

RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEWS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*Change and Stability.
State, Religion and Politics
in the Modern Middle East and North Africa
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Religious worldviews for conflict resolution

Abstract

As time seem to pass on at an increasingly feverish speed in an evolving globalize world, there has been emerging new and common challenges facing the whole of mankind, some of dire consequences. Along has been progressing in tandem wider and greater acceptance of the concept of world views amongst people and nations worldwide. The importance and need of cogent and cohesive world views in the face of devastating crisis was felt never before than in the last century. The two world wars and the sacrifice of millions of lives expedited the process of the need of converging world views in the face of disasters. In fact, the two bloody episodes, particularly the second one could be said to be the turning point of modern human history. The First World War led to the League of Nations that failed when the then world opinion surrendered to the whims of great powers. It was the Second World War driven by unbridled ambition and greed that culminated with worldwide demand for the United Nations, thus created in 1947.

The primary objective of the United Nations was to establish and maintain international peace and security. The mode to ensure such a universal state was to use the forum for exchanging views and formulating common positions on issues threatening destabilization of any region of the world. This time around, the international institution, a need of the time, became an instant and sustained success. Aside containing, dissolving, or even intervening in the event of confrontational bloody crises threatening sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, the institution began spanning its wings to encompass areas of economic, social, and humanitarian concerns. The expansion in newer areas came about through discussions, deliberations, negotiations, basically through exchange of diversity of national views and their convergence into universal consensus agreements on issues adversely affecting humanity at large. Thus, common strategies have been evolved with cooperation of all member states to face and avert challenges and dangers arising from time to time.

The twenty first century swung around the corner and appeared with its own unique brand of problems portending danger of far sinister and greater magnitude to mankind. The

world is now wallowing in the quicksand of global warming and climatic change, degradation of environment and ecological balance, growing shortage of fresh water, human rights violations and the increasing acts of local and global terrorism, among a few others. Though some are directly or indirectly related to the constant drive and exploitation of natural resources for meeting the various demands of humanity, there are others emanating from policies and acts of gross injustice, suppression of freedom, and different forms of repression. A particular type of terrorism deriving from politico-religious based suppression and hard discrimination has appeared with vicious vengeance in the last decade or so. As the saying goes “as you sow, so shall you reap”, there has been harvest of terrorism worldwide simply as a result of our own doings. There is none to blame but ourselves for this terrorism malaise.

Sadly, religion and religious sentiments have been misused in a perverse manner to reach certain selfish, self-centered goals. Political leadership of a myopic few entangled in power craving national politics, with a twisted vision of dictating the rest of the world, instigated further by religious fundamentalists, have led as a reaction to this sorry state of terrorism. Thus, on the one hand, while world views and the United Nations and the mushroom of similar smaller institutions have been consolidating their status in the globalize world, the ever increasing close proximity of nations have also been feeding the religiously motivated politicians with the concept of world domination. It is common knowledge that every religion professes peace among all religious creed and followers within any society or nation. It is also known that the basic values taught by all religions are the same, and these all strive to lay the foundation of a peaceful, prosperous society. In fact, the commonality of basic values of life and living should have inspired common worldviews on issues confronting mankind.

Indeed, religions have all been inherently secular as their founders have found their enlightenment from the same source. Religions have appeared at different times in human history to bring peace and sanity among wayward people stooping to the irrational life of base instincts and paganism. Religions have always taught followers of all faith to have forbearance and tolerance of one another and to live a life of peace with each other. Religions have never instigated imposition of one faith over other by force and oppressive designs. It is true human history is replete with events where rulers in connivance with fundamentalist priests have imposed their religions on other religious sects forcing

conversions. These successes have been far outweighed by failures as such forceful acts have never been part, practice or philosophy of any religion. Surely, secularism lies as the core philosophy of all religions. If religions and their secular philosophies were allowed freedom to preach as in their books, there would not be any distinction between religious and secular worldviews.

