

Religion and Conflict

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

An Urgent Need to Recognise the Role of Religion / Tony Blair

A Critical Time for Recognising the Role of Religion / Charlotte Keenan

Religion and Conflict in Global Perspective / Mark Juergensmeyer

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Avoiding Pitfalls in Responding to Religious Conflict / Daniel Cere

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Nigeria: An Opportunity for Faith-Based Conflict Resolution / John Campbell

Building a Consensus for Reconciliation / Christopher Rider

The Counter Terrorist Classroom: Countering Extremism Through (Religious) Education? / Liam Gearon

Addressing Religious Extremism: A Positive Approach for Policy Makers and Practitioners / Robert Jackson

Pakistan: Education, Religion and Conflict / Raza Rumi

Education as a Security Issue / Ian Jamison

Action for Peace and Progress: 'Tin Ears' on Religion and Development / Katherine Marshall

Supporting Communities for Action / Ian Linden

Islam Versus Secularism: Muslim Democrats and a Third Way / Ed Husain

Dealing with Violent Extremism: Mainstreaming Understanding of Religion / Matthew Lawrence and William Neal

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Religion and Conflict

R E S P O N D I N G T O T H E C H A L L E N G E S

Edited by

D A N I E L C E R E & T H O M A S T H O R P

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Foreword

By the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair



The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair is the Founder and Patron of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. Tony Blair served as Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from May 1997 to June 2007. He was also the leader of Britain's Labour Party between 1994 and 2007 and the Member of Parliament for Sedgefield, England from 1983 to 2007.

An Urgent Need to Recognise the Role of Religion

The world faces a scourge that has seen innocent lives taken, communities scarred and nations destabilised in an arc that stretches from the Far East through the Middle East to North America. This fanaticism abuses faith to justify violence against innocent civilians. We need to urgently recognise the global nature of this problem and from that analysis contrive the set of policies that will resolve it.

A generation of leaders face a fundamental question: how do we uproot the thinking of the extremists and win the battle of ideas? There is no doubt that security measures are required. This is a consequence of taking on groups of people who fight without hesitation, kill without mercy and die without regret. But this alone will not be enough. Without a comprehensive strategy, we will face a future marked by conflict and instability across swathes of the world and major acts of terrorism in our own lands.

To respond in one way to one crisis as it arises and then to another in a different way, produces a fractured, incoherent response that will only serve the purposes of the extremists themselves. Of course extremists are adept at jumping on the back of political grievances and each case has its individual aspects. But to deny on this basis that there is a common factor at play here has dangerous consequences for our response.

The violence is the end product of a way of thinking. The soil in which the extremists plant the seeds of hate, is the soil of ignorance, of warped thinking and education producing warped minds and, in particular, of a distorted and false view of religion. We will not deal with the root causes of terrorism unless we confront this fact.

And the evidence is clear: the problem is growing not diminishing. The current crisis in Syria and Iraq has overshadowed incidents in China,

Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Mali, Kosovo and the United States of America to name but a few. We must tackle this as one, faiths united, East and West together; we must support the moderate majority, the open-minded, and help them to make their voice heard, because it is only by providing a counter-narrative to close-minded extremism that we can halt this growth.

Education is a battlefield we have not yet entered decisively, to our great detriment. If we do not tackle this question with the honesty and openness it demands, then all the security measures and all the fighting will count for nothing. Especially foolish is the idea that we leave this process of the generational deformation of the mind undisturbed, at the same time as we spend billions on security measures to counter the very threat we allow to be created.

This is what the Faith Foundation responds to. This is the importance of the critical examination of the current policy debate set out in this volume. Engaging with issues of religion and conflict is not without its difficulties. But their direct engagement with reconciliation efforts to provide practical tools to counter religious extremism puts them at the forefront of this debate. Their experience working on these issues can help to map out our response to this crisis. This struggle will define the 21st century. There is no better cause, nor one more urgent.

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Charlotte Keenan

Tony Blair Faith Foundation

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A Critical Time for Recognising the Role of Religion

The resurgence of religion has transformed the international sphere. Across the globe, religious extremism is feeding conflicts and perpetrating acts of horrific violence in the name of faith. In illustrating key policy concerns and their implications, the contents of this volume can help policy makers to map their path forwards. This will not be an easy journey and will require long-term commitment, but it has never been more urgent that we embark sooner rather than later, writes Charlotte Keenan.

In the last two decades we have witnessed great atrocities carried out in the name of religion. From isolated but horrific attacks carried out on Western soil, to almost weekly if not daily waves of violence, religious extremism has claimed thousands of lives in conflict torn countries across the world. Religion is undoubtedly a major factor of conflicts globally.¹ In 2014 alone we have seen the unprecedented rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the surge of fighters flooding to their cause from across the world. Estimates indicate that in the last year over 15,000 people from over 80 nations, more than 1,000 people per month, have entered Syria, many, it is thought, to join ISIS, swelling their ranks.²

Across the Middle East and North Africa, Islamist extremists are making headlines and increasingly groups are turning away from al-Qaeda's central leadership and towards ISIS's newly claimed caliphate for direction. Beyond this region, religious extremism has also dominated headlines. Whether

it is Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hindu Nationalists in India, the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan or Buddhist extremists in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, this is just the tip of the iceberg. An arc of religiously motivated violent extremism exists from Indonesia and the Philippines, through Asia, the Middle East and Africa, to Europe and the Americas.

The 'resurgence' of religion explored in this volume has transformed the international sphere. Of course, whether religion had ever disappeared is a debatable point and the evidence that faith is as important as it has ever been is as clear in polling evidence from Pew Research Center and others, as it is to those on the ground working closely with religious organisations.³ Across the world much healthcare, care of the elderly, community support and renewal, social care and youth work is provided by religious groups, often more effectively than by governments. Yet for many, religion has increasingly become a pariah, too complex and untrustworthy to be taken seriously as

a significant factor in the international sphere, let alone as a partner.

Over the last five years the Tony Blair Faith Foundation has built a range of programmatic responses to the challenges we have identified globally. These include developing educational and social action projects that engage directly with reconciliation efforts to help to build respect and tolerance within faiths and between those of different faiths and of none. We have worked in some of the most troubled locations in the world including northern Nigeria, Pakistan and the Balkans and have accrued a vast range of experience from this. I am immensely proud of the contribution that we make to this volume. The practical, policy orientated and experience driven additions that our staff are able to make to those positions outlined by the experts here are proof of our pioneering work in this field.

The purpose of this volume is not, however, to laud our work and discuss its details. We are constantly aware that engaging with issues of religion and conflict is not without its challenges. The difficult questions that this volume highlights from current debates within the spheres of policy and the academy demonstrate this. It is vitally important to move these debates forward, to map a pathway that can help address policy gaps and obstacles. That is what this volume seeks to do. It is, of course, always necessary to engage with counter-perspectives, as these ensure critical assessment and evaluation of methodology and approach. But we must also recognise what works; where there is positive impact we must seek to analyse, foster and replicate it. This is where our experience of applying

these debates and addressing these questions in the field can help.

There is much that we can all learn from the contributions in this volume. In particular, several key themes emerge that can help us to map a path forward. Firstly, as Philpott, Ahmed, Rumi and Marshall in particular highlight, an international, multi-faith and multilateral response to violent extremism is needed. This is a problem that affects us all and political manoeuvring plays purely into the hands of the extremists, giving them time and space to embed and grow. As Juergensmeyer, Ghanea, Campbell and Marshall show, religious actors are critical to this process. As Linden states, for under-resourced governments, and to this we can add international programmes and efforts, religious communities are a source of social capital and civic activism that can contribute immeasurably to solving domestic problems. “Governments,” as Juergensmeyer writes, “would be wise to engage this evolution.”

This leads to a second theme, that, while an international approach is necessary, we must not lose sight of local contexts. As Beaman, Cere, Ghanea and Campbell illustrate, global responses need to be locally applied. No two situations are the same or will necessarily benefit from exactly the same approach. We must not simply seek to duplicate success, but to extract the best practice from one situation and replicate it, adapting it to the new environment to suit the needs of the community and the problem. We must appreciate local narratives and practice, seeking always, as Campbell puts it, to “first, do no harm”. We must recognise where religion is and importantly is not

a problem. Where different religious communities are working together well, even in the face of extremism, we must reinforce and support them to increase their resilience to divisive hate narratives, being careful in this process not to propagate victim narratives that may actually lead to divisions. As Rider outlines, we must work against the polarisation of identities to reinforce inclusivity and ‘us’ identities.

This means that we must listen. There is no point claiming that religion is or is not a factor if that claim is contrary to what is being said by those on the ground. Where religion is a problem we need to provide immediate help to solve injustices that might be feeding this narrative; but we also need to think long-term, even generationally. This therefore frames a third theme. Military power may not always be the answer; indeed it may even be harmful over time. There can be no doubt that it may be necessary to limit and push back those groups that are proving an immediate threat, violating human rights and taking lives. But education that can provide nuanced and experiential learning, which can give people skills, as set out by Jamison, to interact and engage with those of other faiths and of none, is essential.

While, as Gearon argues, we must not lose sight of the exact nature of what we are teaching, we must, as Jackson describes, provide education that informs about, and builds understanding of, religion. This is a critical element in both of the above themes. Education that deconstructs and removes fear of the ‘Other’ is vital to help people dealing with these issues in their communities and daily lives to build resilience to extremist narratives.

It will not only equip them to resist these narratives, but also to argue with and counter them. Furthermore, as Marshall and Lawrence and Neal point out, nuanced and experiential religious literacy is fundamental to policy makers, governmental and non-governmental staff understanding and appreciating religious organisations and communities. Only by building education in these ways can we help current leaders and young people, the next generation of political, business, religious and community leaders, to create a world where faith can be reconciled with a modern civic state.

For governments and the international community, this means engaging with, and developing, long-term strategies in addition to short-term responses: policies and programmes that are not undermined by changes of government or immediate distractions. These strategies need sustained funding. If these strategies and funding are to be maintained and strengthened, then cross-government consensus on the importance of the issue must be built. On top of a better understanding of the role of religion and of the dangers of religious extremism now, international and regional collaboration is required to build the resilience of the next generation in order to ensure these narratives are countered indigenously, as well as within broader global contexts. Governments need to be bold and commit even though the end may seem uncertain. As Husain outlines, they need to partner with those who provide a model for the future, even where those partnerships may be frustrating, expensive and fragile. Moreover, they need to work extensively on building a multilateral consensus on the importance of the

critical issues at the intersections of religion and the global world.

The ideas and experiences that are set out in this volume can form the basis of a pathway for policy-makers in navigating these issues. Our work and advocacy proves that this pathway is viable and engagement with our

work demonstrates that consensus is building behind this vision. Governments need to act quickly to ensure a more peaceful, respectful and tolerant future. As Tony Blair rightly states, there is no cause more urgent. I would only add that, in confronting the urgent, there is no better time to act than the present.

Endnotes

1. Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Five Key Questions Answered on the Link between Peace and Religion', 21 October 2014, [<http://www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/news/1085>].
2. For an excellent infographic demonstrating the flow of foreign fighters, see Washington Post, 'Foreign fighters flow to Syria', 11 October 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/foreign-fighters-flow-to-syria/2014/10/11/3d2549fa-5195-11e4-8c24-487e92bc997b_graphic.html].
3. Pew Research Center, 'The Global Religious Landscape', 18 December 2012, [<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>].



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Juergensmeyer is the 2003 recipient of the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for contributions to the study of religion and is the 2004 recipient of the Silver Award of the Queen Sofia Center for the Study of Violence in Spain. He was elected president of the American Academy of Religion for 2009 and chairs the working group on Religion and International Affairs for the Social Science Research Council. He is a frequent commentator on CNN, NBC, CBS, BBC, NPR, ABC and Fox News.

Religion and Conflict in Global Perspective

The resurgence of religion in the latter days of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st has seen religion increasingly used as a form of symbolic empowerment to justify violent resistance and give meaning to protest groups. Despite the persistence of religious terror and extreme violence, the popular protests of Tahrir Square and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa have instigated a significant paradigm shift that not only has implications for violent religious extremists, but also for how governments should engage with religious actors in the pursuit of counter-terror and democratisation policies, argues Mark Juergensmeyer.

For centuries in Europe, America and other regions of the world, the nation-state provided a secure sense of identity, accountability and security for stable societies. The nation-state format was spread throughout the world in the wake of European colonialism, especially in the era of nation-building in the 20th century. But this vision of social stability and justice was also a fragile one, certain to come crashing down on the shoals of reality as new local governments used the instruments of power for their own personal greed and ethnic privilege. No wonder then that a great loss of faith in secular nationalism has swept across the world.

This sense that the nation-state has lost its legitimacy has become increasingly widespread in the global era. Transnational economic systems undercut national structures of authority and control; new communication networks make instant contact viable across the planet; and massive demographic shifts mean that increasingly everyone can live

everywhere, and many do. The idea of a homogenous national cultural identity is becoming a relic of the past.

The era of globalisation has brought with it three enormous problems. The first is *identity*: how societies can maintain a sense of homogeneity when ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities are spread across borders and the world. The second problem is *accountability*: how the new transnational economic, ideological, political and communication systems can be controlled, regulated and brought to justice. The third problem is one of *security*: how people, buffeted by forces seemingly beyond anyone's control, can feel safe in a paradigm increasingly without cultural borders or moral standards.

Religion, its ideas, values, symbols and rites, provides answers to all three of these problems. Traditional definitions of religious community provide a sense of identity and belonging to those who accept that fellowship as primary in their lives. Traditional

religious leadership provides a sense of accountability to moral and legal standards inscribed in code and enforced by present-day leaders who are accorded an unassailable authority. And for these reasons, religion also offers a sense of security that, within the community of the faithful and uplifted by the hands of God, one has found safe harbour and is truly secure.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, when religion enters the picture in times of crisis. The current era is certainly one of those moments of social crisis, although one experienced on a global scale. This is why the response has been virtually global as well.

Critics of religion may observe that these religious solutions are illusory. It is an elusive *sense* of identity, accountability and security that religion offers, not concrete solutions that are grounded in an enduring reality. The critics may be correct. But where the nation-state seems to have failed, the religious imagination provides a way of coping with the extreme problems of globalisation. It also gives a motivation for engaging in conflicts related to global pressures. Images of cosmic war that enlarge social conflict into the realm of the transcendent give meaning to those who struggle, not just as rebels, but as sacred soldiers. To enter into such global conflicts transcends all of the complications imposed by the new realities of a globalised world.

Understanding the role of religion in providing a sense of empowerment might help to explain some of the more puzzling features of modern acts of terrorism and religious violence:

assaults by extremist groups on opponents who are infinitely better armed. These attacks, including suicide missions, seem destined to fail. It is hard to take seriously the notion that these are rational efforts to achieve power, at least by ordinary calculations. Yet to those undertaking them, there may be something exhilarating, perhaps even rewarding, about the struggle itself. This sense of empowerment may make the effort seem worthwhile. It can also, at times, lead to real political change.

