion: it cannot easily be pigeonholed or delimited. And this — our fascination with religion — is one of the greatest gifts we have to offer our students. If we can convey that, a sense of what we find so deeply interesting about all facets and moods of the religious life, then this is good teaching indeed.

In this regard the contemporary interest in religion's seamier side is a godsend. As my late colleague Ninian Smart once remarked, the angry Ayatollahs of our generation are God's gift to religious studies.

“How do we show the different sides of religion in ways that do not make it appear that religion is either totally innocent or totally bad?”

They pique our students' interests. Our students want to know why these religious activists are the way they are, and what religion has to do with violence, rebellion, and social change. In helping our students understand these things, we can help them understand much about religion. We can take the current interest in the problems related to religion and turn them into an exploration of the complicated roles that religion plays in diverse societies.

How we go about doing this is necessarily idiosyncratic, since every teacher's style is necessarily unique. Still, there are rules of thumb that apply in general to the way that we deal in the classroom with contemporary acts of religious violence. The following are my modest suggestions:

Be analytical. An analysis requires first of all an appreciation of the problem. For this reason I would not be too quick to explain things away until students have a sense of what needs to be explained — the paradox of religion in a problematic world. Case studies are often helpful in giving a sense of this dilemma: providing portraits of sensitive religious persons who have been overwhelmed with a sense of mission and then act them out in violent ways. Dr. Baruch Goldstein, for instance, was from all appearances a thoughtful Jewish doctor and supporter of the expansion of Israeli settlements before he took out an assault rifle and viciously attacked Muslims praying in a mosque at the shrine of the Cave of the Patriarchs in the West Bank city of Hebron. His story — and the

stories of the al Qaeda hijackers on September 11, and the Presbyterian and Lutheran pastors who bomb abortion clinics on the East Coast of the United States

“The great wars of the Hebrew Bible and the Hindu Ramayana and Mahabharata, for instance, are part of the bloody lineage of religion.”

— can be paradigmatic examples of the puzzling role that religion plays in the violence of contemporary life.

Be contextual. As the examples of Dr. Goldstein, Christian abortion clinic bombers, and Muslim activists demonstrate, their religious violence is not solely religious. That is, as devout as they may be, and as much as they may use religion to justify their actions and explain their view of the world, the world that they see is a violent one. In each of these cases they see themselves as responding to forces of violence and oppression in the world around them. Theirs are interesting examples of the interaction between religion and social life. Like all aspects of religion, their acts of religious violence have social contexts that defy our neat Enlightenment-informed notions of the separation of religious and secular realms. In most societies, including our own, significant moments in personal and public life are marked with spiritual depth, moral values, and religious meaning. Likewise the seemingly pure aspects of religion — rituals, roles, and theology — can be powerful agents of social change and political leverage. To understand this is to understand the complex social character of religion.

Be historical. This moment of history is part of larger historical forces, and understanding current religious activism — such as the hostility of some parts of the Muslim world to the secularism of the West — requires historical background. The rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, the exploitive era of European colonialism, the intriguing patterns of secularism in a post-Westphalian Europe, and the lingering sense of international insecurity in a post-Cold War world are all aspects of the social context of some forms of Islamic activism and its militant American response. At the same time it is useful to remind students that religious violence has been a part of all religious histories. The great wars of the Hebrew Bible and the Hindu Ramayana and Mahabharata, for instance, are part of the bloody lineage of religion. Even religious terrorism was found in earlier periods of conflict. Guy Fawkes, for instance — whose first name has become synonymous with rogue males everywhere — was the “guy” who tried to blow up the British parliament in a seventeenth-century religious terrorist attack in protest against what he regarded as the state's persecution of Catholics. Hence there is a history of religious terrorism, as well as a historical context for it.

Be global. In an earlier century — such as

the twentieth — we might have used the term “comparative” in talking about an exploration of religion that takes into account the diversity with which it mani-

fest itself on the planet. Today, just a few years later, we increasingly use the term “global.” We do so for good reasons. In discussing the various contexts for phenomena such as religious violence we want not only to insist on the fact that there are Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim examples, but also that they occur in virtually all regions of the planet. In fact the very intensity of cultural interaction in an increasingly pluralized global society illustrates the problem. Today's expressions of religious violence are seldom directed at other religions; more often they are directed at pluralism itself. They are signs of social frustration and desperate attempts at empowering traditional notions of cultural identities. Often these violent acts are reactions against the homogenous popular culture of global media that rely on images of the secular world of southern California and fashions these images into a global cultural template. With MTV and *Baywatch* as models of the values of the new globalized world, no wonder traditionalists everywhere rebel.

Hence to take seriously contemporary acts of religious violence around the world opens up the world of religion, and it also opens up issues about religion in the world. This is especially so in a globalized era when humanity has become a more

“We can take the current interest in the problems related to religion and turn them into an exploration of the complicated roles that religion plays in diverse societies.”

intimate and often quarrelsome family. The interest in religious violence thus becomes an important resource for teaching religion in the classroom. The contemporary rebelliousness of religion is symptomatic of the searches for meaning and identity that characterize much of religious thought and action, throughout history and in all reaches of global public and private life.

For course syllabus, go to www.global.ucsb.edu

Religion and Violence: A Teaching Opportunity

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ALTHOUGH VERY FEW religions, from well-established ones to fledgling groups, have escaped being associated with violence, none of the classic general treatments of religion puts violence at the forefront of their analysis. For the current generation of college students and teachers of religion, however, multiple incidents have forced the issue. But the fear, outrage, and revulsion that religiously inspired acts of violence often evoke can also serve as an effective point of departure from which to engage students in the academic study of religion. Directly facing the issue of religious violence gives students and teachers a chance to consider significant topics in the general study of religion, such as the nature of religion itself, the power of religious motivation, how religious traditions can be appropriated for multiple uses, the uses and abuses of religious authority, and the ways in which both religious insiders and outsiders define the center and periphery of religious traditions. To promote "religious literacy" among students who are very likely to take only a single undergraduate course in the study of religion, we need to introduce analytical tools that can help them understand how religion can become so lethally entangled with violence.

The topic of religion and violence can be incorporated into courses in many ways. I'll describe three examples from my own teaching. First, it can be the focus of an entire course. Like many others, I offered a course on religion and terrorism in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The course eventually enrolled more than 10 percent of our student body and provided a continuing public forum for students and members of the surrounding community. It set the September 11 attacks in context by first addressing other examples of religiously motivated terrorism, including the Oklahoma City bombing, antiabortion violence, and Aum Shinrikyo's gas attacks in the Tokyo subway. Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God* provided both the organizational and analytical framework for the

course. Students found that they could profitably extend Juergensmeyer's analyses of terrorist acts as symbolic statements, deliberately constructed theatrical events, moments in a cosmic war, and opportunities for martyrdom to examples that Juergensmeyer himself had not covered. Another strategy is to incorporate a dedicated unit on religious violence in appropriate courses, as I have often done in my course on new religious movements in the U.S. Since so many observers have asserted a blanket association of "cults" with violence, it is very difficult to avoid the topic in such a course. Fortunately, scholars such as Catherine Wessinger and James R. Hall have devoted substantial attention to the topic. Wessinger's *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, for example, offers both a descriptive typology of groups that may engage in violence and lists of factors that can lead a group towards violence or away from it. Putting the unit on "cults and violence" at the end of the course encouraged students to test the examples they had already considered against Wessinger's analytical proposals.

A looser approach is simply to be open to addressing the topic when it comes up, in meetings with either individuals or small groups. Over the last several years in our department's team-taught introductory course, for example, we have asked students to write a five-page analysis of a recent news article that focuses on religion. Many of the students, probably more than half, have gravitated to topics that in some way have involved religion and violence, such as the ongoing abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, various terrorist acts, and conflicts in Tibet, Israel, Ireland, India, and many other places. The topic has appeared with similar frequency in comments on class electronic discussion boards. In fact, because the news media frequently give stories about religious violence saturation coverage, one of the most prominent things that undergraduates "know" about religion before they take any courses is that people who consider themselves religious are capable of doing some very bad things. That knowledge can effectively serve as a starting point for demonstrating how the academic study of religion can bring clarity, depth, and appropriate complications to students' understanding of contemporary events and their historical antecedents. To do that, however, teachers of religion need to offer a comprehensive descriptive, analytical, and interpretive framework.

Both of the fundamental terms "religion" and "violence" need to be clarified in ways that further the discussion of daunting and painful incidents such as the destruction of the World Trade Center and the abuse of young children by priests. Focusing on violent incidents can enable students to see how defining religion, for example, can have immediate and even practical consequences. Sorting out the ways in which Aum Shinrikyo's attacks should, and should not, be considered religious acts can help students refine what they mean by "religion," as can trying to grasp the apocalyptic calculus behind Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. It can also lead them to appreciate the different ways in which "religion" is understood by actors in the events and by external observers.

Accuracy in description also demands a more nuanced understanding of violence. For example, violent rhetoric, including vivid depictions of a divinely authored end of the world and lavish descriptions of the horrible fates that await those who have transgressed, is an inextricable element of religious texts in many traditions. Rhetoric, however, does not always inspire action. The potential relationships between violent rhetoric and violent action in religious traditions is one area for fruitful classroom discussion, especially when there is a mixed message in foundational texts, as when Jesus counsels his audience in Matthew's gospel to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39) but a few chapters later declares that "I have not come to bring peace; but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). Our asking, rather than avoiding, questions about violence in religious traditions offers a point of entry into their complexity and human character. Posing such questions can lead students to appreciate how religious visions of the world are constructed, expressed, evaluated, and appropriated in concrete social and historical situations. It can switch the focus of classroom conversation from simply discussing what the authoritative texts of a tradition express to what people actually do with the religious capital that their traditions have built up. Those interested in normative questions from within specific religious traditions can also debate the relative orthodoxy of particular appropriations and expressions of their common tradition.