It is clear if political leadership refrains from using religion for power striving goals, or restrains religious fundamentalists from influencing their visions and policies, world views would have a better opportunity to converge in resolving the dangerous challenges facing the twenty-first century world. As a Muslim who has studied the Holy Quran and Islamic History, there has been manipulation of Islam for political goals by certain Muslim rulers, but it has never been so at the time of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (SM). His period was blessed with a secular environment as ordained by Almighty Allah in the Holy Book. During his lifetime of governance, followers of all religions-Christians, Jews and Muslims lived in peace and harmony in the vast Islamic Empire established under his leadership. Similarly, in today's globalize world, if the common values shared by all religions are practiced and applied in an uninhabited manner in meeting world crises, worldviews would invariably be consensual and unanimous in text and fervor in resolving them.

1. Introduction

The term "world view" is borrowed from the German word "weltanschauung." It means a person's fundamental "world outlook," or life perspective. It refers to their perceptions of deity, humanity and the rest of the universe. "It represents our personal metaphysical outlook on life." (1)

According to The Free Dictionary, the term worldview means: the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world. It is a collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group (2)

Author Palmer Michael describes a worldview as consisting of six parts: Ideology (e.g. beliefs in God, cosmology), Narrative (e.g. sacred writings and myths), Norms (e.g. ethics and morality), Rituals (e.g. activities designed to renew bonds), Experience (e.g. emotional and spiritual elements), and a social element (educating future generations). (3)

Professor James Olthuis of the Toronto Institute for Christian Studies has written: "A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our future in it. The vision may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned; it may be greatly refined through cultural-historical development; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy; it may not even be codified into creedal form. Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. (4)

A world view is a coherent collection of concepts and theorems that must allow us to construct a global image of the world, and in this way to understand as many elements of our experience as possible. Additionally, it refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it.

People tend to adopt a worldview early in life, and often do not change it radically in adulthood. They often reject new understandings and discoveries in the fields of religion,

culture, science, etc. out of hand because they are incompatible with their personal worldview.

Societies, as well as individuals, have always contemplated deep questions relating to their being and becoming, and to the being and becoming of the world. The configuration of answers to these questions forms their world view.

Hence, a world view is a system of co-ordinates or a frame of reference in which everything presented to us by our diverse experiences can be placed. It is a symbolic system of representation that allows us to integrate everything we know about the world and ourselves into a global picture, one that illuminates reality as it is presented to us within a certain culture.

2. Five Worldviews

Dennis McCallum in his book “Christianity: The Faith That Makes Sense” described five world views. These five worldviews include all the dominant outlooks in the world today. (5) Indeed, there are more than six thousand distinct religions in the world today. However, some people are surprised to find that the world’s religions and philosophies tend to break down into a few major categories namely **Naturalism, Pantheism, Theism, Spiritism and Polytheism and Post Modernism**. Theism that includes the Islam, Christianity and Judaism, believe in an infinite god whose unique creation is mankind. In Theism, truth about God is known through revelation and moral values as the objective expression of an absolute moral being. However, in **Postmodernism**, tolerance, freedom of expression, inclusion, and the refusal for claiming to have the answers are the only universal values which are part of our social paradigms as well.

3. Worldviews in Religion and Philosophy

Various writers suggest that religious or philosophical belief-systems should be seen as worldviews rather than a set of individual hypotheses or theories. The Japanese Philosopher Nishida Kitaro wrote extensively on "the Religious Worldview" in exploring the philosophical significance of Eastern religions. (6)

According to Neo-Calvinist David Naugle's *Worldview: The History of a Concept* "Conceiving of Christianity as a worldview has been one of the most significant developments in the recent history of the church."(7)

The Christian thinker James W. Sire defines a worldview as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world." and suggests that "we should all think in terms of worldviews, that is, with a consciousness not only of our own way of thought but also that of other people, so that we can first understand and then genuinely communicate with others in our pluralistic society."(8) Professor Keith Ward bases his discussion of the rationality of religious belief in "Is Religion Dangerous?" on a consideration of religious and non-religious worldviews.