“To die in this way,” through suicide bombings, the political head of the Hamas movement told me, “is better than to die daily in frustration and humiliation.” In his view, the very nature of Islam is to defend “dignity, land and honour.” He then related a story the prophet had told about a woman who fasted daily yet was doomed to hell because she humiliated her neighbours. The point of the story, he said, is that dishonouring someone is the worst act that one can do and the only thing that can counter it is dignity, the honour provided by religion and the courage of being a defender of the faith. In a curious way, both religion and violence are seen as antidotes to humiliation.

Countering dishonour with piety, struggle and empowerment through religion is a theme that runs through many incidents of contemporary religious violence. A Jewish extremist in Israel, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, felt compelled to kill innocent Muslims in the shrine of the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron because he felt Jews had been dishonoured. Sikh militants were so angered by the actions of the Indian government that they turned to violence in order

to force the government to take them seriously. Shoko Asahara, the leader of a Buddhist new religious movement who ordered the nerve-gas attack on the Tokyo subways, wanted to be not only ‘like a king,’ as one of his former followers told me, but also ‘like Christ’. A fiery Buddhist monk in Myanmar, Ashin Wirathu, told me that his diatribes against the Muslim minority in his country were meant to preserve the honour and integrity of Buddhist culture.

By describing this feeling of strength as ‘symbolic’ empowerment, I do not mean to imply that the empowerment is not real. After all, a sense of power is largely a matter of perception and in many cases the power that activists obtain has a very real impact on their community, their relationships and themselves. It also impacts the political authorities who fear them and grant them the respect of notoriety. But symbolic expressions of violence are empowering in a special way, for they do not lead to conquests of territory or personnel in the traditional definition of military success. For most of these quixotic fighters, success exists simply in waging the struggle, in the heady confidence they receive from being soldiers for a great cause, even if the battles are not won, or even winnable, in ordinary military terms.

By calling these violent acts ‘symbolic’, I mean that they are intended to illustrate or refer to something beyond their immediate target: a grander conquest, for instance, or a struggle more awesome than meets the eye. As Mahmud Abouhalima, the Muslim activist involved in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, told me in an interview in prison, the bombing

of a public building may dramatically indicate to the populace that the government or the economic forces behind the building are seen, and have been targeted, as satanic foes. The point of such an attack is to produce a graphic and easily understandable object lesson. Such explosive scenarios are not tactics directed towards an immediate, earthly or strategic goal, but are dramatic events intended to impress through their symbolic significance. As such, they can be analysed as one would any other symbol, ritual or sacred drama.

Hence, acts of religious violence are about religion as much as they are about violence. They are about religion because religion provides a way of thinking about the world that generates a sense of ultimate order. It takes the messy uncertainties of life, the dangers and the nagging sense of chaos and gives them meaning. It locates disorder within a triumphant pattern of order.

Before the protests at Tahrir Square that toppled the Mubarak regime in Egypt in 2011, many Muslim activists were convinced that bloodshed was the only strategy that would work against such a ruthless dictator. They imagined that their acts of terrorism against the regime and the American ‘far enemy’, which they assumed was propping up the Mubarak system, would eventually lead to a massive revolt that would bring the dictatorship to an end. They also thought that only the jihadi ideology of cosmic warfare, based on Muslim history and Quranic verses, provided the moral legitimacy for the struggle. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, self-proclaimed caliph and leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), has revived the work

of ideologists such as Abd al-Salam Farad and Ayman al-Zawahiri who wrote as if violent struggle, including ruthless attacks of terrorism on civilian populations, was the only form of struggle that was advocated by Islam.

These assumptions have been challenged, however, in another way. The dramatic popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria since 2011 have demonstrated that non-violent protests, non-violent at least in their inception but becoming violent only in response to bloody attempts to repress them, can also be effective. Importantly, they are also supported by a more widespread moral and spiritual consensus.

What brought down the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, as it turned out, was about as far from jihad as one could imagine. It was a series of massive non-violent movements of largely middle class and relatively young professionals who organised their protests through Facebook, Twitter and other forms of electronic social networking. No doubt the passivity of the Egyptian military was also a critical factor; the army did not forcibly resist the protests, as the military did in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria.

Yet one cannot underestimate the importance of Tahrir Square and similar protests in Alexandria and throughout Egypt. Clearly they constituted the catalyst for change. Perhaps not since the peaceful overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines has the world seen such a dramatic demonstration of the power of non-violent resistance. The protests were not the weapons of jihad, nor were the voices of opposition in the strident

language of Islamist extremism.

There was also a religious element to the protests. The peak moments came after Friday prayers, when sympathetic mullahs would urge the faithful into joining the protest as a religious duty. But theirs was not the divisive, hateful voice of jihadi rhetoric. In a remarkable moment when the Muslim protesters were trying to conduct their prayers in the Square and Mubarak's thugs tried to attack them as they prayed, a cordon of Egyptian Coptic Christians who had joined the protests circled around their Muslim compatriots, shielding them. Later a phalanx of Muslim protestors reciprocated, transforming an urban intersection into a massive inter-faith sanctuary.

The religiosity of Tahrir Square is far from the religion of radical jihad. Rather than separating Muslim from non-Muslim, and Sunni from Shi'a, the symbols that were raised on impromptu placards in Tahrir Square were emblems of inter-faith co-operation. In my own visits to Tahrir Square during the 2011 demonstrations, I saw displayed the cross of Coptic Christians together with the crescent of Egypt's Muslims, an expression of a united religious front against autocracy.

Does the new politics of Muslim mass protest mean that religious violence is finished and the radical struggles of jihad will fizzle into history? The answer to that question is 'no'. In 2014, the astonishing growth of ISIS brought the Syrian conflict over the border to Iraq, where huge swathes of land were seized. This and the rise of radical movements in Mali, Nigeria and Algeria demonstrate that extremist Muslim ideologies have not been

abandoned. Furthermore, Buddhist and Hindu extremism in Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India, and right-wing Christian groups in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States of America demonstrate that these radical and violent religious responses are not confined to Islam.

In Pakistan and Yemen, the small group of people that comprises the inner circle of al-Qaeda has hardened its resolve. Like the followers of Christian millenarian movements, who become more extreme and entrenched in their beliefs when their prophecies of the end of the world are not fulfilled on schedule, the true believers in jihadi militancy soldier on. They have become more extreme in their rhetoric and more desperate in using acts of terrorism to draw attention to themselves and their increasingly impossible view of the world. Yet the inner circle of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS have never been large and their organisations, though capable of conducting horrible acts of terrorism, have never been consistent and widespread threats. By late 2014 for example, in places like Mosul and Kirkuk, there were Iraqi Sunnis who had already grown weary of ISIS's rule by terror and demagoguery and it is questionable how long such an organisation can survive as a coherent regime.

So although the hardened activists associated with particular movements such as al-Qaeda and ISIS may wane over time, the fate of global jihadi ideology, or rather the worldview of cosmic war that jihadi rhetoric promotes, is a different matter. This view of the world as a tangle of sacred warfare is an exciting and alluring

image. It has attracted large number of mostly young and largely male activists in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh societies around the world since the turn of the 21st century and before, stirred by the glory of being soldiers in a cosmic war.

This image of sacred warfare provides moral justification for sporadic terrorist attacks by linking real acts of violence in the world with the divine struggle between the forces of good and evil, order and disorder, that lies within the mythology and symbolism of every religious tradition. It is this conception of cosmic war that provides a strategic legitimisation of violence by the implicit promise, as a leader of Hamas once told me, that if one is fighting God's war, one can never lose. God always wins.

Yet there is now an alternative model for change. As Tahrir Square showed, God does not always have to fight, at least not in the terrorist ways that the jihadi warriors imagined. In a few weeks of protests, the peaceful protestors demonstrated the moral and strategic legitimacy of non-violent struggle. They succeeded, where years of jihadi bloodshed had not produced a single political change. This is a profound anti-violent extremism lesson and the significance of Tahrir Square has quickly spread around the world. It ignited similar non-violent protests elsewhere in the Middle East and it may also have altered the thinking of activists in other cultures as well. The rise of a new non-violent popularism in the Middle East may seriously undercut the viability of the extremist image of violent social change.

A number of failures of non-violent resistance may lead to a violent backlash once again. Not all protests will end like Tunisia and Egypt. Others will be ruthlessly crushed, as was the Green Revolution in Iran and the Bahrain uprising in 2011, or claim victory only after non-violent protest turns to bloody civil war, as it did in Libya. Failure of non-violent revolution has, in the past, been the occasion for renewed acts of violence.

But Tahrir Square has become ingrained in the pattern of activist struggles in two ways that are as significant for states considering counter-terrorism measures as for the activists themselves. One is the discovery that autocratic regimes can collapse. The sudden fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian governments, and more recently the collapse of the Russian-supported regime in Ukraine, have revealed that political leaders and even ironclad tyrants are not as invulnerable as they may appear. The other is the power that can be released through popular uprisings. From the Occupy movement in the USA and Europe to the rebellion in Ukraine, activists around the world have discovered that individuals can have a voice and can make a difference.

These anti-authoritarian, decentralised tendencies are both good news and bad news for groups like ISIS. On the one hand, extremists like al-Baghdadi can try to exploit these sentiments and make it appear as if they are the appropriate channels for popular uprisings. On the

other hand, this populism is difficult to control, especially as the masses are not enamoured by the heavy-handed authoritarianism that is the usual organisational pattern of groups in the al-Qaeda tradition.

For these reasons officials and concerned citizens who want to counter this extremism also have new ways to encourage the non-violent and creative side of anti-authoritarianism and quell the violent and destructive side. The old method of using massive military power may not work. Though military intervention might be essential to save lives in the short term, in the long term it could be counterproductive, providing a recruiting tool by creating the image of a militant enemy against which the troops can be rallied. More effective counter-extremist methods would respond to, and educate, the popularist support for resistance movements. Political solutions might be effective, such as helping to find a democratic alternative for the opposition to autocratic rule and a role for disaffected communities.

Religious-related activism has evolved in recent years, even as it continues to be a significant dimension of public life. It can enunciate a strident message but it can also articulate the need for acceptance and hope. Governments would be wise to engage this evolution. The new forces of popularism with which religion is associated can move in many ways, for after Tahrir Square, public activism has not been the same.





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Why Religious Freedom is Good Foreign Policy

The incorporation of religious freedom into foreign policy is both a matter of principle and pragmatism. The empowerment of religious actors is a direct route towards the promotion of democracy and the prevention and reconciliation of conflict. Many countries have already moved in this direction, but improvements need to be made in their strategy both in terms of mainstreaming and multilateralism, writes Daniel Philpott.

The question of whether Western democracies should promote religious freedom around the world is far from hypothetical. The United States of America has incorporated religious freedom into its foreign policy since the US Congress mandated it in the International Religious Freedom Act (IFRA) of 1998. In recent years, Canada, the United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway have adopted foreign policies of religious freedom in one way or another. These policies have been controversial. Yet as a matter of principle and pragmatism, Western democracies are wise to promote religious freedom.

The deepest, most direct argument for pursuing religious freedom is that it is a universal human right. Criticism of this argument revolves around four ideas.¹ First, that religious freedom is not a universal principle but rather differs so strongly in its meanings across time and place that there is simply no single thing to which everyone has a right. Second, that religious freedom is

defined in different places by the power and the interests of those doing the defining. Third, that modern religious freedom is a product of particular developments in Western history, especially the Protestant Reformation and the secularisation that followed in its wake. A fourth claim follows from these three: that Westerners ought not to export religious freedom.

Despite these arguments, religious freedom is rightfully lodged in the world's most important human rights and international law documents. Across an astonishingly diverse range of times, places and cultures, human beings have turned to religions for answers to the 'grand questions' of life. Religions offer answers to these questions in the form of practices, most quintessentially the worship of a God or another superhuman power who grants salvation and responds to suffering. By its nature, the search for, embrace and practice of religion must be free. To respect this freedom is to respect the dignity of the person in his or her relationship to ultimate truth.

Thus, religious freedom is the human right not to be coerced in the adoption, expression, practice or rejection of religion.

If this or a similar case for religious freedom as a universal human right is correct, then religious freedom is not something indefinable, uniquely Western, uniquely modern or a mere imposition of power. Nor does it demand the replication of any given country's particular institutions for relating religion and state. Rather it is a precious good to which every human being is entitled. While accommodating great diversity, it insists upon a 'floor', a set of immunities and prohibitions that apply to everyone. Yet despite this universal validity, religious freedom is also one of the most widely violated of human rights. A salient statistic from the Pew Research Center estimates that some 76 percent of the world's population lives in a religiously repressive country.

Beyond the deep principled case for religious freedom is the pragmatic argument that religious freedom promotes values and interests critical to democracies. In *God's Century*² my co-authors and I argue that religious leaders and communities have been instrumental in promoting democracy, forging peace and reducing terrorism and armed conflict. In a remarkable wave of democratisation that has taken place all over the world in the past generation, some 90 countries have become democratic or moved towards democracy. In 48 out of 78 of the democratic movements that we surveyed, religious leaders and organisations played an integral role. Think only of John Paul II in Communist Poland, Protestants

conducting candlelight services in East Germany in 1989 or Muslim popular democratic movements that brought down the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia. That is not to say that religious actors always support democracy. In places like Hungary, Rwanda and Argentina they remained aligned with dictators.

Religious actors have also played a positive role in the mediation of peace agreements. In 26 cases of peace agreements that we surveyed, 11 cases involved strong religious mediation, while in 10 others religious actors contributed but more weakly. They have also influenced transitional justice; the efforts that states make to address past injustices in the aftermath of dictatorship and civil war. Transitional justice can be critical to developing a sustainable peace. Our survey of 19 cases of political transition showed that in at least eight of these, religious bodies exerted a strong influence. Often they were guided by a doctrine of reconciliation. Examples are South Africa, Chile, Peru, Sierra Leone and Timor Leste. In all of these areas, the religious actors who exerted the most positive influence were ones whose authority was independent of the state, who practiced religious freedom and who espoused religious freedom in their doctrines.

A more negative form of evidence for religious freedom's importance for democracy and peace is the association of the lack of religious freedom with violence. Of the many religious terrorist groups that have arisen over the past 30 years, 93 percent hold a theology that denies religious freedom and calls for a close integration of religion and state. A large number

of them are empowered by political settings where their members are denied religious freedom. Likewise, in religious civil wars, it is common for at least one combatant community to seek a regime that denies religious freedom to another community. Examples are conflicts in Sudan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

If policymakers in Western democracies were more aware of the ways in which religious freedom can empower religious actors to promote goals that they share, or how the absence of religious freedom fosters outcomes that they fear, then they would more eagerly incorporate religious freedom into their most central foreign policy pursuits.

However, if Western democracies are to pursue this incorporation effectively, they must improve on the experience of the USA. The greatest fruits of the USA's policy are the annual reports on global religious freedom that the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom produce, as mandated by IRFA. These reports amount to the best documentation of contemporary religious repression in the world. One of the most attractive features of the reports is their coverage of every religious group that suffers repression, a thoroughness that belies a common criticism of the USA's religious freedom policy, namely that it is a front for Christian interests and even proselytisation.