Focusing on how people actually use their religious traditions can help students make other important distinctions. All violent acts are not the same, especially in relation to their motivating sources. Some violence committed by religious people should be considered merely episodic; its personal and social etiologies may in fact have little or nothing to do with an individual's religious commitments and much more to do with specific medical, psychological, or social pathologies. It would therefore be inaccurate to characterize a religious group or tradition on the basis of such actions. Just because a person who commits a violent act has a religious commitment doesn't necessarily mean that the act is an expression of that religious commitment. Other violent acts, however, may in rare cases actually stem from a theology of violence. In the 1980s, for example, an explicit theological program animated the crusade of the Silent Brotherhood, also known as The Order, against the "Zionist Occupation Government" of the U.S. Religiously justified terrorism would also come under this heading. Osama bin Laden, for example, justified his jihad in explicitly religious terms, avowing that the ruling to kill Americans and their allies was a duty for every Muslim. While Muslims and outsiders alike have asserted that "this is not Islam" to preserve religion in general or particular religions from the stigma of endorsing violence, they do so only by ignoring the openly declared reasons of those involved in violent actions.

Still other violent actions may be viewed by their authors, at least, as defensive. Nearly all of my students have been surprised to find that Timothy McVeigh, radical abortion opponent Michael Bray, and Osama bin Laden, among others, argued that they were engaged in defensive action. Descriptive accuracy, however, demands that their reasons be thoroughly

understood, even if ultimately they are condemned. Carefully describing the motivations, contexts, and consequences of violent actions, rather than ignoring them or blithely attributing them to self-evident psychological, social, or religious deviance, can help to train students in the basic skills of "close reading" that are useful not only in the study of religion but as part of students' general education.

The topic of defensive violence highlights another important dimension of the issue. For example, figures like Franklin Graham have not hesitated to brand Islam "a violent religion" and anti-"cult" activists have long issued blanket warnings that "the path of the cults leads to Jonestowns." In those formulations, violence is portrayed as an inherent characteristic of some religions, often in implicit contrast to other, presumably superior, ones. An alternative view argues that violence is the product of discrete and highly contingent interactions. The interactionist perspective appropriately shifts the emphasis from religions to *people* as actors, and it directs attention to the social processes through which violence is, or is not, generated. As a result, it can lead to a more careful examination of the complex and varied motivations for action that are shaped by religious commitments. The interactionist approach can also lead students to discover the countervailing resources for peace-making that can be drawn upon by members of religious communities. Scott Appleby, for example, has argued that "strong religions" support a vigorous and multifaceted argument about the meaning of the tradition and consequently have the capacity to move their adherents away from narrow constructions of their religion's demands towards tolerance and nonviolence.

As depressing, enraging, provocative, and repugnant as they may be, incidents of religious violence should be tackled head-on, rather than avoided, in religious studies courses. As human enterprises, religions bear all the marks of their creators. Though they may incorporate the noblest goals, they are also indelibly marked by the basest passions. The extraordinary commitment that religions can generate, maintain, and direct can, in certain circumstances, lead people both to suffer and to commit violent acts in the service of their religious principles. That capacity of religion can be used very effectively in the classroom to raise significant and interesting questions about religion and to build connections between what students already know about and what we would have them learn.

Resources:

Appleby, Scott. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

Bromley, David G., and J. Gordon Melton, eds. *Cults, Religion, and Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

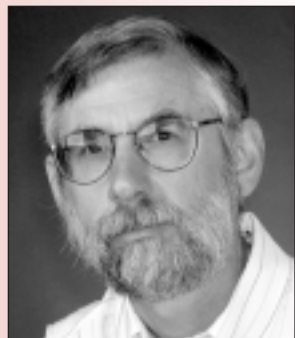
Hall, John R., et al. *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

See GALLAGHER p.xii

Beyond the Four Naïvetés: Approaching the Secular as If It Were Religious

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WHEN STUDENTS take a course in religious studies dealing with peace and violence, they usually come with two kinds of questions. First, they want to know what the “world religions” have to say on these issues, and how the “world religions” lead people to start and stop violent conflict. Second, they want to learn about the ethical guidance religion can offer; ultimately, they want to know when (if ever) it is moral to shoot people and drop bombs on them. These are both important areas of study. Instructors in religious studies courses should be willing and eager to help students learn more about them.

It would be selling religious studies short, though, to think this is all we have to offer. There is a third kind of question we can help our students explore, which they may find the most valuable of all: How can the tools of religious studies — our concepts, theories, and methods of study — shed new light on issues that are normally deemed secular? When we ask how and why people do violence — especially the organized violence we call war (my own major interest) — or how and why they end violence, what can we see, because of our professional expertise, that specialists in other disciplines might not see? The answer turns out to be: Plenty!

In teaching about war and peace, religious studies can help provide a desperately needed corrective to what I would call the “four naïvetés.” In departments of political science, history, international relations, sociology, economics, and the like, the approach to war and peace most often falls into one of four categories, reflecting four political orientations.

On the left, war is usually explained by the elite’s greed, lust for power, and ability to manipulate the gullible masses. In the liberal center, war is generally chalked up to conflicts between ever-expanding modernity, with its ideals of individual

freedoms, and the many forces resisting modernity. Among “realists,” the common explanation is the supposedly inevitable competition for power among nation-states and would-be state actors. On the right, students hear that there is indeed evil in the world, which must be overcome by force, because that is the only language evildoers understand.

Each of these views holds some truth, no doubt. But each, and even all four taken together, leave the student with naively simplistic views. There is so much more going on when a group engages in, or ceases from, violence than these four approaches can explain. Those of us trained in religious studies can help students see that “so much more” by approaching secular processes as if we were approaching a religious phenomenon. This does not mean that war and peace are always religious phenomena. Sometimes they may be; that must be evaluated on a case by case basis. But we can always understand the processes of war and peace more deeply, fully, and accurately if we approach them as if we were studying a religious phenomenon.

For many of us, that means starting from a basic assumption: When nations or groups engage in, or cease from, organized violence, they are using processes of cultural symbolization to create a meaningful structure. To use Jonathan Z. Smith’s language, they are negotiating the complexities of life

“Approaching secular phenomena of war and peace from the perspective of religious studies broadens the boundaries of our discipline.”

and carving out a space within which to live their shared life. To use Clifford Geertz’s language, they are symbolically enacting a worldview, an ethos, and the fit between the two. To use Peter Berger’s language, they are employing language and behavior to legitimate their chaos in the face of perceived threats of chaos. Of course, there are many other theoretical approaches to religion that we can employ. The variety of models available to us points up the richness of resources our discipline holds for studying war and peace. Whatever model we use, we can bring it into fruitful dialogue with the empirical historical realities that must be the foundation of any study of war and peace.

Consider, for example, the study of the Cold War. When students come into my course on “Cold War Culture and Religion,” they have learned from their history and political science professors that the U.S. followed a policy of containing communism. I ask them to think about precisely what was supposed to be contained. The Cold War was not merely a geopolitical battle between dominant states, nor a struggle between competing ideologies. The words of U.S. leaders — in top-secret documents for internal use,

as well as in public pronouncements — and the mass media reveal a much richer cultural context. They speak of the U.S. carrying an awesome responsibility for protecting civilized order against a barbaric chaos that threatened to dissolve the U.S. and, with it, all of civilization.

To probe the meaning of this discourse, we start with the earliest English colonists, who saw themselves as the agents of civilized order, pushing back a wilderness filled with barbaric native peoples. We discuss the unbroken tradition of the discourse and enactments of white America’s “mission” to overcome the forces of chaos. We trace this tradition back to its roots in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic dualism and the dualistic patterns of English Calvinism.

Against that background, we then consider the unique feature of the Cold War era in the U.S. The forces labeled chaotic and evil were still seen as apocalyptic threats to civilization itself. But now they could never be eliminated, it seemed. At best, they could be contained, managed, and kept at bay forever. All the resources of the nation were mobilized toward a new goal, which I call “apocalypse management.” The students may already have heard a simple explanation from their instructors in other disciplines: “Of course, nuclear weapons made it too dangerous to fight the final apocalyptic battle.”

In a religious studies classroom, this becomes only one part (and a surprisingly small part) of a much larger picture. We note that nearly all U.S. elites in the early Cold War years, and most throughout the Cold War era, were raised as Calvinist Protestants. As children, they imbibed some form of a doctrine of original sin. Though they may have jettisoned the specific theological context, they continued to assume that evil at work in the world could never be eliminated by the ordinary historical forces at their disposal. I label this assumption “Augustinian” (acknowledging the simplification that is inevitable in the classroom). I ask the students to consider what happens when apocalyptic dualism and Augustinianism are unconsciously intertwined in the creation of national security policy. Once they grasp this interpretive framework as a lens, they begin to see the details of history and the decisions of policymakers in a new and richer light.

I also ask them to consider why this particular constellation of discourse and enactment was so readily accepted by so many Americans. Why did the end of World War II usher in an era, not of triumphant confidence, but of sustained and increased anxiety about threatening enemies? Was it a refusal to abandon a long-familiar cultural pattern? Was it an attempt to manage growing fears of social, cultural, and economic change? Did the national security state come to dominate American life because it offered a way to structure, and thus contain, mounting insecurity? Did it end up, ironically, only exacerbating the insecurity it was meant to contain? These are hypotheses that are most likely to arise, and can be very effectively explored, within our discipline.

Religious studies can also help students understand the influence of the institutionalized traditions — what they think of

“When nations or groups engage in, or cease from, organized violence, they are using processes of cultural symbolization to create meaningful structure.”

as “real religion” — upon secular processes. In the United States, at least, the mass public as well as elite leaders are significantly influenced by religious factors (most of them Christian), whether they acknowledge it or not. These factors are part of the environment, perhaps as invisible as the air we breathe. Specialists in religious studies have a unique capability to make these factors and their effects visible.

For example, my students find it a creative exercise to look at Cold War culture through the categories of “spirituality of dwelling” and “spirituality of seeking” developed in Robert Wuthnow’s *After Heaven* (though some rightly critique Wuthnow for a bit of over-simplification). They see complex connections between “dwelling” — spiritual life aiming at security in a stable place, sheltered from dangerous uncertainty — and the policy of containment. They see how “seeking” — spiritual life as an endless exploration of new possibilities for individual fulfillment — undermined the power of the containment model, and how it may have subtly reshaped that model (e.g., by validating containment as a way to make “seeking” a safe lifestyle). They also recognize that national security discourse and policy acted back upon institutional religion and individual spirituality in complex ways. They learn to look for a dialectical interaction between religion and national security policies, and for the common threads tying the two together.