The philosophical importance of Worldviews became increasingly clear during the 20th Century for a number of reasons, such as increasing contact between cultures, and the failure of some aspects of the Enlightenment project, such as the rationalistic project of attaining all truth by reason alone. Mathematical logic showed that fundamental choices of axioms were essential in deductive reasoning and, even having chosen axioms, not everything that was true in a given logical system could be proven. Some philosophers believe the problems extend to the inconsistencies and failures which plagued the Enlightenment attempt to identify universal moral and rational principles; (9) although Enlightenment principles such as universal suffrage and (the universal declaration of) human rights are accepted by many, if not taken for granted.

A worldview can be considered as comprising of a number of basic beliefs which are philosophically equivalent to the axioms of the worldview considered as a logical theory. These basic beliefs cannot, by definition, be proven (in the logical sense) within the worldview precisely because they are axioms, and are typically argued from rather than argued for. However their coherence can be explored philosophically and using logic, and if two different worldviews have sufficient common beliefs it may be possible to have a constructive dialogue between them. On the other hand, if different worldviews are held to be basically incommensurate and irreconcilable, then the situation is one of cultural relativism and would therefore incur the standard criticisms from philosophical realists.

Additionally, religious believers might not wish to see their beliefs made relative into something that is only "true for them". Subjective logic is a belief reasoning formalism where beliefs explicitly are subjectively held by individuals but where a consensus between different worldviews can be achieved.

According to Clifford Geertz religion is "...a system of symbols...formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." (10)

Along the same lines, Leszek Kolakowski describes religion as "...the realm of worship wherein understanding, knowledge, the feeling of participation in the ultimate reality (whether or not a personal god is meant) and moral commitment appear as a single act." (11)

It is important to note that any person's worldview need not be, and in fact probably is not, congruous with the fundamentals of any single religious tradition or sect. A worldview is acquired on an ongoing basis, and many an individual's worldview framework blends religious notions and practices he or she acquires from a multitude of experiences over time. A person with exposure to several religious traditions is likely to have a life outlook that is "cobbled" from the varied experiences and understandings to which they have been exposed.

It seems important that any definition for religion that a teacher uses be practical and also capture the emotional/conceptual components of the outlook that make the freedom of conscience our nation guarantees to all citizens, whatever their worldview, so vital. (12)

4. Worldview in Islam

The world view of Islam is not based upon philosophical speculation formulated mainly from observation of the data of sensible experience, of what is visible to the eye. Nor is it restricted to kawn, which is the world of sensible experience, the world of created things.

Islamic worldview encompasses both the al-dunya and al-akhirah in which the dunya aspect must be related in a profound and inseparable way to the Akhirah-aspect, in which the latter has the ultimate and final significance. Specifically, it means that while we are doing our ibadah we also must do the best in our work in this world without implying any attitude of neglect or being unmindful of the dunya aspect. (13)

The key to the Muslim worldview is the word "Islam" itself. It is an Arabic word, a kind of verbal noun which means "submission" (similarly, "Muslim" means "one who submits"). Its importance lies in the fact that it defines how Muslims understand the relationship that God intends should exist between Himself and man. (14)

Islam as a worldview is rooted in knowledge, intellectual exertion, and reason. The Qur'an repeatedly invites mankind to believe in Allah, the one true fashioner of the universe, by imploring us to ponder over the creation of the cosmos.

We are instructed to "travel through the earth and see how Allah originated creation," and we are given the tidings that "He will similarly produce a later creation [the Hereafter], for Allah has power over all things" (29:20). The Qur'an challenges us to probe and to reflect, asserting, "which ever way you turn, there is the Countenance of Allah" (2:115). Our inner self constitutes no less vital a facet of reality, reflecting upon which unlocks some of the esoteric marvels of the creative order. "We will show them Our signs in the universe and in their own souls as well, until it becomes manifest to them that it is the truth" (41:53). This being the case, the Qur'an then rhetorically asks: "Do they not reflect within themselves?" (30:8).