The reports provide a deep and reliable basis of knowledge for advocates of religious freedom. We also should not underestimate the value of exposing

human rights violations. Even if no immediate change takes place, bringing repression to light can help to end it in the long run. After the Cold War ended, Eastern European dissidents testified to the importance of outside attention in supporting their cause.

Less fruitful has been another dimension of the USA's religious freedom policy mandated by IRFA, namely bilateral pressure to alleviate religious repression in other countries. It is difficult to think of any country that is more religiously free today because of such pressure. Part of the problem is that religious freedom is routinely subordinated to goals like fighting terrorism, much as the USA often subordinated human rights to the struggle against Soviet Communism during the Cold War. This dynamic can be seen in the USA's policy towards Pakistan, for example, or in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the USA acquiesced to constitutions weak on religious freedom in the pursuit of stability. There is irony, then, in charges that religious freedom policy is a tool of the USA's power and domination. In reality, religious freedom policy is frequently disempowered and marginalised by other foreign policy objectives.

Two improvements upon the USA's religious freedom policy are needed: mainstreaming and multilateralism. Mainstreaming means acknowledging that religious freedom enhances democracy, stability and peace and incorporating religious freedom policy into the high politics of statecraft rather than relegating it to a corner of a foreign ministry. In a desecularised world, a smart foreign policy would recognise, encourage

and ally with those religious leaders and communities who best promote democracy, peace and stability and discourage those who promote their opposites. If the above analysis is correct, this means fostering religious freedom.

Multilateralism means that the USA and other developed democracies would co-ordinate and unify their

promotion of religious freedom. In their co-operative endeavours, whether acting through the NATO alliance, joint intervening in Iraq or developing a common policy towards Ukraine, a far more robust engagement with religious actors and intentional promotion of religious freedom would take place. In this way, democracies could pursue their best aspirations more effectively.

Endnotes

1. See the online forum, *The Immanent Frame* [<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/the-politics-of-religious-freedom/>], for these arguments.
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From Negative to Positive Narratives: Values and Strategies in Negotiating Difference

The export of religious freedom from the West has serious consequences for religious communities around the world. The impact of such policies can serve to only further divide societies already torn by conflict. Perhaps the greatest problem is the Western, and even Christian, bias these policies contain. A better understanding of local sensibilities and contexts combined with an appreciation for local practices of negotiating religion would provide a more viable building block for the achievement of equality, argues Lori G. Beaman.¹

Caution is needed in thinking about how the regulatory discourses of policy and law are directed toward religion, religious freedom and religious diversity. Numerous criticisms have been raised about religious freedom and its export from the United States of America and Canada.² Indeed there are serious limitations to the present tendency to want to 'save' local religious minorities through various state offices of religious freedom.

First, many public policy and academic discussions about religious diversity and freedom of religion extract religion as a decontextualised variable that then takes on a life of its own. Scholars of religion have long agonised over definitions of religion, or even whether such a thing as religion exists at all. Understandably, this is not something that policy makers have a great deal of time for.³ Indeed, many academics find this debate tiresome and an embarrassing example of intellectual self-absorption.

However, we would do well to step

back and ask ourselves how naming something as 'religious' or being 'about religion' can have an impact on local communities and groups. Religion can act as a simple dividing factor in articulations of conflict. This is in no way intended to exempt religion as a potentially negative, or positive, force, but to advise caution in its use as an explanatory tool. The flip side of this also poses serious problems, namely the ignoring of religion as an important force in social life. However, it is important to recognise the clear distinction between appreciating the religious dimensions of a particular situation and reducing everything to religion.

Second, despite a great deal of lip service to within-group difference, monolithic representations of religious groups dominate the academic and policy landscape. In my research with Muslims, for example, a number of participants have expressed concern that states and policies are reifying a particular orthodoxy about Islam that then plays out on the ground.⁴

Not all Muslims pray five times a day, eat halal or, in the case of women, wear hijab, yet these often dominate conversation about Islam and the need for 'accommodation'. This is not a good Islam versus bad Islam conversation,⁵ but rather an observation that all religion is nuanced in practice and we would do well to attend to that nuance before engaging in diversity engineering strategies.

Another variation of this is the tendency to want to reshape all religion in the image of Christianity, a sort of 'take me to your imam' approach that is grossly out of step with how religion is practised in many regions of the world. This can have the effect of empowering particular religious actors who may not represent the majority of practitioners, or who exclude important segments of religious practitioners. Again we must consider the impact that this has on communities. Women in particular are excluded,⁶ but the effect can be far wider. The Fundamentalist Latter-day Saint community of Bountiful, British Columbia, for example, is almost always characterised as 'polygamous', despite the fact that the majority of its families are not living in that family form.

This leads to a caution about gender. There is a pervasive rhetoric of gender equality in relation to limits on religious freedom that has the effect of establishing 'West as egalitarian, rest as oppressive' that is disingenuous. Examples can be seen in the Stasi report from France, the S.A.S. case from the European Court of Human Rights and the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in Quebec, amongst others.⁷ Gender equality is held out as the justification for protecting women, even when

they do not want such 'protection'. For example, the equality of men and women is used as a justification for all manner of public sphere intervention and debate about women's dress. There is ample evidence that gender equality is far from achieved in Western democracies, both by academics and in statistics about violence against women, pay equity, division of household labour and so on.⁸ Religious or not, there is some serious work to be done before anyone can claim to have achieved gender equality. Thus, to hold ourselves out as paragons of equality virtue is quite simply dishonest. Having so seriously misread the situation 'at home', it would seem to be prudent to exercise extreme caution and care when exporting 'the equality of men and women' or using it as justification for the regulation of women's bodies for their own good.

Being realistic about one's own culture is also important from another vantage point. Statements in interviews from non-Christian immigrants about the Christian nature of Canada challenge the carefully constructed story of Canada as a secular nation.⁹ This requires a bit of careful rethinking for Canada and for other Western countries promoting religious freedom. Recognising Canada's Christian character does not, and should not, mean reifying it. However, the ways in which Christianity permeates Canadian institutions, including its Constitution, holidays, and public symbols, means that as a multicultural country claiming to value diversity and to support religious freedom it must carefully think about how this impacts on those who want and deserve full participation in its society. To characterise majoritarian religion as

'culture' conceals majoritarian religion and its impact from scrutiny.¹⁰ This is not only a problem in Canada, but one that plays out in the European Union as well.¹¹ When Christian values are represented as universal values, there is no escape from them. We all become Christian then.

Related to this is the growing presence of those who describe themselves as 'nones'. This group is globally pervasive, growing and yet its potential impact and its contours are largely ignored by states that are instead scrambling to respond to the 'new' religious reality. Western democracies in particular (though not exclusively) have shown a dramatic increase in people who, when asked to identify their religious affiliation, state that they are 'none' or have 'no' affiliation. Statistics Canada data suggests that one in four Canadians is now a 'none'; in the USA, Pew Research Center indicates that this category accounts for one in five adults; and in England and Wales, 25.1 percent of the population say they have no religion.¹² There is a fine line between the recognition of the importance of religion in some people's lives and the assumption that everyone has a religious, or at the very least a spiritual, life, whatever that may mean. This 'will to religion' is dangerous for a number of reasons, including its exclusion or denigration of those who simply do not want to be identified as either religious or spiritual. Particularly troublesome is the construction of the non-religious as unreasonable, radical or lacking common sense.¹³

Finally, while much attention is paid to conflict and strife that is quite often nominally about religion, there is much less attention devoted to the ways in

which people simply get along and go about the business of negotiating and navigating diversity in day-to-day life. It might therefore be advisable to pay careful attention, through positive narratives, to what works in local settings, instead of imposing top-down 'solutions'. Too often this means a focus on 'inter-faith exchanges' that rely on religious identity rigidity that misrepresent the complex ways that many people 'do' religion in everyday life. Monotheistic religions are especially notorious for rejecting syncretic, eclectic or what W.C. James calls 'dimorphic approaches' to religion,¹⁴ which permeate the practice of many 'religious' people around the world. Shifting the focus to positive narratives of, what I term, the micro-processes of negotiating difference, whether between religions (broadly conceptualised) or religion and non-religion, may facilitate the successful navigation of difference and diversity. Sometimes the situations in which this happens are so unremarkable that they are, essentially, non-events. But they are important moments in tracing the path toward a more robust or deep equality.

Here I return to my first point: religion in these stories is deeply intertwined with other identity markers and experiences that provide a platform from which people identify similarity with others rather than emphasising difference. Rather than reinventing religious freedom as an export from enlightened democracies, a careful examination of local practices of successful negotiation of religious difference might provide a more viable building block for an expanded capacity for the achievement of equality.

Endnotes

1. I would like to acknowledge the support of the Religion and Diversity Project in the preparation of this article as well as the ongoing financial support of my research through my Canada Research Chair in the Contextualization of Religion in a Diverse Canada. I am also grateful to Marianne Abou-Hamad for her editorial assistance.
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10. See for example, *Saguenay (Ville de) v. Mouvement laïque québécois* [2013] QCCA 936.

11. For example, *Lautsi and others v. Italy* [2011] ECHR. No. 30814/06. This is cited with approval by the Quebec Court of Appeal in *Saguenay*.

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Avoiding Pitfalls in Responding to Religious Conflict

The political engagement of religion in a globalising world poses numerous dilemmas for academics, practitioners and public policy professionals.

Global societies are now experiencing enhanced threats to religious freedom through the rise of politicised religions and hardline forms of secularism. Philpott and Beaman illustrate a growing polarisation in academic debates over religious freedom advocacy. In designing policy, civil society and governmental sectors seeking to foster religious freedom need to carefully consider the concerns brought to light by these diverse accounts, writes Daniel Cere.

Modern religious traditions are in the midst of major transformations. Globalisation is rapidly constraining, compressing and reconstructing local and particular textures of religion through processes of disembedding and de-territorialisation. Amongst religious actors these processes are legitimated as purifying returns to the fundamentals of faith. The last few decades have witnessed a resurgence of politicised forms of fundamentalism across all regions and religions. In the 1980s, Roland Robertson argued that processes of globalisation tend to aggravate 'identity' issues, concluding that 'politico-religious' concerns would become "sites of potential religious, ideological and religious-ideological conflict."¹ Likewise, Manuel Castells sees religious identity concerns as central to global modernities.²

Modernisation is fluid, ambivalent and potentially volatile. In religiously charged contexts, even carefully crafted policies with commendable goals towards modernisation can produce unforeseen blowbacks. After a decade

of efforts towards regime change and democratisation in Iraq, today the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham zealously advances a bizarre form of religious totalitarianism wedded to Sadeian-like obsessions with violence and submission. The global resurgence of religion is forging a world full of paradox and unpredictability that requires policy responses capable of charting a course through its quantum-like uncertainties.

For Daniel Philpott, proactive international commitments to religious freedom define the road forward. His evidence would suggest that these foster greater democratisation, reduce religious conflict and activate the social and political capital of religious diversity. Indeed his emphasis on the historic significance of religious freedom in international human rights discourse and his call for constructive responses to current threats to religious freedom need to be heeded. However, these priorities need to be advanced with care.

From its inception in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), two distinctive features have marked the evolution of international dialogue on religious freedom. First, it began as a uniquely international achievement. To disparage the UDHR as an extension of Western ideology overlooks the dynamics of a drafting process that forged an overlapping consensus by an international working group from Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and Marxist contexts. It also overlooks the considerable opposition to critical aspects of the declaration by influential constituencies within Europe and North America.

There is a lesson here about the decisive importance of international dialogue and collaboration. Philpott highlights the need for action, but seems to take the position that religious freedom is primarily a Western responsibility that can be promoted through multilateral alliances between North American and European states. This strategy might wound rather than nurture the uniquely inter-cultural and inter-religious effort required to engage this human rights challenge.

Second, major contributors to the UDHR, like Jacques Maritain and John Humphrey, were acutely aware that its establishment was a notable beginning to a living and evolving international conversation. Subsequent United Nations covenants and declarations have offered substantial enrichments of the initial UDHR articles on religious freedom; far more robust articulations of those rights than can be found in most Western constitutions.

The debates around these

developments continue to raise difficult and unanswered questions about the just limits to religious freedom. Lively debates continue on the extent to which an unqualified 'right to change' religion gives license to aggressive and perhaps abusive forms of proselytisation; on whether free speech and expression can be limited if it defames or ridicules the religious other; on how and if concerns for social harmony and security can or should limit freedom of religion; and on how the claims of religious freedom are situated in relationship to other core human rights such as women's equality. Insistence on a basic minimum or 'floor' of religious rights will be problematic if it is perceived to be part of a strategy for excluding these concerns and enforcing a particular vision of religion. Religious freedom policy must be responsive to an increasingly rich array of concerns if it hopes to accommodate the challenge of religious pluralism.

It is this problem that lies at the heart of Lori Beaman's view that power and regulation lurk beneath Western discourses on religion and freedom. Operationalising 'religion' as a global category for policy responses to domestic or global conflict, along with religious freedom as its legal handmaid, can work to control and override the lived and local realities of religious diversity, exacerbating religious divides.

There is a need to attend to the local or lived experiences of religion that often negotiate and accommodate diversity in more complex and hybrid ways than envisaged by religious, political or academic pundits. It is this assessment of fairly monolithic and condescending

Western conceptions of the religious 'Other' that leads Beaman to argue for a paradigm shift towards a 'deep equality' model. This will be important if we are to engage the lived experience of religious adherents and counter rather than reinforce elite discourses and extremist narratives on religion.

Beaman is right to turn our attention from the 'problem of religion' to the richly textured fabrics of ordinary religious practice. But in turning from one solution to another we must not disengage altogether. We should be cautious about marginalising discourse on religious freedom as mere ideology and sidestepping important features of our post-secular condition. While modern conceptual constructions of religion do have Western origins, they have indeed become global and are reshaping the self-understandings of non-Western traditions that now define themselves as 'world religions'. They are transforming lived experience of faith traditions in powerful and, at times, volatile ways. As the sociological 'Thomas Theorem' states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."³ Much blood has been spilt over modern ideological constructs, including theological ones.