Approaching secular phenomena of war and peace from the perspective of religious studies broadens the boundaries of our discipline. It opens up new avenues for interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues in other fields. Most importantly, perhaps, it shows that our own field can be an important voice in the public conversation about the most important problems of our day. It can help to move the discussion beyond the four naïvetés, to take into account the powerful forces of cultural symbolization and meaning construction that always shape the concrete processes of policy formulation (and shape the naive explanations of those processes, too). These cultural forces will remain largely invisible unless we use our professional expertise to bring them to light.

Since September 11, 2001, our students, like the public at large, have taken a new and urgent interest in questions of war and peace. As I teach about the Cold War or any other topics of war and peace, I

Religion after 9/11: Hijack It, Exonerate It, Get over It?

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IN THE WAKE of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the intersections between religion and political violence emerged as pressing subjects in the public debate in the U.S. over the meanings of what had happened on that day. Living and teaching in New York City and called upon to speak “about religion and violence” at an all-campus forum just a week after the attacks, I recall being struck by the immediate emergence of two related but contradictory claims that were made about religion’s role in the attacks. On the one hand, I repeatedly heard statements like “Religion is the culprit here. If it weren’t for religion, this never would have happened.” The implication was that if people would just “get over” religion, the world would have at least a chance of being a peaceful place. On the other hand, a lot of other people were arguing that the attacks had nothing at all to do with religion — that religion itself had been hijacked alongside the four commercial airliners that morning. This second kind of argument was often mobilized in the salutary service of disengaging a critique of the particular actions of the nineteen Muslim hijackers from a characterization of Islam in general.

In a starkly objectivist view, neither claim is factually correct, but I was less concerned with the factual character of these statements — about whether religion was in fact to blame or whether it was simply absent on that day — than I was interested in the impulses that lay behind such claims. One set of statements sought to blame and demonize “religion” while the other sought to protect and exonerate it. “Religion” — one of the many ways in which human beings organize their experiences and their lives together — in both of these sets of statements was framed as somehow unique and radically different from other human projects. No one was suggesting the need for people to “get over” politics or economics. On the other hand, no one felt the need to defend “politics” or “economics” from the observation that what had happened might indeed have had something to do with one or the other of them. We could, in other words, notice that politics and economics might have played a role without passing a value judgment on that fact. It seemed, however, that religion’s role required that an ethical judgment be rendered. If religion was to

blame, then the inference was that religion was dangerous and in need of bracketing and reining in. If the attacks had nothing to do with religion, then religion stood innocently on the margins as other nefarious forces took control.

The question “How might one teach about the relationship between religion and violence?” took on a peculiar urgency in this context. The following reflections focus on the broad theoretical challenges embedded in the process of teaching about religion and violence.

Coming to terms with the intersections of “religion” and “violence” first involves interrogating the very terms of discussion. No one who has been paying attention over the last twenty years to the academic study of religion can have missed the theoretical contestations over the very word “religion,” and the recognition that its emergence in modern/postmodern academic discourse is linked inexorably with the history of European colonialism. That is, the category of religion is itself an intellectual/ideological by-product of historic violence. But even as several generations’ efforts to define “religion” in the abstract have necessarily failed, the term still circulates as a name for arenas of human activity and conviction that occupy a revitalized space in the realm of the social and the political (see Lincoln for a lucid exploration of the theoretical issues). Other terms, meanwhile, come to be affiliated, often fluidly and imprecisely, with “religion” — terms such as “fundamentalism” — anxiously marking epistemological, hermeneutical, and political divides in the terrain of the modern (see Moallem’s work on feminism and fundamentalism). Although definitions are elusive, it is still possible — indeed, crucial — to pay close attention to the ways in which the categories are deployed in public debates.

And just as “religion” has evaded compelling definition, so, too, has “violence” inspired significant theoretical debate. More focused definitions (e.g., violence “immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects . . . includ[ing] forcible seizure of persons or objects over restraint and resistance,” [Tilly, 3]) compete with more capacious portraits of violence that focus on forms of social, political, and economic exploitation and oppression (see Weigert; Farmer). Meanwhile, both religion and violence operate in the contemporary world as major figures in a narrative of the modern/postmodern (see de Vries; Derrida; Moallem).

The discussion can begin philologically, definitionally, and phenomenologically, but it needs to move through these frames into the arenas of rhetoric, narrative, history, and affect. What arguments, stories, and emotions are mobilized when people seek to blame or exonerate religion in occasions of grievous violence, in situations where coercive force is put in the service of competing ideologies and regimes of truth?

When religion is blamed for violence, the narrative invoked is often mythic in its reach, in at least two significant ways. First, conflict that is deemed “religious” is often viewed as occurring outside of concrete historical conditions, indeed beyond temporality itself. How often do commentators and analysts despair over the prospect of conflict resolution where religion and violence intersect, asserting that the apparent intractability of a situation is rooted in an essential and irresolvable difference whose origins recede backwards into a vague, mythic prehistory? Second, political con-

flicts that have called upon the power of religious narratives often raise the stakes for participants. Where compromise might be a reality and a necessity of the negotiating table, it often has the flavor of failure in the religious realm.

Meanwhile, the vindication of religion as a factor in public violence has its own costs, often making it very difficult to understand, except after the bloody fact, how religious narratives, institutions, leaderships, and followers can all be contributing actors in the strategic use of coercive force. In such situations, religion frequently intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, and nation in providing a grounding rationale for violence. (The cases of the genocide in Bosnia and the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s are devastating cases in point. On Bosnia, see Sells. On Rwanda, see Gourevitch; Longman; Mamdani).

As scholars of recent genocides have made clear, it is critical to historicize and temporally situate the objects of study in exploring the relationships between religion and violence — perhaps most importantly, to address the quintessential modernity of religious violence. It is worth noticing how often religious violence is characterized as “medieval” or “tribal” — constructing an other that is nonmodern, unaffiliated with post-Enlightenment categories of civil society, distanced from “ourselves.” Part of the project here is to pay attention to the material and technological conditions which enable religious conviction and political violence to intersect. As others have observed, the hijackers on September 11 depended fully on quintessentially modern technologies — jet airplanes and television — in the service of their goals. Death raining from the sky, while an apocalyptic (and hence deeply religious) fantasy with a centuries-long lineage, has been a technical reality emerging only in the last one hundred years with the invention, first, of machines that could fly and, second, incendiaries that could be dropped from those machines (see Lindqvist). Many historians of the development of technologies of aerial bombing have documented the claims made by those societies that got there first that God had given them this power to be used in his service. Media technologies, meanwhile, generate images of religious others and interpellate viewers into their narratives (see McAlister; Runions). Explorations of media technologies need to include examinations of how representations of violence shape moral and affective responses (see Cohen; Boltanski).

More generally, teaching about religion and violence requires that attention be paid to the role of affect — anger, hatred, loss — and how it is mobilized and directed through narratives and rhetorics in the service of regimes of truth (see Eng and Kazanjian; Moss). And as we pay attention to affect, works like Chris Hedges’s *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* remind us that the deeply exhilarating, narcotic, and meaning-making effects of violence must be analyzed and understood. Meanwhile, the profound implication of religious traditions, institutions, and people in the ideologies and execution of violence is a difficult reality for many students to encounter, stirring up affective responses all their own.

An essay of this length can only scratch the surface of the questions and resources available for teaching about religion and violence at the current moment. I have, for example, not included any discussion of how religious traditions, institutions, and communities have been mobilized as partic-

ularly effective agents in opposition to violence and coercive force. These mobilizations have not been limited to the discursive realm (but see Crawford for a compelling analysis of the role of ethical argument, often deriving from religious traditions, in anticolonial movements) but have intervened in institutional and structural realms as well. Like teaching about the intersections of religion and violence, teaching about the role of religion in creating and sustaining alternatives to violence will require careful attention to historical specificity and context, technologies of representation, and affect.

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See CASTELLI p.xii

Exegesis Has Consequences: Teaching Biblical Warrants for Violence

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TEACH ABOUT religion-inspired violence because it exists. I was doing this before the attacks of September 11 brought the issue to the forefront of scholarly discussion. Since I am a Western specialist, with research and teaching focused on the biblical period and the formative era of Judaism and Christianity, I primarily address the biblical warrants for violence as they manifest in action in different historical periods. So my task is the difficult one of persuading students to turn the critical eye inward, toward their own tradition. In this article, I will attempt a partial taxonomy of the difficulties, most of which are variations on the old double standard. To generalize about the philosophical and pedagogical difficulties, I analyze two historical forms of violence that come up in several of my courses: slavery and anti-Semitism. Further, I examine the special problems of comparison between religious traditions.

I discuss slavery in classes on biblical studies and the history of Christianity. Modern slavery was a large and long-lived institution, and the violence that accompanied it, ended it, and followed its end, spans a range from coercive deprivation of rights to intimidating physical violence that we would today call terrorism (beatings, lynchings, church burnings, etc.). In all cases, I pose the problem as one of biblical interpretation and the historical nature of the biblical text. First, I explain the differences and similarities between ancient and modern slavery. This simple historicist move already challenges the ahistorical assumptions of much proslavery biblical interpretation. Then, shamelessly playing devil's advocate, I lay out the proslavery case. Finally, I ask students to construct an abolitionist case from the same biblical text.

This approach has produced widely different results with different classes. One New Testament class looked to historicism for help, while another class argued that it simply was not feasible for Paul to abolish the slavery that was so ingrained in his society. Nevertheless, students found, in his treatment of Onesimos as a Christian on par

with his owner Philemon, an intent to eliminate slavery. I thought this was a remarkable feat of reading Paul's mind rather than his text, but at least their hearts were in the right place. However, many of the students who contributed to this interpretation had rejected historicism outright when I covered the Synoptic problem. I pointed out this selective use of historicism with little success at convincing them of any inconsistency. Still, if they were willing to criticize an earlier age's interpretation as historically conditioned, perhaps there is hope that they might turn that awareness on the present. In an unsuccessful use of the same strategy, the class simply refused the task of constructing an abolitionist position and instead spent forty-five minutes telling me that slavery was not that bad. I suspect that the defensiveness about this period of the American past overrode their ability to hear what I was asking them to do.