Knowledge, therefore, is sourced not only in the physical universe that envelops us, but also -- and even more important -- within our inner spiritual being. Both these fountains of knowledge contain signs pointing to the creative force that originated everything. Note how in none of the passages the Qur'an asks us to blindly accept its message. To the contrary, only upon investigation and mental exertion are we to affirm what the Qur'an invites us to believe in God and His oneness, and submission to His will. It is only as a corollary to this submission that we have been expected to obey Allah's commissioned prophets and messengers throughout time.

Complementing the explicit Qur'anic statements about the importance of reflection and seeking knowledge are umpteen narratives from the Prophet of Islam and those who were heirs to his wisdom and gnosis. When asked how one arrives at the knowledge of The Real (Allah), the Prophet replied: "By knowing one's self." Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, in a vividly metaphoric narration with colorful imagery, reports that the Prophet described how Angel Gabriel came to Adam and said: "O Adam, I have been instructed to have you choose among three things; select one and leave the other two." When Adam inquired about his three options, Gabriel offered "intellect, modesty, and religion." "I choose intellect," replied Adam. Thereupon Gabriel told modesty and religion to depart. However, the two stood their ground, saying that they were under instruction to remain with the intellect wheresoever it may be. "So be it," Gabriel replied, as he ascended to the Heavens. (15)

The Qur'an continuously draws our attention to the fact that this universe is created by a Powerful and Knowledgeable Creator (al-Zukhruf 43:9). There are many places in the Qur'an where Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala points towards the creation as "ayat." As there are Ayats (signs) in the Book of God, the Qur'an, so there are also signs in the Book of Nature. The ayats of the Qur'an are called "wahy matluww," while the ayat in the universe are called "wahy mashhud." If we carefully study the "signs of God" in His Book and carefully investigate and analyze the nature we should reach the same conclusion. In this way, Islamic position is that there is no inherent contradiction between religion and science. Authentic religion and proper scientific inquiries work with each other without any problem and difficulty. The difficulties come only when religion is mixed up with mythology or when science transgresses its limits and boundaries.

This worldview is comprehensive and universal. It covers all the basic aspects of human life: individual, family, economic and social. It answers all questions about where life came from, where it will go and what is the purpose of life. This view makes human beings both humble and dignified. It satisfies the heart and mind. It provides guidance and helps human beings to live morally and decently. It broadens the horizons of human beings and gives them the sense of belonging to each other. It fosters love, harmony and peace; it removes egotism and selfishness as well as racialism and rivalry. (16)

5. Islam and Conflict Resolution

Islam has taught very pragmatic and durable ways of conflict resolution from the very beginning. The theme of the Sura Yusuf represents a process of conflict resolution between the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Qureysh who conspired to kill the prophet forcing him to emigrate from Makkah to Al –Madina.

However, in the end, the Quresh had to humble themselves before Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), just as the brothers of the Prophet Yusuf(PBUH) humbly requested him “Show mercy to us for Allah rewards richly those who show mercy (17). And Prophet Yusuf (PBUH)generously forgave them though he had complete power to inflict his vengeance upon them.

The same story of mercy was repeated when, after the conquest of Makkah, the defeated Quresh stood meekly before the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who had full power to inflict his vengeance upon them for each and every cruelty committed by them. But instead, he forgave them very generously saying the same answer Prophet Yusuf gave to his brothers- “Today no penalty shall be inflicted upon you: you are forgiven”

Sura Al-Hujurat (18) provided guidance towards attitudes that Muslim should adopt in cases where groups of Muslims have conflict with each other. Muslims are exhorted to safeguard against the evils that corrupt collective life and spoil mutual relationships such as mocking and taunting each other, calling names, creating suspicions, spying into other people’s affairs and backbiting. All of these evils are declared as forbidden and unlawful. In addition, national and racial discriminations that cause universal corruption in the world are also condemned in Islam.