Dark forms of 'strong religion', movements of hardened fundamentalist fervour, religious nationalism and apocalyptic expectation, and hard anti-religious forms of secularism mark the modern religious field.⁴ The history of the 20th century teaches us that modernisation and globalisation processes can take violent, even totalitarian turns. We should not assume

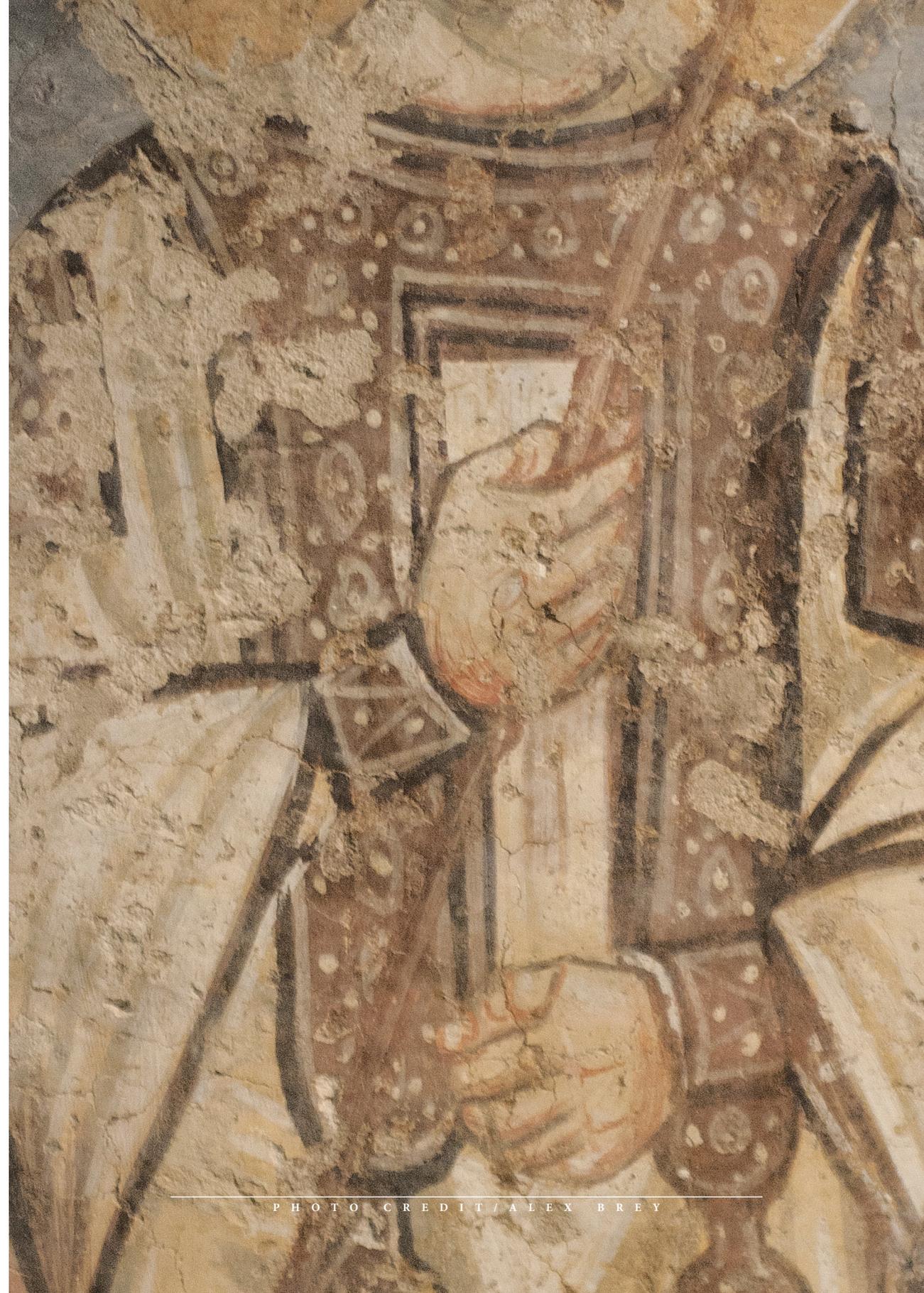
that modern religious imaginaries will be immune to these dangers if we simply deny them the attention for which they hunger.

In Abraham Lincoln's words, "We cannot escape history."⁵ Nor can we escape our global condition, however painful some of its dimensions might be. Deeply embedded in the heart of Islam is an exhortation to fight the good fight. Within the modern Muslim community a tradition of 'civilian jihad' has emerged, namely social forces waging a focused non-violent social struggle against forces of repression.⁶ The protection of religious pluralism requires such a complex and evolving struggle in the ever-changing context of our global condition.

Governments across the world do need to be held accountable to international commitments to human rights including the fundamental right of religious freedom. However we also need to recognise that civil society sectors working on the ground with faith communities are better placed to engage this critical work than the blunt and often counter-productive instruments of governmental intervention. Grassroots civilian jihads that are genuinely international and inter-religious, sensitive to global challenges yet embedded in local contexts, supported rather than impeded by governments, with weapons forged from the most humane resources of our diverse religious and secular traditions, may provide pathways responsive to the concerns of both authors.

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Case Study

Iran: Building Consensus Against Intolerance

When it is reference to religion that is used to violate human rights, it might seem that religion itself should be the last recourse in the search for common ground upon which reconciliation can be based. But the stance of an Islamic cleric in Iran towards the Bahá'í community offers an example of how, in countries where universal human rights standards have little local resonance, appeals for tolerance based on religion can help break the deadlock. The domestication of rights and rights language, particularly in reference to religion, can help to curb intolerance and sectarianism, argues Nazila Ghanea.

It is often suggested that religion offers the human rights movement hope for renewal, greater legitimacy and impact and that religion and human rights share commitments to social justice and the fight against oppression. However this begs some important questions of which religion, whose religion, which human rights and in what part of the world? Context is critical. The greater engagement of religions with human rights requires domestication and rootedness. Appeals for tolerance, equality and reconciliation are communicated best when based on a people's accepted cultural and religious traditions rather than what may be perceived by some as 'foreign' or 'unrelated' concepts. When this is the case, religion and human rights can align to provide a foundation for reconciliation. This is most urgent in cases of longstanding persecution of particular religious communities by governments or social groups.

The persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran is one such case. With over 300,000 followers, the Bahá'ís are

Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority. However, they have no legal protection or recognition as a minority because, unlike Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians, the Iranian constitution categorically does not recognise their faith. For decades, Bahá'ís have been arbitrarily detained, executed, refused education and livelihood, intimidated and demonised in the media. Hundreds have been killed since the 1979 revolution. More than 130 Bahá'ís are currently in prison on spurious charges such as 'warring against God', 'being corrupt on earth' or 'rising against national security', including seven former leaders of the faith who are serving 20-year jail terms. Even the Bahá'í dead are not allowed to rest in peace, corpses being bulldozed into open canals in Shiraz in mid-2014, for example, as Revolutionary Guards held a celebratory press conference. Over the last 35 years intolerance has become systematised and institutionalised into a far-reaching pattern of serious, government-instigated and government-perpetuated rights violations.¹ The persecution of Bahá'ís

is part of a much wider Iranian state oppression; a stark example of targeted persecution that also affects activists, journalists, intellectuals and other minorities.

At first glance, the case of Iran's Bahá'ís seems to support the notion that religion should be kept to the fringes of human rights discussions. However, further pragmatic analysis would suggest otherwise. Since political and religious leaders in Iran base anti-Bahá'í sentiment on religious foundations, an appeal to universal standards of human rights alone will not be sufficient for the realisation of respectful co-existence. While universal standards have merit they may have insufficient resonance in many local contexts. What the Iranian Bahá'ís case demonstrates is that it is not so much a choice between a 'secular' or 'religious' approach to human rights that policy makers and activists should pursue, but a sensitivity to what works best and in which context.

The Iranian context would seem to present a choice between routinised persecution in the name of religion, and tolerance in the name of universal rights. Yet here, and in similar situations elsewhere in the world, the best entry point for overcoming persecution may actually prove to be an appeal to human rights through the dominant sacred texts and values of that society.

A good example is that of Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani who has been engaged in calling for religious co-existence in Iran since 2001. Despite threats against him, in April 2014 he released a statement² specifically calling for respect of Iran's Bahá'ís. He

recalled that Iran's history has included periods in which numerous different religions and beliefs "enjoyed social interaction and tolerant co-existence", bemoaning the loss of that tradition. He noted the undermining of "the right to be human", the right to life, and human dignity, describing Iran's current social reality as one of "religious apartheid".

As a gift to the Bahá'ís, Masoumi-Tehrani prepared calligraphic works of art, choosing a symbol of the Bahá'í faith known as the Greatest Name – a representation of the conceptual relationship between God, His prophets and the world of creation – and a verse from the Bahá'í holy writings. This was, in his own words, an, "expression of sympathy and care from me, and on behalf of all my open-minded fellow citizens who respect others for their humanity and not for their religion or way of worship, to all the Bahá'ís of the world, particularly to the Bahá'ís of Iran who have suffered in manifold ways as a result of blind religious prejudice".³

In a letter of August 2014⁴ he stated that, "I value and respect humanity and human beings and it makes no difference to me what religion he or she adheres to. I respect Muslims, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, etc., even non-believers who believe in the principles of humanity." His concern is that, "The core concept of religion, which is to propagate the cause of spirituality among people, has been tainted by politicisation, coercion, and brutality towards minorities and those of other beliefs by virtue of the actions of our own kind, the clerics." He has invited others to join and "assist in bringing about a comprehensive, committed, and an uncompromising

movement against discrimination and religious and ideological apartheid."

Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani's actions follow similar gestures by the much revered and late Ayatollah Montazeri in 2008 and Ayatollah al-Sadr in 2011 favouring co-existence with the Bahá'ís. By being rooted in religious meaning, their human rights efforts offer cultural resonance which gives them greater legitimacy and impact. As a result, these three Iranian Shia Ayatollahs have mobilised a religious understanding of human rights to respond to violations of the human rights of others.

The academy variously refers to this as the 'domestication', 'rootedness' or 'vernacularisation' of human rights. Sally Engle Merry,⁵ when pondering how transnational ideas, such as human rights approaches to violence against women, become meaningful in local social settings, speaks of intermediaries as being vital. These intermediaries – community leaders, non-governmental organisation (NGO) participants, social movement activists and, as in this example, religious leaders – help bridge the gap "between cosmopolitan awareness of human rights and local sociocultural understandings." She recognises intermediaries as playing "a critical role in translating ideas from the global arena down and from local arenas up... They are powerful in that they serve as knowledge brokers between culturally distinct social worlds."

Religious intermediaries, such as Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani, may not have consciously set out to be knowledge brokers between these social worlds. Indeed these religious

leaders may squarely situate their activism within their religious beliefs and not link themselves with the world of transnational human rights as such. Nevertheless, they still contribute profoundly to transforming social life and enabling the universality of human rights. Heavily oppressive environments of politically infused religious intolerance and sectarianism can serve to preclude the expression of support for alternatives. Yet after Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani's gesture numerous others have welcomed his initiative both inside and outside Iran. His role, therefore, was not only that of an intermediary for the translation of human rights, but also as a catalyst for others who yearn for co-existence and harmony to be able to voice their support.

The significant impact that NGOs, social movements and religious communities can make by rooting human rights ideas in their beliefs and practices, as well as the other way round, needs to be recognised by both these actors and their government and international equivalents and sponsors. Such engagement is not limited to contexts of reversing state-sponsored religious persecution, but can generate acceptance of religious pluralism and co-existence in a variety of contexts.

Admittedly, the wide-ranging rights violations in Iran call for much more than a few gestures by a handful of religious leaders considered dissidents by those in power. Indeed, Masoumi-Tehrani is not in the position to ameliorate the persecution inflicted on the Bahá'ís. However, appeals based on religion play a substantial role in undermining Iran's longstanding effort

to legitimise religiously motivated attacks on human rights. They foster a new tradition of inclusion. They may also prove a necessary precursor to the improvement of human rights in Iran.

The repercussions of such a tradition of inclusion and co-existence go far

beyond the question of the human rights of the Bahá'ís to touch upon the plight of minorities across the region and further afield. It has the potential to grow as an antidote to politically fuelled sectarianism and inter-religious conflict worldwide.

Endnotes

1. For details and further information on the situation of Bahá'ís in Iran, see Bahá'í International Community, [<https://www.bic.org/media/Current-situation-Bahais-in-Iran>]; O. Djalili, 'Iran must free the Bahá'í leaders who have been jailed for five years too many', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2013, [<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/14/iran-free-bahai-leaders-jailed>]; N. Ghanea, 'For the Bahá'ís imprisoned in Iran, freedom and human rights seem remote', *New Statesman*, 6 June 2014, [<http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2014/06/bah-s-imprisoned-iran-freedom-and-human-rights-seem-remote>].
2. Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani, website statement (translated), 7 April 2014, [http://news.bahai.org/sites/news.bahai.org/files/documentlibrary/987_website-statement-translation-en.pdf].
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4. Ayatollah Masoumi-Tehrani, open letter to the Ministry of Intelligence (translated), 2 August 2014, [http://news.bahai.org/sites/news.bahai.org/files/documentlibrary/987_letter-ministry-translation-en.pdf].
5. S.E. Merry, 'Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 108, No. 1, 2006, [[http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/cslls/Merry_AA_Transnational_Human_Rights_2006\(1\).pdf](http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/cslls/Merry_AA_Transnational_Human_Rights_2006(1).pdf)], pp. 38-51.



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Peace Through Knowledge: Responding to Conflict Involving Religion

A simplistic, deterministic narrative of conflict between religions and global civilisations dominates our world. To respond to conflict between these great actors we must develop a new formula for the way in which the world deals with religion, especially with Islam. Dialogue between these civilisations to foster mutual understanding is an imperative we can no longer ignore, writes Akbar Ahmed.¹

Since 9/11 a somewhat deterministic 'clash of civilisations' narrative seems to have dominated our understanding of global conflict.² In this view, the fundamental lines of conflict in our times will be defined by cultural and religious civilisations, with Islam as a major global civilisational opponent to the West. But this scenario of escalating conflict does not have to define our future. Peace can be found through the search for a greater understanding of each other. There has never been a greater urgency for dialogue between the world's civilisations.³

There can be no doubt that we are living at a critical and dangerous time in history with several world civilisations feeling under siege simultaneously. This arises from the cultural and historical contexts of their relationships, how each perceives the other and from the impact of the war on terror on Muslim communities around the world. While the West feels under siege from terrorism, Muslims across the United States of America, Europe and in the Muslim world

feel under siege because the West's response to terrorism has affected their entire religion. With growing anger, often fuelled by their own experiences of oppression and persecution, they point to growing Islamophobia in the West and the plight of besieged Muslim communities such as the Palestinians, the Kashmiris and the Syrians. In spite of United Nations resolutions and military action, little has been done to settle these problems.

Individuals living in a siege mentality are thrown off balance. They fall back to notions of excessive group loyalty. In this heated climate, there is little room for dialogue and the dominant ethos is one of group survival and security. For the great Muslim historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun who lived in the 14th century, the notion of *asabiyya*, group loyalty or social cohesion, explained how societies were bound together and passed on values, customs and behaviour patterns from one generation to another. In our times, through the processes of globalisation, *asabiyya*

is loosening and even disintegrating. But as societies do not disappear into a black hole, different expressions of *asabiyya* begin to form. We are now seeing excessive or exaggerated forms of group loyalty, or hyper-*asabiyya*. This encourages a rigid drawing of group boundaries that can encourage violence.

For Muslims, as for other global civilisations, there are four main factors that contribute to the development of hyper-*asabiyya*. Firstly, Muslim leaders need to worry about social and demographic trends. Muslim population growth rates are among the highest in the world, the literacy rates are among the lowest, the figures for health facilities are unsatisfactory and the life expectancy below average.⁴ Rapid urbanisation has not helped. Take Karachi, which in 50 years has gone from a population of a few hundred thousand to about 23 million people today. It is literally bursting at the seams and law and order, transport, health and civic facilities simply do not function in many parts of the city. A once rural population has been suspended between two ways of life and are particularly vulnerable. The gaps between the rich and the poor are growing dangerously wide. Anger is caused not only by the widening gap but also by the fact that many of the rich have made their money through illegal means. A large percentage of the population is young, jobless and restless for radical change and an aggressive Islam, which easily translates into violence, is the natural way out.