The second issue is anti-Semitism. It comes up in several of my classes, but I want to focus on the introduction to the New Testament. There is a lively subfield of New Testament studies devoted to this question, and a diversity of scholarly opinion on the subject. I always present it to my classes as a question: "Are the Gospels anti-Semitic?" I review at least three different responses to the question (since my students often labor under the illusion that there are only two sides to every issue), and then open the discussion. As with slavery, the majority tends to harmonize the biblical text with current standards of tolerance. They see the classic passages (Matt. 28, John 8, et al.) as representing only the views of, and only directed against the Jews on, the scene in the narrative. On this reading, the Gospels represent the hatreds of some people against some others, without presenting this state of affairs as normative. Later interpretations may be anti-Semitic, but the texts themselves are not. Given this response, I ask them to examine the interpretive moves that justified violence against Jews, and also their own interpretive moves in absolving the text of one of its more violent legacies. I have had, more rarely, a response that I find truly disturbing. One student said that the Gospels were not anti-Semitic because Jews really are as the Gospels depict them. More on this below.

The above gives merely two major instances of biblical interpretation in violent practice. Since 9/11 I have also witnessed a certain kind of tendentious comparison that I do not myself introduce. Two examples will suffice. All of the students in my "World Religions" class do a project on a topic of their choice. In Fall 2002 one student gave his oral report on passages in the Qur'an that direct violent invective at Jews and Christians. He then compared the Bible in a favorable light, arguing that its recommendations of genocide are "less specific." I challenged this with examples of specific targets: Canaanites, Amalekites, etc. (leaving aside the question of whether these actions occurred as narrated). He replied that these were smaller groups of people. "And that makes it more acceptable?" I asked. He backed down, still grasping for a distinction that would make the Bible come out better in a contest of whose invectives are worse, on the page or in practice. The other students were amused at

this exchange, but I am certain that I did not convince this student of the weakness or tendentiousness of his comparison. Comparisons of whether one religion is more peaceful or violent at a specific historical moment can be done effectively; it is the texts themselves that I find so evenly matched on warrants for violence. (I do not discount biblical warrants against peoples who no longer exist, or give greater weight to Qur'anic warrants simply because the named groups are still around.)

The second encounter was with a student who interviewed me in preparation for an oral report in a public speaking class. He, too, came armed with some of the most violent passages in the Qur'an, with no context and no awareness of the history of Islamic interpretation. I tried to provide the missing context by pointing out that sacred texts, much less a handful of passages, do not exist in a vacuum; it can make a great deal of difference how a community interprets them. The student surprised me: he knew of differences within the contemporary Muslim community on this issue, even knew personally a few young Iranians who disagreed with the extremist interpretation of these passages. But he himself thought that the "Muslim liberals" were "sweeping stuff under the rug" in their refusal to interpret these passages broadly and act on them; he believed that terrorists groups were in fact interpreting correctly. It dawned on me that this student was grading Muslim interpreters according to the literalist-inerrancy type of interpretation that he learned from his own kind of Christianity. I was at a loss how to respond to this. The interview ended with some irritation on both sides, but it alerted me to a possibility of which I had earlier been unaware: that those who learn a certain kind of scriptural interpretation from their own tradition may recognize similar interpreters in other traditions as doing it "right," even though they think these same people are wrong from scratch. If this sort of approach is used to construct both Christianity and Islam under single, narrow, and "correct" versions of each, then the rest of us are in for a very long war.

All of these discussions have raised certain core problems that run deep in religious studies. No matter what the specific question, my students' reactions fall into two categories: refusal to see a problem and/or selective reading to make it go away. In the first category, I include the students who have defended slavery and insisted that the NT portrayal of Jews is accurate for all times and places. Their stance amounts to what I call "epistemic exemption": they believe that the Bible is an unimpeachable source of knowledge. Since they do not admit that reality can differ from biblical depictions, they simply do not see slavery as something that can be inherently wrong, or Judaism outside of the New Testament presentation of it. Evidence from historical records or scientific investigation is subjected to a standard of proof so high that nothing could meet it, and the biblical text enjoys a presumption of "true until proven false" by this impossibly high standard. I confess that I still do not know what to do with this mind-set, but it is dangerous. I cannot respect it as a worldview, and cannot accept an epistemology so weak that it would make no distinctions between this belief system and the efforts of historical

research, scientific experiment, and philosophical ethics.

There have been major trends within religious studies scholarship that attempt to put religion on a philosophical footing that would exempt it from the demands of a correspondence theory of truth and falsehood; most of these are liberal attempts to preserve some sort of value in religion while mitigating exclusive truth claims that run afoul of empirical science and pragmatic ethics. But we should think twice about whether cutting religion loose from epistemology is worth the intellectual and practical implications. Too often, I have seen students seize on epistemological relativism as a justification for replacing standards of evidence with a feeling of certainty in what they already believe.

The second group of students could make fine scholars one day, for they are adept at selective reading of sacred scriptures. The cases I use put them between a rock and a hard place: they believe that slavery and anti-Semitism are wrong, and also that the Bible is right. This group does take in knowledge from extra-biblical sources, but wants to preserve the authority of the text in some other way. So the typical solution is a combination of blaming the interpreters, selective use of historicism, and occasionally a little mind-reading. My own reactions to this are mixed. On the one hand, it's a relief that they recognize other sources of knowledge, instead of adjusting all reality to their reading of the Bible. On the other hand, there is no principled justification for their selectivity. Where, for instance, is the distinction that would let one historicize Paul's allowance of slavery, but not the Gospel's depiction of Jesus? What would justify selecting peaceful passages over violent ones, if the goal is to understand the text as it is?

Perhaps there are other goals, but I am not sure what these are for scholars and instructors of religion. Whether practiced by what we would call liberals or fundamentalists, selective interpretation is dishonest about the nature of the text. The student who interviewed me about the Qur'an had a point: exegetes of any religious scripture can and do sweep things under the rug. Actual violence, except in self-defense, is wrong on its own. However, the intellectual error of selective interpretation is the same, no matter what course of action is supported by selective reading. As scholars and teachers, our task should be an accurate and honest appraisal of the text. Shepherding students from one form of selectivity to another, without questioning the underlying exegetical practice, only leaves in place a poor reading habit that can be benign or malignant. Better to confront the habit itself, in ourselves and in our students.

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Religion and Violence: Teaching Islam at an Evangelical Institution

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ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2001, I got lost as I took my family to the Benton County Fair, so I pulled over at an IHOP to ask for directions. Behind the counter stood a young man whose black hair and bushy eyebrows didn't seem to match the pasty-white skin of his face. As he spoke, his voice startled me. In a thick Arabic accent he politely told me how to get to the fair. When he had finished I looked him right in the face and asked (in Arabic), "Do you speak Arabic?" He froze. After what seemed to be forever, a small tear formed in his eye, and he answered me very quietly, "Yes, I speak Arabic." When I asked him where he was from, much to my delight he answered, "Jordan." I then told him that I had lived in Jordan for two years and studied at Jordan University, and it turned out that the archaeological excavation I work with is just a few miles from his village. Before we could talk any more, a customer approached and I had to leave for the fair. As I walked out to the car I couldn't help thinking about his face. Then it hit me. His face was white because he was wearing a thick coat of pasty-white make-up. Four days after 9/11 he didn't want anyone to see his Arab face.

Violence isn't done only with bombs and guns. A recent report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) indicates that reports of anti-Muslim violence, discrimination, and harassment are up 15 percent over the past year. For me and my students, the violence that we perpetrate against those who are different, either religiously or culturally, is often the marginalization and stereotyping that leads them to feel (rightly or wrongly) that they have to cover their faces to feel safe. Violence, both physical and psychological, is everywhere. We cannot deny the reality of the horrendous physical violence that is sometimes perpetrated, but we often overlook violence of a more subtle sort.

John Brown University, where I teach, is a private, independent, liberal arts college in northwest Arkansas. Both in its faculty and its student body, JBU is clearly within

mainstream Evangelicalism. Many students here would not take offense at being called "fundamentalists." This context is important because, as I began a recent course on Islam, national news headlines were filled with reports of Jerry Vines (former president of the Southern Baptist Convention), Jerry Falwell, and Franklin Graham saying "Islam was founded by a demon-possessed pedophile," or "I think Muhammad was a terrorist," or "The God of Islam is not the same God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different god, and I believe it is a very evil and very wicked religion," respectively. Violence was in the air — not physical violence, of course, but violence of a much more insidious type, the type that led the Jordanian man to cover his face.

In addition to the more emotional and inflammatory challenges faced in teaching Islam at an Evangelical institution, there are also obstacles of a conceptual nature. At the 2002 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, a presenter who had a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies declared that since Muslim understandings of God, atonement, and redemption are so fundamentally opposed to Christian understandings of these things, there can be no "points of contact" between the two traditions. An odd claim, I thought. On a more popular level, Don Richardson, whose books have sold widely, is the architect behind a way of approaching non-Christian religions called "redemptive analogies." He argues that all the religions and cultures of the world have "analogies" to ideas in Christian theology which can serve as bridges for Christian witness to members of these religions. His most recent contribution, *Secrets of the Koran*, takes a different turn. There he calls Islam "the great exception," arguing that Islam is so fundamentally different from Christianity that there are no "redemptive analogies" in Islam.

Despite such formidable obstacles to teaching Islam at an Evangelical institution, two strategies allowed me to circumvent many of these obstacles and help students sort through some of the dynamics involved in understanding the complex relationships between religion and violence, both in Islam and in their own tradition.

The first strategy was to help students to see that they have the resources within their own Evangelical tradition to approach the study of Islam with empathy and hopefulness. All students at John Brown University take a first-year seminar in which they read *The Idea of a Christian College* by Arthur Holmes. One of the main themes that Holmes addresses is the notion that in a world created by God, there is no other source for truth than God. Pressing Holmes further, I suggested that since all human beings are created in the imago dei, we should expect that people everywhere, from every culture, and even from every religion, would come to apprehend God's truth, to a greater or lesser extent. We ought to be surprised and even incredulous then at any assertion that there is any sphere in life that is devoid of God's truth. This is no less true when we study Islam. Many students were taken aback at the thought of applying what they took to be true from Holmes in what was for them such an unexpected way.

Along these same lines, but more related to the study of world religions, is a recent excellent book by Gerald McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from the World's*

Religions? According to McDermott, "most learning is not a matter of seeing entirely new things but of seeing old things in new ways" (14). He suggests that seeing old things in new ways can consist in a "shift in emphasis," or seeing a "new aspect" of an old idea, or of "teasing out the implications" of an existing idea. All three of these, McDermott argues, are a large part of what it means to learn, and it is possible for all three to happen in varying degrees when one studies the world's religions.