In Sura Al-Mumtahana, (19) Allah has taught the believers the lesson that no believer should, under any circumstances and for any motive, have relations of love and friendship with the disbelievers who are hostile to Islam and a believer should refrain from anything which might be helpful to them in the conflict between Islam and the disbelief.

The history of early Islamic period shows the practical benefit of peace by signing the treaty of Hudaibiya that neutralized the Quraish in any conflict between the Muslims and the Jews.

In facing rebellion against his authority, Khalifa Ali Bin Talib was opposed to any armed conflict between the Muslims. He felt that those who had rebelled against his authority laboured under some misunderstanding. It was his endeavor that such misunderstanding should be removed and unity should be restored among the Muslims. He commanded his Army Generals that war was not to be resorted to until all possibilities of an equitable settlement through peaceful means had been exhausted. He ordered that even on the failure of the peace parleys, the first shot was not to be fired from his side. "Let the other side take the initiative in the war, if they are not inclined to listen to the voice of reason" he said. (20)

6. Religion and Conflict

Religion, after all, is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (e.g., freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and wrong, sacred and profane), religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. (21)

The ambiguity of religion's relationship to conflict is better understood when religion is recognized as a type of living tradition, "a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition." (22)

The heterogeneity of the world's largest religions means that at any time or in any territory, these living traditions might be a source of violence. Yet, it also means that within each of these religions there is room for the normative tasks of conflict resolution.

Since the awakening of religion, wars have been fought in the name of different gods and goddesses. Still today most violent conflicts contain religious elements linked up with ethno-national, inter-state, economic, territorial, cultural and other issues. Threatening the

meaning of life, conflicts based on religion tend to become dogged, tenacious and brutal types of wars. When conflicts are couched in religious terms, they become transformed in value conflicts. Unlike other issues, such as resource conflicts which can be resolved by pragmatic and distributive means, value conflicts have a tendency to become mutually conclusive or zero-sum issues. They entail strong judgments of what is right and wrong, and parties believe that there cannot be a common ground to resolve their differences.(23).

The attention for the role of religion in conflicts has been stimulated by positive and negative developments, including the desecularisation of the World and the rise of religious conflicts. In most Strategic Surveys, attention is now paid to the militant forms of religious fundamentalism as a threat to peace. Also importance has been the phenomenon of realignment or the cross denominational cooperation between the progressives and traditionalists with respect to certain specific issues. (24)

7. Religious Peace-making

The greatest challenge to religious peacebuilding is the ambivalence of religion. Ambivalence undermines the perception of the enterprise and enables intra-religious sabotage of its progress. The challenges of religious violence notwithstanding, however, there are many points of criticism within the developing processes of religious peacebuilding.

While addressing the 5th Annual Lecture of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, at the University of Maryland in 1999, Former Lebanese president Amine Gemayel offered his vision of a world that could overcome conflict. He spoke of the imminent need for a "synthesis of religious tenets" as "an essential prerequisite for conflict resolution on a global scale. He suggested that "the time has come for the creation of a new universal forum that draws together thinkers, philosophers, theologians, poets, and artists from several backgrounds and nations, great and small." And he concluded these ideas by suggesting that "through a consultative process, a widespread agreement can be achieved and controversy avoided." (25)

Several factors endow religions and religious organizations with a great and under-utilized potential for constructive conflict management.

First, more than two thirds of the world population belongs to a religion. In 1992, 29.2% of the religious constituency was Christian; 17.9% Muslim; 13% Hindu; 5.7% Buddhist/Shintoist; 0.7% Confucianism/Taoist. Together, all these religious organizations have a huge infrastructure with a communication network reaching to all corners of the world.