Secondly, Muslim societies, like others, tend to marginalise critical and creative scholarship. Muslims must remember

that the word for knowledge, *ilm*, is highly prized in Islam. It is the second most used word in the Quran after the word for God. The poor treatment of scholars has driven a brain drain from the Muslim world to the West. Scholars are chased out, sometimes silenced and even killed. The climate of sycophancy surrounding rulers and the widespread powers of intelligence services make life intolerable for scholars of conscience. In the absence of critical and intelligent scholarship, neither objective analysis nor sensible predictions are possible in society.

Thirdly, Muslims face a greater challenge that is internal to their faith. They need to rebuild an idea of Islam that includes justice, integrity, tolerance and the quest for knowledge. Muslims must not just insist on the rituals, on the five pillars of Islam, but on the entire edifice of their religion. Reducing a sophisticated civilisation to simple fundamentals encourages simple answers: reaching for guns and explosives, for instance. Today, piety and virtue are judged by political action, often equated to violence, rather than moral integrity or spirituality.

Fourthly, and to make matters worse, the West does not generally understand Islam and therefore responds in ways that make the relationship worse. Since 9/11 there is also growing Islamophobia. The West must learn to curb this tendency, to discourage knee-jerk 'nuke 'em' responses and to avoid the labelling of any Muslim act as 'fundamentalist'. The international media and Western governments need to be more sensitive to Muslim society. The Western media needs to

treat Islam in its coverage with the dignity due to a world religion. The media's generalised and often intense contempt of Islam provokes many Muslims into an anti-Western stance. It also makes the position of those who talk of dialogue and moderation more vulnerable.

These factors have real implications for us all, but it is their current unique geopolitical alignment for Islam that both isolates Islam and creates the global dilemma in which the 21st century is construed as an era of war between Islam and the other world civilisations. We know that for the first time in history, due to a unique geopolitical conjunction of factors, Islam is in confrontation with all of the major world religions: Judaism in the Middle East; Christianity in Nigeria, Sudan and sporadically in the Philippines and Indonesia; Hinduism in South Asia; and Buddhism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Of course, this neat conceptual equation is challenged because so many Muslim countries are clearly allied to non-Muslim countries. Besides, so many Muslims now live in non-Muslim nations. But this idea is now firmly entrenched in the minds of many opinion leaders across the world. The major world civilisations are experiencing problems in accommodating or even understanding Islam, both within, and outside of, their borders. Whatever the economic, political and sometimes demographic causes of social transformations on this scale, simplistic ideas often capture the imagination and become the filter through which ordinary people understand them. Western

academics and leaders have stoked this argument, building on narratives of conflict that have been around for a thousand years.

Peace will only come through a better understanding of each other. Whether one adheres to the notion of the clash of civilisations, or whether one chooses dialogue, this will be the key to resolving the many conflicts that rack the Muslim world today.

However, to advance this goal, more is needed than just political resolutions. Muslim honour and dignity must be restored. No other people in our times can be so openly abused and humiliated with such impunity. Their God, their Prophet, their holy book, their women and their culture can be attacked openly and freely. This has resulted in a growing sense of powerlessness and despair, which has fed into anger that in turn encourages violence. The continued presence of Islamophobia in the West only serves as a barrier to discovering real solutions towards these ongoing conflicts.

It is vital to create an effective process of mutual understanding and dialogue. With dialogue comes knowledge and understanding of each other. This can be done through conferences, seminars and other means of disseminating knowledge about each other. Education and democracy must be encouraged in the Muslim world. Only through this process can we create a climate that will allow the real problems of the Muslim world to be solved in Palestine, Kashmir, Syria and Iraq. That stability and security must come to these regions as soon as possible

makes these initiatives all the more imperative.

An important place to start is looking for what we hold in common. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam there is rich material: the idea of one invisible, omnipotent God; the angels and messengers; the sacred texts, revelations and commandments; the notion of the afterlife; and many customs and values.

What we must not do is to take the sacred texts out of context. Misguided Muslims, men like Osama bin Laden who cite Surah 2, Verse 190, "Fight against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities", to justify violence against Jews and Christians in general and in particular the USA, are wrong. Non-Muslims, especially the instant experts in the media, who also use this kind of selective use of holy texts to support their arguments, are also wrong. Not only do they take these verses out of context, as they relate to a specific situation at a certain time in the history of early Islam, but they ignore verses, which often follow immediately after, that nuance and clarify the meaning, clearly conveying God's overarching command. In this instance, for example, Surah 2, Verses 192-193:

"Make peace with them if they want peace; God is Forgiving, Merciful."

We must pursue a new formula for the new millennium. Justice and compassion must flourish, and be seen to flourish, in the Muslim world whose rulers must be people of integrity and Muslims must be allowed to practice their faith with honour. If these criteria are met, then Islam will be a good neighbour to non-Muslims living outside its borders and provide a benevolent and compassionate environment to those living inside them. It will continue to resist attempts to subvert its identity or dignity.

The urgency of the call for dialogue has never been greater. Creative participation in the dialogue of civilisations to find an internal balance between the needs and traditions of local communities and the world increasingly dominated by international corporations; the committed search for global solutions to the common global problems confronting human society; and the quest for a just, compassionate and peaceful order will be the challenge human civilisation faces in the 21st century.

Endnotes

1. This article was adapted from Akbar Ahmed's 2004 Milliband Lecture on Culture in the Age of Global Communications at the London School of Economics titled *Islam Under Siege: From Clash to Dialogue of Civilizations*.
2. See S.P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49; S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996.
3. For a full account of the opinions and arguments I express here, see my quartet of books examining relations between the West and the Muslim world after 9/11: A. Ahmed, *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization*, Washington D.C., Brookings Press, 2007; A. Ahmed, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam*, Washington D.C., Brookings Press, 2010; A. Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*, Washington D.C., Brookings Press, 2013; and A. Ahmed, *Journey into Europe: Islam, Immigration, and Empire*, Washington D.C., Brookings Press, Forthcoming.
4. Pew Research Center, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population", *Religion and Public Life Project*, 27 January 2011, [<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>]; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "International Literacy Data 2014", 17 July 2014, [<http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Pages/literacy-data-release-2014.aspx>]; Pew Research Center, "Main Factors Driving Population Growth", *Religion and Public Life Project*, 27 January 2011, [<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-main-factors/>].



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Case Study

Nigeria: An Opportunity for Faith-Based Conflict Resolution

Religious conflict in Nigeria is only one challenge facing a polity that is divided into approximately 250 ethnic groups, a political order characterised by weak government and in which there is little regard for the rule of law. Under both military and civilian governments, fierce and bloody competitions between elites, often appealing to ethnic and religious identities, have resulted in a country run for their own benefit with little reference to the needs of the Nigerian people. There is a wide remit for faith groups to be involved in reconciliation and conflict resolution, however, such initiatives need to carefully negotiate around local circumstances, writes John Campbell.

In Nigeria, faith matters profoundly. Nigerians like to say that they live in the 'world's most religious country'. Christianity and Islam are in the midst of revivals. Among Christians this often takes 'Pentecostal' forms, while among Muslims it is often 'Salafi'. These and other technical religious terms have even more specific meanings within the Nigerian context that are related to, but differ in nuance, from standard uses elsewhere. Both forms are literalist with regard to sacred texts; both tend to set fixed boundaries between 'believers' and 'non-believers'; and the clergy of both are often authoritarian and judgemental, placing greater emphasis on Divine judgement than Divine love.

These revivals represent a dramatic change in Nigeria's religious landscape. In 1900, estimates suggest that Nigeria's population was 26 percent Muslim and one percent Christian; the remainder adhered to traditional religions.¹ During the 20th century, especially after independence, Christianity grew explosively in the

south and the Middle Belt and there are now Christian minorities even in the predominantly Muslim north. As a result of these changes over the past century, in some areas faith relations have all but broken down, notably so in the Middle Belt and in the north. Some Christian leaders have resorted to triumphalist rhetoric, while Islamist radicals call for the implementation of a rigid form of sharia throughout the country. Nevertheless, in some parts of the country inter-faith relations are excellent. In the southwest around the megacity Lagos, for example, Muslims and Christians regularly intermarry and keep each other's holidays.

To ease the political impact of religious divisiveness, at the end of military rule in 1998, the ruling People's Democratic Party established a pattern of presidential power alternation between the predominantly Muslim north and the mostly Christian south. That system was dismantled in 2011 when the southern Christian Goodluck Jonathan successfully won the presidential campaign for re-

election, despite many considering it to be a northern Muslim's turn in the Presidential Villa. Jonathan's failure to replace the presidential alternation system with a new political form of Muslim-Christian balancing has been an important catalyst for the current wave of ostensibly 'religious' conflicts.

This is particularly overt in the Middle Belt, where religious and ethnic boundaries coincide with disputes over land and water use. A result has been 'ethnic cleansing,' reminiscent of the Balkans, in the area around Plateau State's capital Jos, where Christian and Muslim populations are now segregated. The government in Abuja, the media, and outside observers often label this conflict as 'religious' when in fact it is rooted in rivalries over land and water use.

In the north, the dismantling of the power alternation system has seen Nigeria's government and traditional Islamic establishments directly targeted by the radical Islamist revolt, commonly called Boko Haram. In the context of political marginalisation and economic impoverishment, Boko Haram and similar movements such as Ansaru seek to overthrow the Nigerian state and establish a pure Islamic state organised according to their interpretation of sharia. A salient theme within this interpretation is justice for the poor. This has potent appeal during a period of increasing personal and communal poverty at the grassroots level, while traditional elites prosper from connections with the federal government and its oil revenue.

Radical reformers have long claimed that Muslim leaders are 'non-Muslim' if they promote or legitimate social

injustice. Hence, 'Salafi' reformers, such as Boko Haram, pit themselves against 'Sufi' elites, led by the Sultan of Sokoto and the Shehu of Borno, who dominate the traditional Islamic establishment. Despite being avowedly anti-democratic,² Boko Haram has called for the Sultan to be replaced by a council that would be dominated by its own members and, in their view, more responsive to the needs of Muslims. It has tried to murder the Sultan and the Shehu and has also claimed responsibility for killing the Shehu's brother and bodyguards of the Sultan. Boko Haram also seeks the expulsion of Christians from the north. While Boko Haram has killed a significant number of Christians, most of its several thousand victims have been Muslim.

Ansaru, its full name meaning 'Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa', is a smaller radical group with a base in Kano State and Kaduna State. Its spokesmen claim the group split from Boko Haram because of the latter's frequent killing of Muslims. Ansaru actively attacks Christian churches. It appears to be trying to provoke a Christian backlash against Muslim minorities in the south, presumably to promote the breakup of the Nigerian state. Thus far, that effort has been unsuccessful.

Ansaru has introduced tactics more commonly associated with Islamist organisations in the Sahel, especially kidnapping for ransom and, possibly, the use of suicide bombers, which were previously unknown in West Africa. These tactics have most likely been derived from links the group has with radical Islamist groups in Algeria and Mali, but it is unlikely that it takes

direction from them. Neither Ansaru nor Boko Haram appears to receive significant funding from foreign sources. Furthermore, it is possible that Ansaru and Boko Haram have merged. There have been no Ansaru statements for several months and while the kidnapping of some 300 school girls from Chibok in Borno state has the marks of an Ansaru operation, it was a well-known Boko Haram warlord, Aubakar Shekau, who claimed responsibility. In May 2014, Boko Haram began using female suicide bombers. Some operatives have been criminals hired by Boko Haram to participate in specific operations, especially kidnapping for ransom.

Before August 2014, Boko Haram had not moved to set up an alternative state structure or levy taxes on the local people. Its funds came from criminal activities. But this is changing. Shekau had expressed admiration for the establishment of a caliphate by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and in August established one centred on Gwoza in the block of territory that it controls in north Nigeria. There do not appear to be links between the ISIS caliphate and that of Boko Haram, though their rhetoric is similar. In the territory it controls, Boko Haram is now levying tolls and fees and perhaps other taxes. It is unclear whether Boko Haram is providing residents with any government services. However, there is anecdotal evidence that it is enforcing a strict form of Islamic law.³

The Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram, Ansaru and other radical Islamists is to see them as an integrated global terrorist movement without popular domestic roots or context. It has reacted with severe repression, to

the extent that, during some periods of particularly brutal security force repression,⁴ government forces may be responsible for as many Nigerian deaths as Boko Haram. The government's seemingly indiscriminate killing of Boko Haram members, as well as many others who are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, appears to be a driver of popular support for, or acquiescence to, Boko Haram.⁵

A credible hypothesis is that Boko Haram recruits from the ranks of former students of the *al-majirai* schools that are decentralised institutions usually without government support, where *malams* instruct their students to memorise the Quran, but teach nothing else. A report based on surveys and interviews in Nigeria since 2013, concludes that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and weak family structures make young men vulnerable to recruitment by radical Islamists.⁶

Religion, then, has much to answer for the current situation. Yet there are a number of avenues by which faith groups and organisations can make significant contributions to reconciliation work. In April 2014, National Security Advisor Sambo Dasuki presented a long-term strategy to address issues that feed Boko Haram. While it was accepted by the Jonathan administration, little has been heard of it since. Nevertheless, its specific proposals could provide a useful entry point for faith-based organisations, especially with respect to education and partnerships to counter radicalisation at local levels. Faith-based organisations have considerable on-the-ground experience with community-based conflict mitigation

and resolution, both in Nigeria and also around the world. With respect to education, Dasuki envisions an approach where students learn how to communicate with different faiths and ethnicities based on mutual respect. Faith-based organisations with their characteristic sympathy for and sensitivity to religious considerations could play a positive role in helping to integrate *al-majirai* schools into a broader curriculum while respecting and enhancing their specifically Muslim religious character.

In addition, the struggle between the security services and Boko Haram has already generated significant refugee flows into Niger and Cameroon. Internally displaced persons in north Nigeria number at least 1.5 million. They are consuming the seed corn set aside for future harvests, raising the prospect of famine in the coming year. Faith-based organisations, particularly those with close grassroots connections, are well placed to act as intermediaries between the official National Emergency Management Agency, Nigerian non-governmental organisations, such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, international food relief agencies and potential donor governments. The magnitude of the looming humanitarian crisis should not be underestimated.

Elite inter-faith initiatives, such as those involving the Sultan of Sokoto, the Cardinal Archbishop of Abuja and the Anglican Bishop of Kaduna, have certainly had some impact on the traditional northern leadership. To them should go at least some

of the credit for a perceptible shift among northern elites away from their characteristic indifference to the plight of the poor. However, there is little sign that these efforts have much influence at the 'street' level, which is increasingly under the sway of radical Islamist preachers. Conversely, in the Middle Belt, grassroots work by 'the pastor and the imam' that paired Christian and Muslim clergy has been successful in diffusing tensions. However, it has not had sufficient support and capacity to succeed in reversing the ethnic cleansing that resulted in horrific loss of life around Jos.