“Violence was in the air — not physical violence, of course, but violence of a much more insidious type, the type that led the Jordanian man to cover his face.”

Through the work of these two respected Evangelical writers, I took principles that most students at John Brown University would accept as true and helped them to apply that truth in a way that many would never have considered beforehand. Most students left the class not only with a greater knowledge of and sympathy for Islam and Muslims, but also with a new understanding of how their own Christian faith can be enriched from their study of Islam.

A second issue that allowed me to address the issues of violence in religion, especially as this relates to the study of Islam, is that we used only Muslim sources and focused almost exclusively on the formative period of Islam. While this might sound surprising to some, it is not uncommon at some Evangelical and Fundamentalist colleges to find Islam taught in classes on "the cults," using texts that are clearly anti-Islamic. In addition to the book by Don Richardson, a recent book by two Christian converts from Islam, Ergun and Emir Caner, is widely used in teaching Islam. Their *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Belief* has sold over one hundred thousand copies and recently was given a Gold Medallion Award from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. This book was the source for Jerry Vines's comments about Muhammad and is clearly written with a profound anti-Islamic agenda.

Many of the prominent Evangelicals who make pronouncements about the violence of Islam know little more about the tradition than a smattering of the more negative events of recent years. Little if any consideration is given to why Muslims (and Christians!) in the Middle East or southeast Asia are so frustrated with the West, or to the broader traditions of Islam that span the last fourteen centuries. Focusing on formative Islam shows students that it is inappropriate to take one slice of the Islamic pie (for some Evangelicals, the last fifty years of Christian-Muslim violence) and to define the whole tradition by that slice. Students read Karen Armstrong's *Islam: A Short History*, which allowed them to see the development of the religion beyond the period of our concentration. Their research papers often dealt with issues of more contemporary concern, but they had to address their topics in light of the historical development of Islam.

My focus on "formative" Islam also gave us a chance to discuss the issue of jihad and

religious violence. At Evangelical institutions, students generally take their Bible very seriously, a fact I used for pedagogical advantage. As we read through the biography of Muhammad we discussed the similarities and differences between the conquests of the "promised land" in the book of Joshua and those of Muhammad and the early Muslims. The similarities were many. One student responded, "Yea, but God told Joshua to do what he did, and so that makes it OK." This opened up an important discussion on how we can and ought to live as religious people in a world where many people from various religions believe that their tradition has special sanction for what it says and does. Students began to see the parallel between their belief in religiously justified violence and the Muslims who believed that their early conquests had Divine approval. While the tension was never fully resolved, students came a long way in learning how believers, whether under Joshua, Muhammad, or during the Christian Crusades, rationalize violence in their tradition. Later in the semester, as we read al-Ghazali's *Revival of the Religious Sciences* students saw how this prominent Muslim thinker used the word jihad to mean inner rather than outer struggle against the lower self. As they read about al-Ghazali's quest for a more authentic spirituality, ridding his life of those things that hindered progress down the spiritual path, they saw the term jihad used in ways that were very similar to how their pastors might speak of "sanctification" in the Christian life. My students began to see that just as they have the resources in their own Christian tradition to reject the violence of the conquests of the "promised land," Muslims also have the resources within their own tradition of interpreting jihad in ways that foster peaceful coexistence among members of different faith communities.

A final factor of some significance in my success with students was being able to share with them my own experience of living and traveling among Muslims in various parts of the world. From my own store of anecdotes and experiences, students began to see that the wild-eyed fanatics that they so often see in the media are not representative of all Muslims or of Islam.

Thinking back to my encounter with the Jordanian man whose face was plastered with white make-up, another image of a face comes to mind. And that is, that as I teach Islam, I hope to help students understand the significant truth of Sura 2:115: "To God belongs the East and the West, Wheresoever you look is the face of God."

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Teaching about Millennialism, Peace, and Violence

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AFTER THE WACO TRAGEDY in 1993, a number of scholars of new religious movements produced studies of the connections between religion and violence. Many of these scholars were interested in exploring why so many cases of violence involve millennial groups. As one of these scholars, my teaching about millennialism, peace, and violence does not only occur in the classroom, but has also been directed to the general public. New Religious Movements scholarship on religion and violence has application to understanding the dynamics of conflicts involving believers on the international scene today.

When teaching about millennial groups that have been involved in violence, it is important to humanize the believers. All too often members of the general public assume that believers who carry out violent acts or who have become engulfed in violence are "not like us." The general public distances these believers in a number of ways, but most obviously by labeling them with a dehumanizing, pejorative term such as "cult" in English, or "sect" in Romance languages. An important point that I seek to convey in my teaching is that ordinary people, people "like us," can become caught up in groups and religious and sociological dynamics that culminate in violence.

For instance, to humanize the residents of Jonestown, Guyana, who committed murder and mass suicide on November 18, 1978, twenty-five years ago, I utilize images found on the Web site maintained by Rebecca Moore, *Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and Peoples Temple*: (see jonestown.sdsu.edu/). This Website contains numerous images of people carrying out the daily activities of life in Jonestown, depicting the elderly, the children, the ordinary people of Jonestown. To humanize the Branch Davidians, I find the video *Waco: The Rules of Engagement* (see www.waco93.com/) helpful in depicting the Branch Davidians as individuals and as a group, and acquainting students with the complexities of the case. Images of some of the Branch Davidian adults and children are available at the Waco Memorial Project, members.aol.com/karenwmp/waco/project.htm.

In my studies of millennialism and violence, I have developed categories to shed light on these phenomena and to encourage the crosscultural, comparative study of millennialism. I utilize these categories not only in my course on millennialism, but also in my survey courses on world religions, and in discussions of current events in my course on religion and media. I present these categories here in the hope they may be of use to others in teaching about millennialism, peace, and violence.

Understanding Millennialism

Norman Cohn was one of the first scholars to study the connection between millennialism and violence. Cohn's definition of millennialism stipulates that it involves belief in a salvation that is collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and accomplished by supernatural agent(s) [Norman Cohn, introduction to *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), n.p.]. This definition of millennialism is useful, but the study

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of new religious movements reveals two limitations. First, many millennialists believe in a heavenly salvation, or very often there is a simultaneous expectation of a terrestrial salvation and a heavenly salvation, or believers may shift back and forth between expecting the collective salvation to be terrestrial or otherworldly. Second, many believers today expect the agent(s) of the millennial transformation to be superhuman, such as masters or extraterrestrials, but not necessarily supernatural. Therefore, I stipulate a definition of "millennialism" as referring to belief in an imminent transition to a collective salvation in which the elect will experience well-being and the unpleasant limitations of the human condition will be eliminated. The collective salvation may be earthly or heavenly. The collective salvation is believed to be accomplished by superhuman agent(s), with varying degrees of human participation.

Since the terms pre-millennialism and post-millennialism only have application to Christianity, I have proposed the terms "catastrophic millennialism" and "progressive millennialism" to promote crosscultural studies of millennialism. These terms have limitations in being derived from the Christian tradition, but scholars have applied the term millennialism to other traditions.

I understand catastrophic millennialism to be belief in an imminent and catastrophic transition to the collective salvation, the millennial kingdom. It involves a pessimistic view of human nature and society. Humans are seen as being so evil and corrupt that the old order has to be destroyed to make way for the millennial kingdom. Catastrophic millennialism's worldview is radically dualistic. Reality is seen as involving a struggle between good versus evil, and this easily translates into a sense of us versus them. Therefore, catastrophic millennialism

is not surprised when conflict appears on their doorstep, and their actions may contribute to conflict understood in apocalyptic terms.

Progressive millennialism is the belief that the imminent transition to the collective salvation will occur through progress. It is optimistic about human nature and the possibility that human society can improve. Humans working in harmony with a divine or superhuman plan will create the collective salvation.

Millennial movements are often characterized by prophets, people who are believed to speak God's words or those of other supernatural or superhuman beings. Millennialism does not necessarily require a messiah, an individual believed to possess the power to create the millennial kingdom. For example, the catastrophic millennialism expressed in the Qur'an has no messiah; Allah will destroy the current universe, resurrect the dead, and judge humanity by himself on the Day of Doom. Messianism is not only found in catas-

trophy millennial movements. Messianism can be a feature of progressive millennialism, such as the Theosophical millennialism of Annie Besant and her promotion of Krishnamurti as the World-Teacher she believed would bring about the New Civilization.

Millennialism, Peace, and Violence

Through discussion of various examples of millennialism, and encouraging students to talk about the types of millennialism they have encountered, I emphasize that a range of behaviors is associated with both catastrophic millennialism and progressive millennialism. Catastrophic millennialists may await divine intervention to destroy the world as we know it; they may arm themselves for self-defense and will fight back if attacked; they may become revolutionaries to overthrow the old order and create the new. Progressive millennialists may engage in social work and reconciliation to effect the divine plan to create the millennial kingdom, as in the Protestant Social Gospel, the Catholic special option for the poor and Pope John Paul II's Jubilee Movement, or the New Age Movement's concern to effect a transition to the Age of Aquarius by a shift in human consciousness; they may arm themselves for defense against enemies and will fight back if attacked; or they may become revolutionaries.

Many believers possessing catastrophic millennial expectations have worked for peace, but probably not the ones who anticipate that the catastrophic transformation is imminent. American Christian Dispensationalist literature, especially the *Left Behind* series, proposes that a future international peacemaker will in fact be the Antichrist.

Progressive millennialists are not always a force for peace. In my edited book *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, Robert Ellwood wrote that the German Nazis saw revolution as "progress speeded up to an apocalyptic rate" (253). Richard C. Salter concluded that the Khmer Rouge, and Scott Lowe concluded that Mao's Great Leap Forward, were progressive millennial movements. Revolutionary progressive millennialists have been extremely violent.