Second, religious organizations have the capacity to mobilize people and to cultivate attitudes of forgiveness, conciliation. They can do a great deal to prevent dehumanization. They have the capacity to motivate and mobilize people for a more peaceful world. Religious and humanitarian values are one of the main roots of voluntarism in all countries: doing something for someone else without expecting to be paid for it. They are problem-solvers. They do not seek conflict. But when a need is seen, they want to do something about it. They are a force to be reckoned with.

Third, religious organizations can rely on a set of soft power sources to influence the peace process. Raven and Rubin (1983) developed a useful taxonomy for understanding the different bases of power. It asserts that six different sources of power exist for influencing another's behavior: reward, coercion, expertise, legitimacy, reference, and information.

Reward power is used when the influencer offers some positive benefits (of a tangible or intangible nature) in exchange for compliance. If reward power relies on the use of promises, coercive power relies on the language of threat. Expert power relies for its effectiveness on the influencers' ability to create the impression of being in possession of information or expertise that justifies a particular request. Legitimate power requires the influencer to persuade others on the basis of having the right to make a request. Referent power builds on the relationships that exist between the influencer and recipient. The influencer counts on the fact that the recipient, in some ways, values his or her relationship with the source of influence. Finally, informational power works because of the content of the information conveyed.

To mediate, religious organizations can rely on several sources of power. There could be the referent power that stems from the mediation position of a large and influential religious family. Closely related could be legitimate power or the claim to moral rectitude, the right to assert its views about the appropriateness and acceptability of behavior. Religious leaders could refer to their 'spiritual power' and speak in the name of God. Another aspect of importance could be the informational power derived through non-governmental channels; groups like the Quakers could use expertise power on the basis of their reputation of fine mediators.

Fourth, religious organizations could also use hard sources of power. Some religious organizations have reward power, not only in terms of promising economic aid, but, for example, by granting personal audiences. Usage could also be made of coercive power by mobilizing people to protest certain policies. Integrative power, or power of 'love' is based on such relationships as respect, affection, love, community and identity. (26)

Fifth, there is a growing need for non-governmental peace services. Non-governmental actors can fulfill tasks for which traditional diplomacy is not well equipped. They would provide information not readily available to traditional diplomats; they could create an environment in which parties could meet without measuring their bargaining positions, without attracting charges of appeasement, without committing themselves, and without making it look as if they were seeking peaceful solutions at the expense of important interests. They could monitor the conflict dynamics, involve the people at all levels, and assess the legitimacy of peace proposals and agreements.

Sixth, most can make use of their transnational organization to provide peace services. Finally, there is the fact that religious organizations are in the field and could fulfill several of the above peace services.

However, several weaknesses limit the impact of religious organizations in building a world safe from conflict. Several religious organizations are still perpetrators of different kinds of violence. In many of today's conflicts they remain primary or secondary actors or behave as passive bystanders.

Also inhibiting religious peace-making efforts is the fact that, as third parties, religious organizations tend to be reactive players. They seem to respond better to humanitarian relief efforts after a conflict has escalated than to potential violence. A third weakness is the lack of effective cooperation between religious organizations. Most of the peace making or peace-building efforts are uncoordinated. Finally, there is a need for more professional expertise in conflict analysis and management.

9. Religion and Modernity

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religion becomes mobile, divorced from traditional community life. While modernity has affected the entire globe in some ways, the privatization of religion has not been a universal experience for the world's communities. The process and effects of secularization have been halting and mixed. While 78 percent of the world's states are secular, 78.3 percent of the global population adheres to one of the world's five largest religions.

Western modernity, especially as understood through the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, has heavily influenced conflict resolution and international relations. As such, these academic disciplines and their practical applications have incorporated elements of secularization theory] and marginalized the influence of religion in their analysis of world affairs. The roots of this tendency can be traced to the development of the modern western understanding of religion, which is markedly different from pre-modern and some non-Western understandings.