Efforts by outsiders to support faith-based reconciliation should reflect local circumstances. Capacity-building to connect high-level elite initiatives with grassroots-level work is needed. While external actors can keep the spotlight on human rights violations in Nigeria, faith organisations and leaders are well-placed internal actors with significant capacity to pressure the government about ongoing human rights abuses by the security forces. However, the watchword for outsiders must be 'first, do no harm'. An increasingly brutal civil war between Islamist radicals and government security forces, both capable of the most outrageous human rights abuses, poses potential landmines for any initiative. There are opportunities for faith-based reconciliation projects to help make meaningful progress towards conflict resolution in Nigeria, but such initiatives require careful navigation through the specific challenges of local contexts.

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5. Human rights abuses by government security services in the north have been exhaustively documented. See, *inter alia*, Amnesty International, 'Nigeria: Gruesome Footage Implicates Military War Crimes', 5 August 2014; Human Rights Watch, 'Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria', October 2012, especially chapter 4; Amnesty International, 'Nigeria: More than 1,500 Killed in Armed conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria in Early 2014', London, 2014, pp. 11-23; A. Nossiter, 'Bodies Pour in as Nigeria Hunts for Islamists', *New York Times*, 7 May 2013; D. Hinshaw, 'Hundreds Killed in Jails Swelling with Islamist Suspects', *Wall Street Journal*, 15 October 2013.
6. F.C. Onuoha, 'Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?', in United States Institute of Peace, *Special Report* 348, Washington, D.C., June 2014.



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Tony Blair Faith Foundation

Christopher Rider is a Programme Manager at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation responsible for supporting religious leaders transform conflict, with a particular focus on Nigeria. His work has included the design and delivery of inter-faith workshops for emerging and front line Christian and Muslim leaders and the associated programme of follow-up coaching, mentoring and support. Prior to joining the Faith Foundation in 2013, Christopher spent 36 years in Government Service and has worked at senior advisory levels in many parts of the world including Iraq, Kosovo, Bosnia and the Middle East. His specialisations include diplomacy, security sector reform, training and education and team building. He is a graduate of Durham University and also holds a Masters in Defence Administration from Cranfield University.

Building a Consensus for Reconciliation

A core component of current conflicts is the growing polarisation between identities, particularly religious identities. To overcome this polarisation, heal divisions and build a consensus for reconciliation, we must develop patterns of dialogue and collaboration that build shared understanding, experience and trust. This will not be easy, but there can be no doubt that faith communities must take a leading role, argues Christopher Rider.

Akbar Ahmed and John Campbell argue that the polarisation of identity, especially around religious identity, is a central factor in many conflicts today. Ahmed explores how the exposure of communities to new ideas and ways of living as a result of globalisation has eroded traditional identities. The emergence of reactionary and excessive forms of group loyalty, or 'hyper-*asabiyya*', reflects a fear of the unknown, of what is different or uncertain. So we look to identities that can reaffirm our place in society and help us to respond to political, economic or socio-cultural issues.

Religions often provide the most explicit forms of this reactive group identity. According to Campbell, this phenomenon has manifested itself in Nigeria through Christian and Muslim 'literalist' revivals, the like of which are apparent in all faiths worldwide. Rigid boundaries, set up around these exclusive religious identities, become hardened markers of difference, often leading to withdrawal from society, segregation and potentially violence

and 'ethnic cleansing' as in parts of Nigeria.

Resolving this polarisation will not be simple or quick. It will require dedication from multiple sectors of national and international communities and substantial resource input, especially around communication and network building. Importantly it will require collaboration not only between these different civil society and political sectors, but also between different faiths. Narratives of 'us' and 'them' need to be turned into narratives of 'we' if we are to build effective and sustainable consensus for reconciliation and peace-building.

Mutual misunderstanding between faith groups and appeals to religious identity in support of contentious causes, can lead communities down the pathway to division and violence. But in both respects, faith groups can make a significant contribution to the process of reconciliation through facilitating and participating in dialogue and collaborating on social action.

This process must begin by fostering a shared understanding of core beliefs and a shared experience of each other. As Ahmed indicates, education about, and a shared understanding of, our commonalities provide the critical intellectual foundation for the sort of transformative experiences that can change behaviour. Dialogue which facilitates this learning and which brings opportunities to be exposed to each other's experiences and hopes and fears for the future is therefore essential. Our experience of working with religious leaders in Sierra Leone and Nigeria confirms this and indicates the necessity of moving this dialogue into practical collaboration to prove its success. Successful dialogue and collaboration builds mutual trust, which is critically important for undermining identity polarisation and beginning the process of reconciling divided communities.

However, initiatives of this kind often stumble for two reasons. Firstly, as Campbell highlights, disconnects between elite dialogues and 'the street' and between grassroots activism and national infrastructure can create misunderstandings between these actors that undermine constructive collaboration. Initiatives at both levels are equally important, but of limited effect if not integrated. It is for this reason that we advocate and work to build capacity and capability across 'mid-level' religious leadership. It is these 'mid-level' leaders who are best positioned to deliver and effect change in partnership with others at community level. They are able to recognise and replicate best practice across communities and harness the resources of wider national organisations to support community action.

In Sierra Leone, it is these leaders who have most effectively delivered health training and information to diverse and dispersed communities in partnership with national programmes. In Nigeria, it is these leaders who seek to build networks between the local communities and the national elites through which to counter misunderstanding, extremist thinking and hate speech. In our experience it is these leaders who have demonstrated through their work the critical role that faith communities can play in helping to forge more inclusive and integrated societies.

Secondly, if these initiatives take place close to the conflict, they are often hampered by events that can reinforce distrust and suspicion, or even bring the whole process to a halt. The creation of 'safe space' is fundamental to interaction that can develop the understanding and experience of each other. This has been what Canon David Porter has described as "disrupting the cultural settlement."¹ By taking participants out of their daily working environment and removing them from fear of violence or retribution, it is possible to disrupt a cultural settlement of mutual distrust and suspicion and create instead a safe space in which there is time for reflection, for understanding to grow, for trust to build and for relationships to develop.

Our experience of running workshops in the United Kingdom for Nigerian mid-level religious leaders demonstrates the importance of this disruption of the cultural settlement for overcoming the prejudice arising from rumour and misinformation. For example, a narrative widely accepted in many Nigerian Christian

communities is that the Muslims are killing Christians in the north of the country. As Campbell states, while Boko Haram has killed a significant number of Christians, most of its several thousand victims have been Muslim. When the nephew of one of our Muslim participants was killed in a Boko Haram attack on his school, the support provided by both the Christian and Muslim participants was powerful testimony that with shared understanding and experiences comes trust and friendship. We can all realise our common humanity and the impact that senseless and indiscriminate violence has for everyone, we just need the space in which to do so.

The problem of course is that we cannot disrupt the cultural settlements of mutual distrust that can infect entire populations. Rumour and misinformation will continue to spread rapidly if there is no authoritative challenge to them or any pathways offered for surmounting divisions. This, then, is the importance of supporting those leaders who are capable of turning dialogue into collaborative action. In Sierra Leone, for example, we have witnessed the dedication of religious leaders working together across faiths on Malaria prevention, building networks of support and trust. Excitingly, they are now using those same networks and partnerships to help battle against the spread of the Ebola virus.

In Nigeria we have seen the relationships developed by participants in our workshops strengthen as they have worked together to deliver change. One of their many initiatives is an employment training course for unemployed youth, to change the

patterns of unemployment, idleness and boredom that lead to radicalisation and recruitment into Boko Haram. They are also establishing peace clubs to counter ignorance of Islam and Christianity and to make the case for mutual respect and co-operation within and between faiths.

It is through actions such as these that dialogue and collaboration can be developed; that shared understanding and experience can be spread in a way that is sustainable and replicable. In just under a year, by building networks and community projects, 24 religious leaders have taken the message of intra- and inter-faith understanding and collaboration to some 24,000 people in Nigeria. In Sierra Leone, in little over three years religious leaders have taken malaria prevention information to over a third of the population.

Needless to say, in a world of 'polarised' identities of 'us' and 'them', this dialogue and collaboration often carries risk. Perceived as a compromise and even as a betrayal of core beliefs and group identity, its proponents may become targets for violence. Yet the evidence coming out of our own as well as similar programmes indicates that individual and group identities can be transformed and sustained over time, opening up the capability and determination to reach out to the 'Other'.

Demonstrating that dialogue and collaboration between different faiths can work is essential in empowering communities to build trust once again. Through the creation of trust we have seen identities begin to shift from 'us' and 'them' to 'we', a shift that is fundamental to all aspects of effective

conflict transformation. This process may not be quick or easy and it certainly requires long-term commitment, but it is vital if we are to overcome divisions caused by the polarisation of identities and begin to build a consensus for reconciliation.

Endnotes

1. Conversations with the author.



Liam Gearon
University of Oxford

Liam Gearon is Associate Professor in Religious Education at the University of Oxford's Department of Education and a Senior Research Fellowship at Harris Manchester College. After teaching religious education for several years, including as Head of Religious Education at St Dunstan's, Glastonbury, Gearon has since conducted extensive academic research on theology and the study of religion as well as education and is the author or editor of over twenty books. These include On Holy Ground: The Theory and Practice of Religious Education published by Routledge in 2013 and MasterClass in Religious Education published by Bloomsbury Academic also in 2013. Gearon has worked extensively with UNESCO including consulting on the official UNESCO Guidelines on Inter-cultural Education of 2006 and contributing to Contemporary Issues in Human Rights Education published by UNESCO in 2011. A member of the Executive of the Society of Educational Studies, Gearon is also Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He also holds the posts of Adjunct Professor at the Australian Catholic University; and Conjoint Professor in Humanities Research Institute, Schools of Education and Humanities, Newcastle University, Australia.

The Counter Terrorist Classroom: Countering Extremism Through (Religious) Education?

The problem of modern religious education remains how to ground the subject when it is no longer grounded in the religious life, in the life of the holy. Contemporary efforts to use religious education for the countering of extremism are a subset of the wider grounding of religious education in political life and concerns. When religious education is harnessed to secular purposes and no longer provides any meaningful pathways to pursue the holy, we leave that vital space empty for the extremists to fill. If we do not recognise this, any attempt to use education to counter extremism is bound to fail, argues Liam Gearon.

Religious education needs to be grounded in the religious life in order to address the critical moral and existential questions at the heart of the religious domain in human experience. Within a religious community, for example, religious education involves nurture within a tradition. This does not mean that such education fails any test of criticality of that tradition, but its broad parameters, even when contested, are grounded within it. The problem for modern non-confessional religious education becomes how to ground the subject when it is cut from any meaningful connection to forms of religious life.

In answering these questions,¹ I have mapped how modern approaches to religious education have sought grounds in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment forms of knowledge that have had a particularly close, but often conflictual, relationship with religion. Philosophy, the natural sciences, the social sciences, psychology, phenomenology, politics and aesthetics have each been defined

in relation to, and often in reaction against, the sacred. Each, in being the grounding for religious education, has tried to appropriate religious education for its own ends.

These appropriations have pedagogical impacts. Philosophical models see the object lesson of religious education to make thinkers and proto-philosophers. Socio-cultural models see the object lesson of religious education as creating ethnographic, cultural explorers. Psychological models see the learner as a seeker after personal meaning and fulfilment, 'spirituality' more preferable to 'religion'. Phenomenological models see religious education as creating a detached observer of religion who is perpetually distanced from it. Political models, emphasising the public face of religion and most commonly used for enhancing community and social cohesion in religiously plural but open democratic societies, see teaching and learning in religious education as concerned with the creation of citizens and even activists. Aesthetic models see a role for the arts in

religious education, not simply the noting of art in religious contexts but also religious education classrooms as forums, through the expressive arts, for creativity as spirituality, the artist as spiritual seeker.

Recent decades have seen one or other of these objective groundings being prioritised. Currently the political seems to be emerging as of paramount importance.² Given world events, this seems likely to be established as a priority grounding for the future. There is a longer history of political forces defining religious education of course. This is tied closely to the relationship between European civil religion and European religious education, the latter being compelled by the former to comply with international standards. Jean-Paul Willaime identifies this compulsion as a 'double constraint':

a sociological one, in that the religious and philosophical pluralisation of European societies obliges them to include ever more alternative religions and non-religious positions into their curricula, and ... a legal one, through the importance of the principle of non discrimination on religious or philosophical grounds (as well as others such as gender or race) in international law, especially in the European Convention on Human Rights.³

However, a third constraint has become apparent within the political paradigm of religious education that I have termed 'the securitisation of religious education'. Simply put, this 'securitisation' is apparent where the political uses of religion in education

outlined above take on, or are strongly determined by, security concerns.

Education has become an integral element of national and international security landscapes, from surveillance, counter-surveillance and intelligence gathering within schools and universities, to curriculum development, pedagogy and institutional policy at national and global levels. This is notable in relation to the countering of often, but not exclusively, religiously motivated extremism and terrorism. Education has become a critical element in a battle of ideas that painfully reflects real conflicts in the theatres of contemporary war.

Yet at present we do not know the implications or the effects of, nor even have we much idea of the philosophical or pedagogical rationale for, the use of education to counter extremism. Academically, the interface of education, security and intelligence studies has received relatively sparse attention. Even the association of religion itself with security is relatively new and correlations between international terrorism and religion are contested.⁴

The emergence of education, and specifically religious education, as one part of the complex interface of security and intelligence is manifested in key policy documents worldwide.⁵ The involvement of *any* curriculum area in such matters as security and intelligence may have critical and fundamental implications for the nature of the roles and purposes of education. For religious education this interface means disconnecting it from the religious leaving empty a space that

can be occupied by the same extremists that this approach is meant to counter.

The impact of this shift can be seen in national and international security policy developments. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools* is one influential example of this expanding interface. In the United Nations, two months after 9/11, Abdultaffah Amor, then UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, addressed an International Consultative Conference on School Education on 'The Role of Religious Education in the Pursuit of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination'.⁶ In 2010, Amor's successor, Heiner Bielefeldt, addressed the Human Rights Council and remarked that the "there seems to be worldwide consensus that the right to education is of strategic importance for the effective enjoyment of human rights in general."⁷ He referred to the contribution made by his predecessor and Ms. Jahangir, who had assisted in the development of the Toledo Guiding Principles. The official UN summary thus records:

States should favourably consider ... the final document adopted at the International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination and to the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools.⁸

It is in this same movement, that Tony Blair gave a speech to the United Nations Security Council's Counter-

Terrorism Committee on education as a security issue for the 21st century in November 2013.

However, the risks of such an initiative, politically, pedagogically and religiously, are considerable and deserve greater analysis.⁹ We have no clear understanding of how or if an education directed towards countering terrorism and extremism, what I term 'the counter terrorist classroom', can be effective. Politically and pedagogically the evidence at present is limited. Religiously, the dangers of limiting the focus of religious education to countering extremism are more significant. They could amount to a potentially permanent barrier to engagement with the religious life itself. An epistemological problem, how to ground religious education when it is no longer grounded in the religious life, therefore becomes a moral, even existential one.