Fanaticism

I strive not to use pejorative terms when I am teaching, but September 11, 2001, motivated me to give consideration to what constitutes fanaticism in light of my previous studies of religion and violence and to stipulate a descriptive definition of fanaticism. Admittedly the label "fanaticism" involves a value judgment. One person's fanatic is another person's hero, patriot, saint, or martyr. As with millennialism, a range of behaviors is associated with fanaticism. There are varying degrees of fanatic activity, the most extreme involving violence, either in killing others or in deliberately placing oneself and others in harm's way. Based on comparative case studies, I believe that the cognitive components of fanaticism may include four characteristics. If only characteristics numbers one through three are present, the person or group is fanatic in a nonviolent manner. In these instances, I keep my opinion to myself and would not label such persons or groups as fanatic in the classroom or in public. I do highlight the characteristics of fanaticism in class for students' consideration, because I think it is important for citizens to be aware of the nature of fanaticism. If characteristic number four is present along with the other three, this is an individual or group that is willing to utilize violence. In these instances, careful consideration, and probably much more research, is needed to determine an appropriate response. I identify the characteristics of fanaticism as being:

1. absolute confidence that one has the "Truth," and that others are wrong and evil;
2. no openness to considering other points of view;
3. dualism — a conviction that there is a battle between Good versus Evil; us versus them;
4. a conviction that the end justifies the means; a willingness to resort to any method, even harmful and/or illegal ones, in order to achieve the ultimate concern.

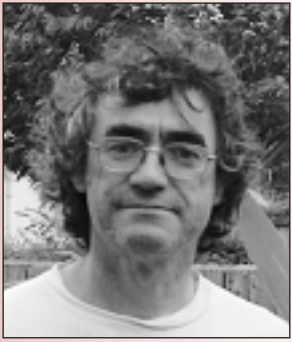
I have begun to present this descriptive definition of fanaticism to students to encourage them to think about manifestations of fanaticism in the world today. I believe that humans need to be wary of the propensity of fanaticism within ourselves, not just among strongly committed religious believers, but also among political leaders and patriots. Fanaticism can take many forms, including socially approved ones. I see dualism as a major conceptual component of the problem of conflict and religious violence. Yes, dualism is found in all religious traditions. It is an all-too-human and common outlook. But I think there are varying

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Poisonous Teachings: Aum Shinrikyo and Violence

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WHILE THE ATTACKS of September 11, 2001, now dominate studies of religiously motivated violence, the nerve gas attack carried out by the Japanese new religion Aum Shinrikyo on the Tokyo subway in March 1995 represented an earlier but equally significant and dramatic example of this phenomenon. The Aum case showed that a religious movement could not only develop weapons of mass destruction but could, through its religious imperatives, go ahead and use them on civilian populations. Within the field of the study of new religions, too, it was a critical case, providing one of the most potent examples of how religious movements may turn violent due to their own internal dynamics rather than primarily because of external pressures. Aum, as such, is a critical case study in the field — one made more important, of course, if, like myself, one specialises in and teaches about religion in Japan.

There are two critical points — not unrelated — that are essential to get across when dealing with the Aum Affair but that are also pertinent to the wider issue of teaching about religion and violence. One is that with such modern events as this, everybody knows *something* about it, can rapidly find information about it, and almost certainly first encountered it through the mass media. Most students' initial views and understanding of the Aum Affair (as, of course, of September 11, 2001, and the Waco Affair) will be through the lens, perspectives, and spin of the mass media. This raises problems not immediately inherent in teaching about, say, conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in seventeenth-century Europe, or about the use of St. James, central to the Santiago pilgrimage, and venerated as Santiago Matamoros ("St. James the Moor-slayer"), the icon of the medieval Catholic armies seeking to reconquer Spain from the Muslims Moors — events which really are in the "past" and about which students will not have gleaned their first impressions from the media.

Media portrayals, as scholars are well aware, are likely to be one-dimensional, sensationalist, and skewed towards particu-

lar orientations: in the case of Aum, as with Waco and others before it, the angle tends to be stereotypically that of the mad guru, brainwashed acolytes, lunacy, and evil. They also make it appear as if the movement was always "evil" and the guru always mad and set on mass violence — and hence, they neglect the importance of process that was central to Aum's turn to violence. Such representations effectively strip out any potential avenue for analysing or understanding what actually went on in Aum or for considering how Aum's hatred of the modern material world was fuelled by a genuine distaste for, and critique of, the follies of materialism. (Likewise, they eradicate any scope for understanding the September 11, 2001, attacks by making Mohammed Atta and his fellow hijackers into fanatics driven by hate and evil, and thus they abandon any attempt to ask why they felt that way about the West.)

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If needing to get students to think beyond the simple, sensationalised binary (good and evil) models that media coverage will present them is one problem, another is that many people bring to their understandings of "religion" prior assumptions about its nature, namely, that religion is somehow connected with good things and that real religions do not do bad things. It has been suggested to me before now by students that Aum could not have been a "real" religion because if it had been, it would not have committed the things it did, and hence, perhaps it should be studied in the context of terrorism and politics rather than in courses on religion. Similarly, there may be some students who deny the possibility that Aum — which espoused and used aspects of Buddhist thought in its teachings, and called itself a Buddhist movement — could have anything to do with Buddhism since "Buddhists aren't violent." Indeed, the Japanese media, aided by pious pronouncements from various Japanese religious organisations, have also done a fine job in "showing" that Aum had nothing to do with "true" religion, certainly nothing to do with Buddhism, and that it therefore belonged to another ("cult") category that was deviant and liable to acts of social misconduct.

Such views — which are as myopic and problematic as the old "all religions do is cause war" syndrome — are founded in assumptions about the nature of religion that, while they may be less pronounced than before September 11, 2001, continue to colour opinions. As such they need, from the outset, to be challenged as value judgements rather than dispassionate and academically grounded assessments. Hence, I emphasise to students that we need to consider "religion" not through judgemental lenses (as good or bad) but as a concept that has no *inherent* qualities such as good or bad: it is value-neutral in nature, and

thus can manifest, depending on circumstances, all manner of different faces.

At times, too, people expect or seem to want me to denounce or condemn Aum — which is not the job of the teacher in a classroom. Horrific as the actions of Aum were, when I discuss it in the academic contexts, my job is to analyse, explain, and understand what happened and why, not to pass moral judgements. As such, I start my analysis by placing Aum within the context of the new movements that emerged in Japan in the 1980s, which were also millennial and apocalyptic in nature. From this point, I discuss why Aum turned to violence in pursuit of its millennial visions, whereas other movements went down different paths.

Besides illustrating that different religious movements can share very similar types of teaching and standpoints without following the same paths of action, close analysis of Aum's context and origins highlights an important point often lost in portrayals of violent groups: that they may not — and probably do not — start out that way. Aum started as a rather optimistic movement with a mission to save the world and get people to meditate and achieve spiritual awakening. It considered the world corrupt and in need of a spiritual revolution to eradicate materialism — but it believed that this could occur through proselytising its truths by converting people and persuading them to engage in ascetic and spiritual practices that would eradicate the negative karma of the world. Yet, over a period of years, that optimistic vision faded as Aum's plans for peaceful spiritual transformation failed, as the movement became more convinced that something more dramatic was needed to change the world, and as it came to envision the sacred war of good and evil not as an event played out on the spiritual plain but in the real world as an actual conflict.

It was through such processes — aided and fuelled by events in and outside Aum that drew it into actual confrontations with mainstream society — that Aum turned from a positive to a negative vision and became fixated on the idea of a final, real war, necessitating the manufacture of weapons to defend itself and wage this war. That fixation was founded on Aum's deep-seated belief that it alone possessed the ultimate truth of salvation, a truth so potent that all who rejected it could ultimately be killed as enemies of the truth. Hence, my discussions of Aum also aim to discuss how religious movements can develop notions of superiority and elitism which enable them to elevate themselves over, and justify all manner of iniquities against, others.

As Aum became engulfed in a spiral of violence and confrontation with the "evil" world beyond it, it developed increasingly militant teachings to underpin its visions of a final war of good and evil, and to legitimate its emphasis on coercion and confrontation. It found in sources as diverse as tales of Tibetan gurus, Buddhist texts, and the Bible, teachings that seemed to fit its purposes. And here another important message can be relayed to students: a reason why Asahara was able to draw such images from various religious sources is because such images of conflict — primarily between good and evil — are found widely in the teachings of religious

traditions. Again, the question that needs to be raised is to what extent are such

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images of conflict intended to be purely symbolic, and to what extent do religious traditions allow for the symbolic to be transformed into the actual. In Aum's case we can see how a movement, thinking it possessed absolute truth, considered it had the right to kill in the name of this "higher" truth, and it is worth asking students to reflect on whether the truth claims of any religion might harbour within them the potential to produce equally intolerant attitudes.

While Aum is an extreme case, in other words, one has to consider whether and to what extent it raises wider questions about whether religions in general have an inherent potential to become violent. If I can leave students a little more sceptical of the media, a little less likely to hold to black-and-white analyses of problems and to think of religion as inherently "good," and a little more critical of the ways in which religious traditions set out their truth claims — as well as giving them some insights into how particular movements in specific contexts might (or might not) become violent — then I think I am heading down the right road.

Resources

Bromley, David G., and Gordon Melton, eds. *Cults, Religion, and Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hall, John R., Philip Schuyler, and Sylvaine Trinh. *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan*. New York and London: Routledge, 2000.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

Kisala, Robert, and Mark Mullins, eds. *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society through the Aum Affair*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Reader, Ian. *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo*. Richmond and Honolulu: Curzon and University of Hawaii Press, 2000.

Wessinger, Catherine, ed. *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

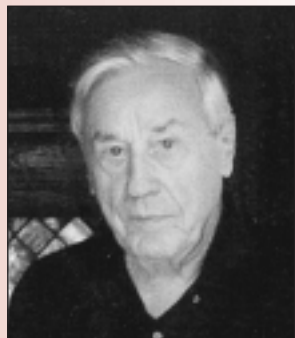
Aum's Japanese site: www.aum-internet.org. Its English version is: english.aleph.to

The Cesnur Web site has English language newspaper updates about Aum, which track some of the trials and related controversies: www.cesnur.org/2003/aum_03.htm#pefa

The University of Virginia archive is well known. While its Aum page puts too much weight on some very early Aum material, it is one of the better Net resources, many of which are dubious: religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/aums.html

Religion, Nationalism, Violence, and Leadership: The South Asian Context

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VOLTAIRE, the great icon of the Age of Reason, after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 ended the century of what is known in European history as “the Wars of Religion,” gave thanks that such “abominable monuments to fanaticism” would never recur.¹ Three centuries later, the relation of the world’s religions to peace and violence remains the most complex issue in international affairs, marked by fundamental contradictions and misunderstandings. While almost all their institutionalized forms stress social harmony in their foundation texts and in their expository writings as the basis for human life, both the historical record and contemporary experience indicate that religions have been in the past, and continue to be, a causal factor in violent behavior, even as their spokesmen call for peaceful solutions. If one made a list of wars and violence where religion can be seen as a contributing factor and one where religion promoted peace, the balance might turn out to be dishearteningly in favor of the first list, but the simple conclusion is misleading, for it ignores how complex is the nature of both peace and violence.² While they seem to stand in polar opposition, the causes of peace and of violence are mingled in ways that are not easy to untangle, for both are products of human nature and human history.