Changes in the context of international relations and conflict resolution have been matched by changes internal to many religious traditions. Positive responses to the human rights era, globalization, and fundamentalism have included the growth of the Christian ecumenical movement, increased pursuit of interfaith dialogue, and the development of coalitions across religious, secular, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Within this current of change, some religious leaders and groups have an increased interest and capacity in conflict resolution. While this necessarily involves training in contemporary conflict resolution techniques and approaches, religious actors can also draw upon their identities as participants in a social and spiritual tradition.

Whatever becomes of the secularization debate, the privatization of religion has had as yet its strongest influence only in the West, which represents less than one-sixth of the world's population. Understanding the way identity and morality are formed in this context gives foundation to the concept of religious peacebuilding. The social theory of Alasdair MacIntyre provides a useful vehicle for beginning such an exploration. Grown from Aristotelian thought, it argues the importance of community in forming, continuing, and rejecting morality and tradition. (27)

However, the New World Order cannot be understood without accounting for the role of religion and religious organizations. During the Cold War, not much attention was paid to the phenomenon of nationalism and religion. Marxists, Liberals, nation-builders and integration specialists treated it as a marginal variable. In the Western political systems a frontier has been drawn between man's inner life and his public actions, between religion and politics.

The West is characterized by a desecularisation of politics and a depoliticisation of religion. Part of the elite Western opinion views religion as irrational and premodern; "a throw-back to the dark centuries before the Enlightenment taught the virtues of rationality and decency, and bent human energies to constructive, rather than destructive purposes" (28)

In the Communist block, religion was officially stigmatized as the opium of the people and repressed. In theories of integration and modernization, secularization was considered a 'sine qua non' for progress. Consequently, the explosion of nationalist and ethnic conflicts was a great surprise.

10. Role of Religious Organizations

Religious organizations are a rich source of peace services. They can function as a powerful warrant for social tolerance, for democratic pluralism, and for constructive conflict-management. They are peace-builders and peace-makers.

Despite numerous success stories, religious peacebuilding is still asserting its validity amidst religious violence and in a largely secular culture of academia and policymaking. The process and effects of secularization have been halting and mixed, yet the persisting

relevance of religion has not been matched by sufficient religious literacy in Western international relations and conflict resolution. Current academic and policy definitions of peacebuilding emphasize a determination to be non-prescriptive and long-term oriented. It is evident that religious peacebuilding is well suited to enact such designs—in its capacity for multi-layered, long-term work based in permanent and semi-permanent relationships with people in conflict zones.

Though there are substantial challenges that must be addressed, religion can offer considerable contributions to peacebuilding efforts. At least, religion should be included in matters of conflict and peace because its adherents represent numerically significant portions of society. At most, its inclusion increases the possibility of further contextualizing and internationalizing peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Religious traditions are vehicles for this in their existing networks, through which peacebuilders can share the best practices, and in religious education which takes daily form in preaching and school teaching. The ambivalence of religion, among other factors, dictates that the latter may be problematic.

However, to the extent that local manifestations of religion accept and teach the peaceful doctrines of their traditions, they can contribute to the development of indigenous peacebuilding or what Appleby calls the saturation mode of peacebuilding. Herein lays the greatest potential for religious peacebuilding: the capacity to transcend the boundary of peacebuilding as a field for external expertise.

11. Conclusion

Religious organizations have a major impact on inter-communal and international conflicts. During the Cold War, religious as well as ethnic and nationalist conflicts were relatively neglected in the study of international relations and peace research. After the implosion of the communist block, the escalation of nationalist violence was a surprise. Some expect an escalation of religious conflicts as well. Despite an increase in the attention to the religious dimension of conflicts, it remains an under-researched field.

The world cannot survive without a new global ethic, and religions play a major role, as parties in violent conflicts, as passive bystanders and as active peace-makers and peace-builders. Hans Küng's thesis (29) that there cannot be world peace without religious peace is right. Representing two thirds of the world population, religions have a major responsibility in creating a constructive conflict culture. They will have to end conflicts fueled by religion, stop being passive bystanders and organize themselves to provide more effective peace services. Religions and religious organisations have potential as an untapped and under-used integrative power.

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