Modern religious education, it seems, must be grounded in 'enlightened' epistemological parameters. These have their foundations in Kant's 'bounds of reason', Rousseau's 'civil religion', Dewey's 'religion of humanity' and, more recently, the counter extremism agenda manifested by the 'counter terrorist classroom'.¹⁰ Modern religious education is therefore governed by three principles: rationality – autonomy of reason, freedom of will and action, students are encouraged to think for themselves, rejecting religious authority and faith at face value; secularity – directing its purpose to worldly concerns, especially political and security concerns, by removing the transcendent as a term accessible to reason; and temporality – an understanding of time which, given

the first two principles, focuses on the here and now.

Religious lives must also reason and live in the world and in time, but they can also provide antinomies to the exigencies of temporal order that are sufficient neither as educational nor existential ends. From a Christian perspective, these are the concerns of faith – that God alone is the ground, known but never fully knowable; the eternal – where the temporal may manifest but is not the fulfilment of the holy; and sanctification – where God alone grounds purpose, the world is an instrument, rather than an end, of the holy life. Any religious education that falls short of such goals, even for

the temporal necessity of countering extremism, will provide a skewed engagement with the religious.

Indeed, however misguided in its violence and its brutality, there is some distant recognition within the extremist mindset that what is offered as ‘Western education’ does indeed lack higher transcendental goals and perspective. If we offer a ‘religious education’ emptied of the sacred, extremists will be ready to fill that void. Until policy makers and indeed security and intelligence services realise this, their struggle is likely to be in vain and their programmes for securitised forms of religious education the most ineffective weapons of all.

Endnotes

1. For a full account of the opinions and arguments I express here, see L. Gearon, *On Holy Ground: The Theory and Practice of Religious Education*, London and New York, Routledge Research in Education, 2014; L. Gearon, *MasterClass in Religious Education*, London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013; L. Gearon, ‘The Counter Terrorist Classroom: Religion, Education, Security’, *Religious Education*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (2013), pp. 129-147; L. Gearon, ‘European Religious Education and European Civil Religion’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (2012), pp. 151-169; and L. Gearon, ‘The Securitization of Religion in Education’, in Theo van der Zee and Terry Lovat (eds.), *New Perspectives in Religious and Spiritual Education*, Münster, Waxmann, 2012, pp. 215-233.

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6. A. Amor, ‘The role of religious education in the pursuit of tolerance and non-discrimination’, UN Geneva, International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, 2001.

7. UN Human Rights Council, *Sixteenth Session, Agenda Item 3, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt*, United Nations General Assembly, Document A/HRC/16/53, Geneva, United Nations 2010, Paragraph 20.

8. Ibid, Summary.

9. To this end, I will be editing a special issue of the *British Journal of Educational Studies* on ‘Education, Security and Intelligence Studies’.

10 I. Kant (A. W. Wood and G. di Giovanni (trans. and eds.)), *Religion and Rational Theology: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996; J.J. Rousseau (V. Gourevitch (ed.)), *Rousseau: ‘The Social Contract’ and Other Later Political Writings* and *Rousseau: ‘The Discourses’ and Other Early Political Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; J. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York, Free Press, 1997; J. Dewey (J. Boydston (ed.)), *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, 3rd edn., Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.



Robert Jackson
University of Warwick

Robert Jackson was Director of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (1994-2012) and is Professor of Religions and Education at the University of Warwick and a Special Adviser to the European Wergeland Centre, Oslo. He has been involved in international research and development, including the European Commission's REDCo project, and the Council of Europe's wide-ranging work on religion and education. He was Editor of the British Journal of Religious Education (1996-2011). In 2013 he received the William Rainey Harper Award from the Religious Education Association (USA), presented to 'outstanding leaders whose work in other fields has had profound impact upon religious education'. He was also made a life member of the Religious Education Association and the Association of University Lecturers in Religious Education. His latest book 'Signposts': Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2014), is written for policy makers, schools and teacher educators across Europe, discussing the implementation of a recent Council of Europe Recommendation.

Addressing Religious Extremism: A Positive Approach for Policy Makers and Practitioners

Extreme violence in the name of religion has become a feature of our society. However, there is a risk that hasty policy reactions to such violence can confuse extremism with conservative views that are legitimate in a liberal democracy that supports freedom of religion and belief. This can damage social cohesion by associating these events with a generalised picture of a religion. National policy needs to be integrated, including a positive educational approach. Better understanding of religions and engagement with people of other faiths, while not a solution on its own, is an important factor in countering extremism and building tolerance and respect among different groups. This can only help to foster democratic citizenship in national and global society, argues Robert Jackson.

Cases of 'religious extremism' often involve extreme violence against innocent people such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States of America, the Madrid and London bombings of 2004 and 2005 and the murders of British and American hostages in 2014. There is a real danger that 'knee-jerk' shifts of policy in response to such events can contribute to social division and fragmentation rather than promoting social cohesion. This is especially true when the extreme views and actions of a few are taken to correspond to a generalised picture of a religion. Avoiding policies built on these dangerous generalisations requires well-researched, integrated strategies.

A *positive* educational response, that could form part of policy and practice anchored in a constitutional recognition of religious freedom, should have a broad set of aims. It should aim to increase young people's knowledge and understanding of religions, regardless of whether their own family background is

religious or not. This should include, among other strategies, facilitating communication between young people from different religious and non-religious backgrounds. The Council of Europe, for example, through its ministerial recommendation on education about religions and non-religious convictions,¹ regards this form of education as necessary to the development of inter-cultural understanding. However, it is important that this is set within a wider strategy to counter violent extremism. A religious education that sets out *only* to promote tolerance and social cohesion is inadequate since it assumes that understanding and knowledge necessarily foster tolerance. Knowledge and understanding are necessary but not sufficient conditions for genuinely removing prejudice.

Liam Gearon² is a critic of this approach who misrepresents it as constituting a discrete 'historical-political paradigm' of religious education with a *single* aim of achieving 'political' goals (such as increasing tolerance) while failing to

develop any understanding of what it means to be religious. This results, he argues, in its naively colluding with the agendas of security organisations, whose interest in promoting understanding of religions he perceives to be sinister. Gearon claims this approach filters out religious difference and conflict in the classroom, makes the assumption that all religions are equally true and that it uses the personal experience of children as the *only* source of information for learners. Its methods are also sullied, he suggests, by the use of research and didactical methods derived from social sciences and psychology, which he regards as inherently secularist in nature. Not one of these claims holds up to critical scrutiny. I address these criticisms elsewhere, but brief responses to some of them are present in what follows.³

Dr Gearon is rather coy about what he regards as legitimate ‘religious education’, but the numerous references associating it with initiation into ‘the religious life’ seem to reveal his position. What policy makers need to understand is that there is a fundamental distinction between forms of education which initiate individuals into some form of religious life, developing *religious understanding*, and those which promote an inclusive, general public understanding of religion, what I term *understanding religion*. I have no problem with the former in principle, if it results from the wishes of parents or young people themselves and does not necessarily depend on funding from the state. It is simply different to the activity appropriate for *inclusive* schools in which young people from a variety of religious and secular backgrounds

work and study together and gain a better understanding of each other’s beliefs and worldviews.

That said, these two approaches can be complementary. For example, an individual’s religious understanding can, in principle, contribute experience that facilitates understanding of another’s religious position. Just as an understanding of religious plurality can, in principle, inform one’s own religious understanding. Indeed, many who are involved in educating for religious understanding within their faith communities regard it as important that learners have opportunities to develop an understanding of religious diversity. Moreover, dialogue between students experiencing each form of education can be successful.⁴ Confusingly, both processes, depending on context, are often called ‘religious education’, or the equivalent of this term in languages other than English.

Policies intended to counter violent extremism need to promote ‘understanding religion’ for a range of reasons. The primary aim of inclusive ‘religious education’ is to promote an understanding of the language, experiences and values of religious people in order to understand another’s religious stance. This goal is both intrinsic to the nature of education and instrumental to the benefit of individuals and society. Education is concerned with introducing young people to the full breadth of human experience, and this must include religion. In an international context where skills for employability and industrial competitiveness often dominate educational policy, this view acts as a counterweight, pressing for

the inclusion of studies of religious and ethical issues and reflection on these as *intrinsic* elements of education, rather than optional ‘add-ons’.

For individuals, study of, and reflection on, different religions can also help students to clarify their own *personal* religious positions or values and to appreciate the relationship between another’s position and their own. Continuing reflection is a ‘conversational’ process in which students, whatever their family or cultural background, interpret and reinterpret their own views in the light of their studies.

For society, such study encourages recognition of the principle of religious freedom and tolerance of, and sometimes respect for, others’ views and ways of life within society.⁵ Thus it makes a contribution to education for democratic citizenship. Participation in these debates links the social world and the individual and is a condition for the kind of inter-religious and inter-cultural communication that is necessary for the proper functioning of plural democracies.

The REDCo Project,⁶ which included various research studies with 14-16 year olds in eight European countries, demonstrates the importance of this link between the personal and the social. It shows support from young people for education about religious diversity, demonstrating that studies of religious diversity are not erosive of students’ own commitments, but can help to develop a culture of ‘living together’. The majority of survey participants wanted opportunities to learn about and from one another’s religious perspectives in the ‘safe

space’ of the classroom, with teachers acting *both* as sources of knowledge and understanding and facilitators of dialogue. Students were able to develop their own stances on the relationship between religions using skills of empathy and criticism in order to relate to the materials being studied, especially when trying to grasp another’s religious language. There was absolutely *no* procedural assumption that ‘all religions are equally true’, but there *was* a commitment to the democratic and human rights principle of freedom of religion or belief within society, which is a very different matter.

‘Conflict’ and difference is *not* filtered out of such exchanges; indeed this approach, the development of safe, interpretive spaces, allows for discussions of religious extremism. As Joyce Miller argues,⁷ the development of a nuanced approach to representing and interpreting *any* religion in the classroom avoids both ‘satanisation’ and ‘sanitisation’, encouraging recognition of internal diversity and avoiding stereotyping. This interpretive approach does not *only* draw on the experience of children – teachers are essential guides and sources of information – but credits students with the ability to distinguish between, and to show tolerance or respect for, different beliefs and perspectives; skills vital for citizens in plural democracies.

These debates are not just about the religious. *Signposts*, the book explaining the Council of Europe’s ministerial recommendation on “the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within inter-cultural education”, makes some key points.⁸ Here, a form of inclusive education is recommended for *all*

students, regardless of background, developing their understanding of a range of religious and non-religious life stances or worldviews. This education is intended to deepen students' understanding of different traditions present in late modern societies and to encourage dialogue and exchange between those from different backgrounds. It relates religions and 'non-religious convictions' to intercultural education, not to reduce religion to culture, but to mirror Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in giving public recognition to the plurality of deeply held commitments within our societies. A distinction is also made between 'organised' world views such as the religions of the world and secular humanism, and the 'personal' world views which individuals adopt that might mirror the organised, but are often more eclectic.

Clarification of terminology and processes, including distinguishing clearly between descriptive and normative meanings, is necessary when discussing the field of religion and education. For example, there might be wide agreement that we live in a world where cultural and religious diversity is highly complex, influenced by both 'local' and 'global' factors, a condition widely described as late modernity or post-modernity. This is very different from adopting the normative stance of postmodernism, in which, for example, truth is seen as internal to different ways of life. Similarly, religious *plurality*, describing the complex mix of religious phenomena, is different to *pluralism*, connoting a particular normative stance. For citizenship education this means that, as well as developing an

understanding of insiders' meanings of religious language, it is important to unpack how religious people relate their religious identities to ideas of ethnicity, nationality and culture and also to examine examples of (mis) representations of religions by the media or by politicians.

The social and moral values behind this approach to 'understanding religion' relate to the idea of *human dignity* reflected in human rights codes such as the UDHR. There may be very different moral, religious and cultural sources for ideas of human dignity, but there is also some close overlap between these different ideas. These codifications are therefore important reference points for negotiating these differences through dialogue. By exploring different expressions of the concept of human rights, consensus might be found through the discussion of these 'overlapping values,' in attempting to find some degree of common ground. This is close to what John Rawls means by an 'overlapping consensus.'⁹

There is no space here to discuss best classroom practices.¹⁰ One of the essential things for policy makers to note, however, is that promoting this form of education affects not only content, but also format. Democratic principles fostered by this education must also create a safe classroom space in which it can be explored. Various research studies demonstrate the need to create a safe classroom space by agreeing ground rules for the expression of views, directly involving students in their preparation. Such procedures should not simply be agreed, but should be understood as exemplifying the democratic principles of tolerance, non-discrimination and

mutual respect for the right to hold a particular viewpoint, that underpin the public life of the school and society.

It is perhaps unrealistic to expect any classroom to be entirely 'safe' for all students all of the time. Providing opportunities for student dialogue and exchange inevitably holds some element of risk, though these can be minimised through suitable preparation and training. But this risk is one worth taking.

Increasing the level of knowledge and understanding of religions and other worldviews, together with increasing the competence of students to practise and engage in 'civil' dialogue that includes questions related to religious conflict, will not completely remove issues in society related to extremism. However they can make an important positive contribution alongside other strategies and should be an important consideration in the development of national policies.

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Pakistani policy analyst, journalist and author

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In March 2014, he survived an assassination attempt in which his driver lost his life. Within weeks, he left Pakistan and has since been affiliated with the New America Foundation and the United States Institute of Peace.

Case Study

Pakistan: Education, Religion and Conflict

Pakistan is in the midst of crisis. It is threatened by virulent extremist groups and is suffering from a failing education system that is poorly funded, politically manipulated and which promulgates an undefined Islamo-nationalist ideology that lays the foundations for widespread acceptance of ideologically motivated violence. Reforms to the curriculum have been legislated but are badly implemented by the country's politicians and the international community has largely turned a blind eye to these shortcomings. Unless aid and advocacy is specifically focused on far-reaching educational reform that directly tackles extremism, the long-term consequences will be extremely severe, writes Raza Rumi.

Pakistan's education crisis is severe. Almost half of children of school-going age are not in school. In conflict-affected areas such as the Balochistan province, nearly 66 percent do not have access to schooling. The government spends less than two percent of GDP on education and the financing gap is filled by foreign aid and private or charitable funders. In recent years, the increased number of madrasas promoting extreme interpretations of Islam and funding from dubious sources has raised the possibility that those who do access education are being indoctrinated into ideologies that either sympathise with or promote various forms of violent extremism.

Yet it would be unwise to consider madrasas as the main source of radicalisation. Since the 1970s the educational system and state curriculum has been used as a political tool for promoting an Islamo-nationalist ideology that is dangerously counter-democratic. In the words of Pervez Hoodbhoy, a Pakistani public intellectual, both

schools and madrasas produce "fiery zealots, fuelled with a passion for jihad and martyrdom."¹ Pakistan's education system urgently needs to be reimagined and restructured to ensure societal stability.