The actualities of peace and violence, seemingly so starkly different, are products of the ongoing flow of human history, whether in the repulsive brutalities of the civil wars in Liberia and Rwanda, or in the very different kind of civil war, such as the American Revolution, usually regarded, at least in school texts, as a necessary search for peace and justice. The authors of the magnificent document in 1776 that justified that eventual war, and, by extension, many others, appealed to inalienable rights derived from “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God.” So did President Bush of the United States, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, and Charles Taylor of Liberia in 2002 in

their different ways and perhaps to different gods, a reminder of what the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung had in mind when he wrote, “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions.”³

In a useful study published in 1992 entitled *The Spirit of Violence*, Christopher Candland listed over eleven hundred titles of scholarly books and articles relevant for contemporary discussions of religious and violence.⁴ If it had been published ten years later, the number of titles would have been increased by many hundreds, an indication of the enormous importance of the subject in the opening years of the twenty-first century. It is a safe guess that a similar listing of works on religion and peace in this same period would have been meager, despite the efforts of virtually all religions to preach love and harmony, prompting the query from Mark Juergensmeyer in a number of important studies: “Why is religion so violent, and why is violence often cloaked in religion?”⁵

This essay is an attempt to explicate, through specific historical evidence, how religions function in promoting peace and violence by looking at the particular context of contemporary South Asia. Other areas could, of course, be chosen — Ireland, Sudan, Nigeria, Israel-Palestine, China, Japan, the United States — but South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal), with its immense population of about 1.5 billion people, its many cultures, languages, religions, and very long and varied historical experiences, is of great interest in its own right, as well as of importance to the rest of the world. Most of the world’s Hindus and Muslims live in the area; it was the birthplace of Buddhism and Jainism, often characterized as religions of peace; it has the largest surviving community of the very ancient Zoroastrian religion; it has a sizable Christian community that claims its origins in the first Christian century with a visit from the Apostle St. Thomas.⁶ This does not exhaust the list, for as Mark Twain remarked with pardonable hyperbole when he visited India in the 1890s, it is “the home of a thousand religions and two million gods.”⁷ It has been the center of great violence associated with

“In neither India nor Pakistan did religion become a strictly private matter.”

religion, but it has also been the center of peace movements, rooted in religion, symbolized by the career of Mahatma Gandhi who argued that nonviolence, based on religion, was the pathway to the independence of India. In 1947, however, he saw, as political freedom came, the outbreak of horrific violence between the three great religions of India, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, tearing its society apart. Watching the destruction of his dream, he said his “heart grew sick and weary,” but despite the conflagration raging around him, he continued to believe in “the still small voice within.”⁸

Pakistan, the other country that became independent out of the conflagration, was created as a homeland for Muslims where they would be free from the domination of Hindus. Nonetheless, just as Pakistan came into existence, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, its chief architect, told his people that while division of the subcontinent into Pakistan,

“Such a sense of community can bring peace or, as often happens in South Asia, it can be used to promote hatred and violence against other communities.”

with its Muslim majority, and India, with its Hindu majority, had been necessary, now the ideal was that in the course of time, “Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.”⁹ In India, Nehru said much the same thing to his people, many of whom desired a specific role for Hinduism as the majority religion, when he argued for a secular state, by which he meant a society where religion would be a strictly private matter, with no voice in public policy. “The cardinal doctrine of a modern democratic state is the separation of the state from religion. The idea of a religious state has no place in the mind of the modern man.”¹⁰

In neither India nor Pakistan did religion become a strictly private matter. Pakistan became a constitutionally defined Islamic state, and at the time of Partition in 1947, most of the Hindus fled to India, leaving a small minority, along with an even smaller number of Christians. While subject to some harassment by local police, they were too few in number and too unimportant economically to attract much attention. This was not the case of Muslims and Christians in India, who were guaranteed the rights of all citizens, including full freedom of religion in the constitution, but who were subjected to increasing pressures as Hindu nationalist groups became more powerful, seeking to make India not, they insisted, into a Hindu state, but into a nation where the values and ancient traditions of Hindu culture, summarized under the term *Hindutva*, became part of the fabric of Indian society.

Four aspects of religious and political life in modern South Asia can be identified as interacting to provide coherence for the study of the role of religion in promoting both peace and violence. Religion as a definer of social and personal identity is one; nationalism, with its claims for absolute loyalty, is another; the function of leaders in fusing these two social forces is crucial; and, finally, the nature of the violence produced by this fusion must be understood in context. While all these relevant terms defy agreed-upon definition, one can at least point to their usage here. Peace is a ubiquitous term in religion for an internal spiritual condition — in the Christian phrase, “the peace that passes for understanding” — but here it is used in the sense of freedom from war and civil unrest.

At the same time, most contemporary versions of religion seem to recognize, in the words of Psalm 85, that “righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Religion is understood here as “a fusing of memories and experiences around symbols that are regarded as possessing powers that transcend ordinary life, and these shared experi-

ences unite people into community.”¹¹ Such a sense of community can bring peace or, as often happens in South Asia, it can be used to promote hatred and violence against other communities. Nationalism, like religion, can mean many things, but minimally it means a sense of identity based on belonging to a nation-state that is circumscribed, to some degree, by territory, culture, language, religion, and history. Out of this mixture comes what Carleton Hayes, the eminent historian of nationalism, many years ago called “the religion of nationalism,” parallel in many ways to traditional Christianity, with its demands for loyalty, sacrifice, and obedience.¹² Religion and nationalism thus share many characteristics, not the least of which is a utopian vision of what a good society should be like, and the differing versions of such a society are a potent cause of conflict when religions compete for loyalty. At this point, leadership has a crucial role in creating this religion of nationalism and the conflicts that follow from it. Leaders articulate and define the often inchoate goals of a people, offer solutions, and create institutional forms to carry them out.¹³ Violence also covers a large territory of human activity, including wars between nations, attacks on neighbors, oppression through slavery, stigmatizing groups by gender, and, very frequently, enmities between institutionalized religions and their leaders.

Peace, violence, nationalism, religion, and leadership make, then, a strange and volatile mixture, and I have attempted to give them some coherence by constructing a course for looking at them in the historical context of contemporary South Asia. A version of the syllabus can be found at: www.sais-jhu.edu/depts/asiasyllabi/embree-violence_in_sa.pdf.

ENDNOTES

¹ Quoted in Ainslie T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

² Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Thompson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Douglas Johnston, ed., *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³ Quoted in James Carroll, “Why Religion Still Matters,” *Daedalus* (Summer 2003), 12.

World Religions, Violence, and Conflict Resolution

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IN THE MID-1990s I designed an undergraduate course that brought together two very different academic disciplines, the study of world religions and conflict analysis theory. It was the first course of its kind. I intended it as a follow-up to an introduction to world religions, but with a specific focus on texts, rituals, and traditions regarding war and peace, and relationships between ethics and conflict analysis, prevention, management, and resolution. The traditional approach to studying texts of war and peace turned out to be sterile. Justifications of peace and war in religious texts tend to be self-justifying, self-righteous, and rather irrelevant to the complex questions of how to prevent conflict or defuse it once underway. On the other hand, looking at the larger intellectual worlds of religious rituals and ethics through the lens of what causes conflict, what prevents it, how to manage it, and how to promote reconciliation, turns out to have opened up a treasure trove of religious insights from every civilization. The work is just beginning.

These insights turned out to enrich not only secular analysis of conflict. They strongly implied that a variety of religious traditions across the world possessed insights into the nature of human conflict, its prevention, or its resolution that rivaled secular analysis and offered new and innovative approaches to conflict resolution on an individual level and to diplomacy on a global level.

As this course transformed into a graduate course for experts in conflict resolution, I problematized the application of religious ritual and values to complex international conflicts. Highlighting the dual legacy of these religious traditions, and their capacity to promote unequal levels of barbarity such as in holy wars, crusades, jihads, and exterminations, the course simultaneously explored the way in which religious peacemakers have played a pioneering role in

global diplomacy and paths of nonviolent social change, in full hermeneutic engagement with their respective traditions. I also problematized the question of universal religious or interfaith values that have emerged in the last one hundred years as a kind of growing subculture of global religion.

Since the mid-1990s, I have used the course as a rough blueprint to train experts in conflict, students of diplomacy, and peace activists. The multidisciplinary nature of the course has always led to challenges. Some students are prepared well for religion and utterly unprepared for political science, diplomacy, and conflict theory. Other students are skilled in social sciences and politics and utterly ignorant of religion, or more often, utterly biased against it. Both sets of students (and scholars) tend to lack a general pragmatism about complex problem solving in the social, economic, and military realm that leaves them unprepared for the true moral complexity of political and military decision making. But the results have been almost universal praise for the course, with several courses now mirroring its style. A complete syllabus of the course can be found at the following Web site: fletcher.tufts.edu/faculty/gopin/WORLDR-1.htm. The following course description outlines the goals of the course:

This course is designed to analyze the ways in which world religions play a role in conflict, war, peace making and conflict resolution. Every religion has a broad range of cultural resources and values that have formed the basis of personal and communal values that prevent or successfully manage conflict. On the other hand, war, violence and repression have been justified at one time or another by important representatives of every major religion. Understanding each religion's values, world view, and, especially, the hermeneutics through which the religion changes and evolves, are the keys to discovering conflict resolution methodologies that may be effective in global and domestic violent contexts in which religion is playing some role.

Analyzing the role of religion in these phenomena is particularly challenging due to the fact that human beings come to be engaged in war or peace making out of a host of complex motivating factors, only one of which may be their religious beliefs and practices. Furthermore, religious language is often used as a mask by political leaders and perpetrators of violence that hides other motivating factors that may be less noble or persuasive to their cause.

Key questions that should be kept in mind as we explore these issues include: What are the warrants for making war and making peace in a given religious tradition? Are they at odds with each other or do they complement each other? Do they emanate historically from competing visions within the same religion? How do these varying traditions affect current practice and belief? What is the role of change and evolution in the religion's practices and beliefs, and how does change occur? How would you attempt to disentangle multiple motivations for war or peace among religious people? Is religious motivation a mask for economic, ethnic, or psychological needs? Always? Sometimes? For political leaders but not for followers? What would you do in a given region of the world where religion played a major role in violence? Would you attempt to secularize the public, redirect the religious motivations,

or repress the violent representatives of religion? Would you attempt to employ a variety of conflict resolution strategies? If so, which ones, problem-solving workshops, mediation strategies, or psychodynamic approaches to interpersonal reconciliation? What is religious violence? Is it a more authentic or less authentic expression of a religion? How do you go about answering this question, by taking a poll of co-religionists, studying the primary sources of that tradition, or imposing a value that you and many others are convinced is universal, e.g., that killing of innocents by terror, for whatever reason, cannot be sanctioned by decent religion? Can you know what a religion has truly meant to its adherents if you only speak to or study male representatives of that faith?

These are but a fraction of the questions that are raised by our subject matter. Some questions will be addressed in class. Other questions I would like you to ponder as you prepare innovative research.

I organized the course by categories of THEORY and APPLICATIONS. A sample from one year is as follows:

THEORY

1. Religion and Conflict Resolution: Mapping a New Field
2. The Psychological and Social Foundations of Conflict
3. Hermeneutics, Religion, and the Psycho-Social Dynamics of Religious Conflict and Violence

II. APPLICATIONS

4. Buddhist Liberation Movements: Introduction, Sri Lanka, Thailand
5. Buddhist Liberation Movements: Vietnam, Tibet, Conclusions
6. Christian Peacemaking: Introduction, France/Germany, East Germany
7. Christian Peacemaking: Nicaragua, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Philippines
8. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Religious/Secular and Inter-Monotheistic Conflict
9. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Abrahamic Pathways toward Transforming Relationship
10. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Practical Steps
11. The Question of Interfaith Dialogue

I have consistently assigned large papers to the course, asking students to choose a region in which there is a conflict, violent or nonviolent, and then examine the way in which religion is contributing to its resolution, perpetuating, or exacerbating the conflict, or all three. Their job is to understand and explain the hermeneutic range of lived religious belief, practice, and ritual and mythic engagement, and see its role in both war making and peace making. They then are asked to make policy recommendations. The course continues to be an amazing treasure trove of insights from the students and their research. The top third,

or at least 10 percent of the graduate classes, and sometimes undergraduate as well, create papers of such significance that they could easily serve as excellent briefs for policy makers or NGO's.

I assign my own books, in addition to those of friends who have pioneered this kind of analysis. (For a select bibliography, see below.) Unfortunately, there has not been enough to choose from, especially in the non-Christian religions, for many reasons. There are few authors who are sympathetic to and critical of religion at the same time. Secular constructs of political science theory, sociology, psychology, tend to be utterly threatened by religious constructs of reality, and allowing them the space to be an independent variable in analyzing complex conflict. In point of fact, the whole field of conflict studies suffers from the insularity of many unipolar disciplines. There are only a few of us who have seen fit to defy the unstated prohibition against multidisciplinary work, especially before tenure.

In any case, the field is growing, and there is new literature all the time on religion, diplomacy, and conflict resolution. It will require great discipline in mastering many bodies of knowledge, but also the humility necessary to know that the knowledge gaps of multidisciplinary work are inescapable. In addition, our work is deeply informed by the empirical study of lived religious experience today, on the ground, in the hands of these extraordinary, anonymous, religious peacemakers around the world, as well as study of their infamous counterparts who are warriors for God or the gods. Such a broad grasp generally requires tenure and sympathetic colleagues.

New insights into world religions will be discovered by applying new disciplines to the raw data of religious texts, ethics, and rituals, and the world of conflict theory and political policy making will be enriched as well. There may come a day when religion experts as a class of people will be taken very seriously in the global halls of power, if we take seriously the interface between the power of religion, negatively and positively, and the power of human social and political constructs.

Resources

Appleby, Scott. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.

Gopin, Marc. *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Kakar, Sudhir. *The Colors of Violence*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Kraft, Kenneth. *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992. (on reserve)

Johnston, Douglas, and Sampson, Cynthia, eds. *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. (on reserve)

Smock, David. *Religious Perspectives on War: Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Attitudes to Force after the Gulf War*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1992.

Web site: (course syllabi, articles, papers and op-eds) fletcher.tufts.edu/faculty/gopin/default.asp

WESSINGER, from p.viii

degrees of dualism. I call the most extreme dualism “radical dualism” to point to the dualism that sees things in simplistic, rigid dichotomies — us versus them.

Religious believers are not the only ones who may have a rigid dualistic perspective. It can also be found in political leaders, law enforcement agents, and military personnel. Radical dualism dehumanizes the “other,” and justifies killing the “other.” This is why it is so vitally important to humanize believers when we are teaching about different religions. We do this by showing videos and photos, inviting guest speakers, and giving religious visit assignments.

Peace, Violence, and the Issue of Security

Religious violence is interactive and does not occur in a vacuum. The complex contributing causes and interactions leading to dramatic violence need to be examined and understood in order to work to prevent future violence. On June 16, 2003, on National Public Radio, I heard an Iraqi man, who had two family members killed by American soldiers raiding his home, say, “Shooting makes shooting. Peace is the best way to solve the problems.” This man understands the interactive nature of violence, and did not want his family’s tragedy to contribute to an ever-escalating cycle of violence. Still there is the question of how to preserve peace and security in the face of threat. This is the difficult

question. But I very much agree with this Iraqi man that the underlying causes of violence have to be addressed by peaceful means, means that do not make the believers feel persecuted, and this includes teaching about the complex causes of violence that is either committed by believers or engulfs them.

Resources

Bromley, David G., and J. Gordon Melton, eds. *Cults, Religion, and Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hall, John R., with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh. *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Richardson, James T. “Minority Religions and the Context of Violence: A Conflict/Interactionist Perspective.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 103-33.

Robbins, Thomas, and Susan J. Palmer, eds. *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Wessinger, Catherine. *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven’s Gate*. New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000.

Wessinger, Catherine, ed. *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000. 📖

CHERNUS, from p.iv

regularly ask students to reflect on the current situation in light of what they are learning. That reflection is what they want. It brings the course material alive for them. It helps them realize that, as citizens, they can participate in making national decisions of global importance. It helps them fulfill the responsibility entailed by citizenship: analyzing the issues carefully in the largest possible context.

Religious studies can offer this kind of analysis. By turning good scholarship into good citizenship, and vice versa, we assume our full responsibility as both scholars and citizens. This is what our students will remember, even if they forget the details of apocalyptic eschatology or the Truman Doctrine. They are more likely to take a lifelong interest in their nation’s policies of war and peace, and to feel responsible for continually deepening their understanding of those issues, if we set a good example for them in the short time we have them in our classrooms.

Resources:

Stephanson, Anders. *Manifest Destiny*. Hill and Wang, 1995.

Campbell, David. *Writing Security*, 2nd ed. University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Engelhardt, Tom. *The End of Victory Culture*, 2nd ed. University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven*. University of California Press, 1998.

Tuveson, Ernest. *Redeemer Nation*. University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Chernus, Ira. “Fighting Terror in the National Insecurity State.” www.colorado.edu/ReligiousStudies/chernus/4820-ColdWarCulture/Readings/FightingTerrorInNIS.htm

Chernus, Ira. *The Idea of Nonviolence in U.S. History*. Available online at www.colorado.edu/ReligiousStudies/chernus/4800/NonviolenceBook/Index.htm

Course syllabi can be accessed from: www.colorado.edu/ReligiousStudies/chernus/ 📖

GALLAGHER, from p.iii

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Kaplan, Jeffrey, ed. *Millennial Violence: Past, Present, and Future*. London: Frank Cass, 2002. Also published as a special issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 1 (2002).

Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Robbins, Thomas, and Susan Palmer, eds. *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Wessinger, Catherine. *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven’s Gate*. New York: Seven Bridges, 2000.

The syllabus for “Cults and Conversion in Modern America” is available at www.aarweb.org/syllabus/syllabi/g/gallagher/1JN2D-Gallagher.pdf. 📖

CASTELLI, from p.v

Sells, Michael. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Tilly, Charles. *The Politics of Collective Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

de Vries, Hent. *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Weigert, Kathleen Maas. “Structural Violence.” In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, edited by Lester Kurtz, 3: 431-46. San Diego: Academic Press, 1999.

“Responding to Violence”: www.barnard.columbia.edu/crow/respondingtoviolence/rtrtflash/rtrv01.html

The Scholar & the Feminist Online vol. 2, no. 2 (forthcoming special issue devoted to issues of violence and the current global situation): www.barnard.edu/sfonline 📖

EMBREE, from p.x

⁴ Christopher Candland, ed., *The Spirit of Violence: An Interdisciplinary Bibliography of Religion and Violence* (New York: Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, Occasional Papers, No. 6, 1992).

⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer, introduction to Ibid, i; Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁶ For a brief overview, see Ainslie T. Embree, “Religion” in *Understanding Contemporary India*, Sumit Ganguly and Neil DeVotta, eds., (Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 2003), 191–320.

⁷ Quoted in Ibid., 191.

⁸ Quoted in Stephen Hay, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 251.

⁹ Quoted in Ibid., 387.

¹⁰ Quoted in Donald E. Smith, *India as a Secular State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 155.

¹¹ Embree, “Religion,” in Ganguly, *Contemporary India*, 192.

¹² Carleton J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: MacMillan, 1926), 93–125.

¹³ Embree, *Utopias*, 10.

In addition to the endnotes, the following resources will be useful.

Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Revenge and Reconciliation: Understanding South Asia*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1999.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Hindu National Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*. London: Hurst, 1996.

Marty, Martin E. and R. Scott Appleby, eds. *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Varadarajan, Siddharth, ed. *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*. Delhi: Penguin, 2002.

Varshney, Ashutosh. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 📖

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AAR members interested in guest editing an issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* are invited to submit the title of a theme focusing on teaching and learning in the study of religion, along with a succinct description (500 words) of the theme’s merit and significance, to *Spotlight’s* general editor, Tazim R. Kassam. In addition to issues devoted to specific themes, problems, and settings, *Spotlight on Teaching* will also occasionally feature a variety of independent articles and essays critically reflecting on pedagogy and theory in the field of religion. Please send both types of submissions to:

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