Pakistan's enduring internal conflict over the past few decades is well documented and often attributed to a dysfunctional foreign policy and restructuring of Pakistan's legal and political system to create a hybrid theocratic state.² Two decades of geopolitical struggles centred in Afghanistan have not helped either. During the 1980s, the emergence of jihad as a policy tool backed by the international community was a watershed in the country's history. A deliberate state choice was made to use a violent version of jihad (struggle) as a counterweight to India and its influence in Afghanistan. Consequently, violent manifestations of Islamism have penetrated the fabric of Pakistani society through sectarian strife and the rise of the Pakistani Taliban as a force committed

to annihilating the existing Pakistani regime. However, it would be simplistic to reduce the country's metamorphosis into a hybrid-theocracy to its foreign policy agenda alone.

Pakistan's birth in 1947 opened the question of identity, whereby the new nation was torn between the idea of transnational Islam and imperatives of a modern nation-state. Pakistan's successive governments, elected and unelected, have used Islam as a political tool. They have pandered to the demands of the religious right for the creation of an 'Islamic' state, given that the country was created for the 'welfare' of Muslims living in undivided British India. Islam was invoked as the unifying factor between the disparate Western and Eastern Wing, now Bangladesh, and insufficient attention was paid to the regional and ethnic quests for political expression and power sharing. Pakistan's dismemberment in 1971 therefore created another watershed where the influence of a more democratic and secular Eastern Wing disappeared, leaving the polity open to the re-assertion of an Islamist identity.

In 1973, Pakistan was declared an Islamic Republic and the avowedly 'secular' Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto began a process of Islamisation. Acceding to the demands of the religious lobbies, in 1974 the Ahmadiyya sect was declared 'non-Muslim'. By 1977 Bhutto had declared Friday as a holiday and banned alcohol and gambling. His successor, General Zia-ul-Haq, took this further, introducing a wide variety of sharia laws and ushering in an era of ideological statehood that continues to this day.

This, perhaps the most notable shift, saw the construction of what is now widely known as the 'ideology of Pakistan'. First introduced in the late 1960s during the government of General Yahya Khan, during the 1980s this vague, undefined notion was embedded into the constitution. The penal code was also amended to conflate the 'safety' and 'sovereignty' of Pakistan with 'ideology', creating an Islamo-nationalist identity of Pakistan that the highest officials of the state are bound to protect.³

Concurrently, Pakistan also witnessed the rise of religious extremism as a legitimate policy tool. This was employed to support the Afghan jihad and later the insurgency in Indian-occupied Kashmir, a key dispute between the two neighbours. Even civilian democrats have accepted this 'national security' agenda that entails an alliance with both violent and non-violent religious, sectarian and extremist groups to ensure Pakistan's defence against anticipated Indian aggression. This has meant that internal and external resources flowed to the religious right through charitable and private donations and foreign funding for the decade-long Afghan jihad. The religious right has therefore been able to organise its grassroots structures and propaganda capabilities to influence the functioning of the state. Over time, religious parties and sectarian-militant organisations have transformed into pressure groups with the ability to mobilise the streets through networks of mosques, religious seminaries and charities. The use of religion has become a legitimate mode of furthering political objectives.

The education system has been a major

vehicle in creating support for jihadi ventures as well as in embedding an undefined Islamic 'ideology' as a core part of citizenship. During the 1980s, the state curriculum underwent radical revisions. The Zia regime decreed Islamic studies and Pakistan Studies as compulsory subjects for schools and universities, even for engineering and medicine degrees. By using religious instruction, the Pakistani state has systematically introduced generations to an exclusivist ideology, where a peculiar interpretation of jihad is propagated as part of security policy.⁴ Today, this lays the foundations for widespread acceptance of ideologically motivated violence. Textbooks portray a victim narrative, where the entire world is conspiring against Muslims and Islam and Pakistan are under siege.

After 9/11, the Musharraf regime, under pressure from the international community, announced plans to revise the curriculum and to delete passages advocating jihad. In 2001 curriculum reforms were initiated but in a phased manner because of fears of a backlash from the religious right. In 2003, Pakistani authorities announced that a curriculum revision would take place every 5 years through an institutionalised process.⁵ In 2006, a new curriculum policy was also announced but it could not be fully implemented before Musharraf was ousted in 2007. In 2009, the new National Education Policy recognised that three parallel education systems, public, private and religious, had "created unequal opportunities for students."⁶ But, it failed to address the ideological components of the curriculum and no net increase in spending on education materialised.⁷

These reforms are urgently needed if Pakistan is to maintain and foster a democratic society. In 2004, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, a Pakistani think tank, highlighted that the state-mandated curriculum "contained material that was directly contrary to the goals and values of a progressive, moderate and democratic Pakistan."⁸ A tenth grade textbook, for instance, tells students that,

In Pakistan, ideology and foreign policy are intertwined. Pakistan is an ideological state and is based on Islamic ideology. The important objective of Pakistan's Foreign Policy is the defence of ideological frontiers. Pakistan's stability is also implicit in the protection of the Ideology of Pakistan. It can protect its ideology by establishing good relations with Islamic countries.⁹

This curriculum is not limited to public schools. Pakistan's growing demand for education has resulted in a mushrooming of private schools that are bound by the same curriculum. Millions of Pakistani children, over at least three generations, have been tutored in a quasi-Islamist, xenophobic and Muslim supremacist fashion.

Madrasas have also mushroomed across the country. According to Pakistan's Ministry of Education, in 2012 there were over 13,000 madrasas in the country. Of these religious schools, 97 percent are in the private sector with a total enrolment of nearly 1.8 million children.¹⁰ While this may be just less than five percent of the total of school-going children, they

produce Pakistan's mosque leaders and clerics. An overwhelming majority of madrasas belong to the Deobandi school of thought that is close to extremist Wahabi-Salafi thought and has trained the leadership of the Taliban movement.

Many in Pakistan agree that extremism is the key threat to the survival of the state and its society. With the rise of armed militias, of which there are currently at least three-dozen groups across the country, the space available to the national government for policy shifts has been greatly reduced. Today, politicians fear that they might open a Pandora's Box by changing the curriculum.

Since the amendments to the constitution in 2010, authority to set the curriculum has devolved to provincial governments. Progress in the past four years has not been encouraging. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, for example, there is an intense ideological struggle underway, with the Jamaat-e-Islami wishing to revise the earlier changes that secularised the curriculum. In the Punjab, clerics and their supporters in the media have resisted minor changes. Private schools have been dissuaded from teaching comparative religion as a subject. In the Sindh province, some changes have been made but it is unclear if they will hold given the power of the local Islamist groups. In the short to medium term, the situation is not likely to change and indoctrination will continue.

The madrasa reform story is even more instructive. In 2001, the Musharraf administration promulgated a 'Pakistan Madrasa Education Board

Ordinance', despite resistance mounted by the religious lobby.¹¹ The new law mandated that madrasas should teach English, mathematics and computer science. Another law calling for voluntary registration and regulation was enacted in 2002, assuring state funding for madrasas that formally register with the government.¹² Weak implementation and wide resistance has resulted in a small fraction of madrasas accepting curriculum reforms since then.¹³

In early 2014, the current government launched the National Internal Security Policy (NISP). NISP identifies madrasas as a potential 'security' concern because of their ability to 'spread extremism' and their tendency to cultivate intolerant and 'violent religious attitudes'.¹⁴ In a bold departure from the past, NISP states that madrasas are engaged in spreading radicalisation literature, advocate complete rejection of other beliefs and preach sectarian indoctrination. Thus NISP seeks to initiate a comprehensive review and reformation of the madrasa education system, and has called for laws "supporting the administration, financial audit and curriculum accreditation" of madrasas.¹⁵

The Pakistani parliament has endorsed NISP, but little or no movement has been made towards its implementation. Not unlike previous reform efforts, this also seems to be falling victim to institutional inertia, a lack of political will and the fear of a backlash from the religious lobby. More importantly, negligible funds have been allocated to fulfil all these ambitious targets.

Since 2002, the international community has invested substantial

resources to reform the education system of Pakistan. Under the Kerry-Lugar-Berman aid package, the United States of America spent \$450 million on education reforms in Pakistan over the period to 2012.¹⁶ One of the aims of the USA's aid was to initiate changes in the curriculum.¹⁷ The United Kingdom has also invested a sizeable portion of its aid into the education system. However, given the sensitivity of the issue, the UK is not making curriculum reform a priority, but is instead focusing on getting children back into classrooms.

This is all very well, but in the long term such a fragmented strategy is only likely to have negative consequences. The international community must not refrain from articulating the imperative of fixing Pakistan's education system and the ideological content of its curriculum. Aid packages must take stock of the way young minds are being influenced. Ultimately, it will need a broad coalition of Pakistan's political parties, civil society and media to initiate changes and build a consensus that radicalisation of young minds can only harm the country's future.

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Education as a Security Issue

The use of education as both tool and target of religious extremists globally is perhaps one of the most important generational challenges we face today. To ensure that the next generation is open to a more pluralistic world we must ensure that their education equips them to safely encounter the 'Other'. This not only means improving knowledge, understanding and interaction, but also critically requires investment in developing essential soft skills that can ensure these are properly employed, writes Ian Jamison.

When deliberating the role of education in countering extremism, it is imperative to stand back from the minutiae of our own situations to focus on general principles about the nature of the challenges that we face today. This is not easy. For those actively engaged in education systems it is always hard to think beyond the theory and practice that one is used to; and for those who are not, it is hard to think beyond one's own experience at school. Yet without grasping the nature of these challenges, and the implications for our policy choices, we severely limit our ability to generate practical solutions.

One of the greatest generational challenges we currently face is that there are those who actively seek to create educational cultures that inculcate divisive and violent religious worldviews and positively encourage violent extremism. While it is important to recognise that the potential for the discourse of extremism exists in all religions and amongst all communities, the extremists, though

frequently appearing to the outsider to be anchored within traditions, are extreme distortions of them. Their voices are repudiated by the vast majority of practitioners of those traditions, who are viewed by the extremists as targets to be conquered rather than fellows to be engaged. Ordinary adherents become the most frequent victims of the violence of these groups. New forms of religious extremism are persistent, united and investing enormous personnel, finance and intellectual resources into their efforts. Much of this investment deliberately targets youth. Ultimately, for extremists, the purpose of education and socialisation is to close, rather than open, the minds of those with whom they come in contact.

Thus, when Gearon questions the purpose of education, I think it is naïve to suggest that education exists in some kind of policy vacuum. All education systems in the world are driven by some kind of policy. There is *always* a purpose to education over and above the cultivation of knowledge and

understanding and human flourishing, whether it is that of promoting a particular brand of religious ideology, to increase market competitiveness or to build better citizens. The experience for students in the classroom is mediated through a *bricolage* of competing purposes.

It is precisely because education always serves a purpose, because it is always instrumentalised, that it is vital to question what might be the best purposes. In our experience, the challenge of countering extremism is not about education *per se*, but about the *kind* of education that can make the most difference. Gearon's inclusion of 'the transcendent' should be viewed in this context; it *can* form part of the *bricolage*, and may arguably be a critical dimension for schools with a specifically religious character. But it does not necessarily address the challenges of fostering more inclusive and respectful approaches to religious diversity within education systems themselves.

Effective education should not merely stand by and assert that 'such issues are outside our purview', but should actively seek to oppose these extreme viewpoints. It should form part of a coherent counter-narrative, build resilience to radicalisation and give students the knowledge and skills that they need not merely to ignore, but also to stand up to these voices.

Unfortunately, reluctance to engage is the norm. Both Jackson and Gearon write as experts within the field of 'Religious Education', but it is significant to reflect that around the world the exclusion of religion from the classroom altogether, or abrogation

of responsibility to religious believers to provide education, is far more common than formalised study of religion. Neither of these predominant responses is well adapted to providing the kind of broad understanding of religion that will form resilient students able to play a full role in a globalised world marked by complex forms of cultural and religious diversity.

Jackson elucidates some of the critical components of the kind of education that can be most effective in addressing the challenge of extremism. His suggestion that increased understanding of religions and direct interaction with peers of different backgrounds are important contributions education can make to addressing radicalisation and extremism, matches our experience. I would, however, add the cultivation of appropriate skills for open-mindedness.

Without these skills, efforts to increase knowledge, understanding and interaction will fail to adequately equip students to grapple with the challenging and complex nature of the globalised world for which education is preparing them. This stance is grounded in our experience of running Face to Faith over the last five years, providing students in over 30 countries with opportunities to learn about other faith and belief traditions through direct encounters with their global peers. The most significant part of this is the preparation students undergo for their dialogical encounters through the use of a robust and adaptable pedagogy of dialogue. This helps them to move into meaningful discussions that allow them to explore, challenge and understand better one another's

cultures, beliefs and values.¹

It is this pedagogy of dialogue that inculcates a number of critical skills that enable students to go beyond simply learning about the 'Other', to experiencing each other. That is, beyond a superficial and stereotypical list of things that they 'know' about the 'Others', to a more profound and nuanced understanding of the 'Other's' life and the ideas, beliefs and values that are important therein. Students need to develop skills of active listening, reflection and questioning; global awareness, communication and co-operation; leadership and religious literacy.² Students also need to be critical consumers of information, questioning provenance, reliability, audience, motive and purpose. This is increasingly vital now that so much misinformation on religion and even violent radicalisation is occurring via the Internet. I would also highlight the importance of developing skills that empower students to critically engage the media. It is much harder for teachers to cultivate tolerant attitudes in their students when they are constantly bombarded with the opposing message. Keeping students safe therefore means giving them the skills to make critical and informed judgements about whom they can trust and the kinds of information that they will accept. The core skill that can arm students against the narratives of extremism is an attitude of openness to others: a willingness to understand before making judgements and, ultimately, not to be afraid of difference.

This pedagogy of dialogue is the critical element that I would add to Jackson's description of a 'positive educational response' to religious extremism when seeking to develop practical policy solutions. In our evolving project we have seen how global peer dialogue empowers young people by giving them the sense that their voice is being heard by, is of interest to and is taken seriously by their peers around the world. Moreover, research indicates that these students are going out into their communities spreading messages of tolerance and respect, even informing and educating their parents.³

Around the world more and more education systems are moving towards more and more rigorous centralised testing regimes. At the same time, amongst educationalists, employers, parents and academics there is a much broader recognition of the importance of 'soft skills' in preparing students for the globalised world of the 21st century. Just as education policy makers take it as axiomatic that one should include skill sets to support students to develop literacy and numeracy; so they should include the skill set of effective dialogue between those of different countries, cultures, beliefs and values, as part of a palette of soft skills to ensure students are more tolerant, respectful citizens. This is critically important if education is going to play a meaningful role in empowering students to resist and combat those forms of religious extremism that target them.

Endnotes

1. For more information about Face to Faith and its Pedagogy of Dialogue, visit the Tony Blair Faith Foundation website [<http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/projects/supporting-next-generation>].
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Action for Peace and Progress: 'Tin Ears' on Religion and Development

The role of religion and of religious actors is far too often ignored or dismissed by international development officials and organisations. Religious actors have a wealth of experience, access and capacity to offer in tackling and achieving global goals, and the separation of secular and religious efforts is wasting precious time and resources. Yet there is hope, as the experiences of the World Faiths Development Dialogue proves, writes Katherine Marshall.

Discussions of international development issues and policies and religion tend to veer towards one of two extremes. Where economic facets of issues tend to dominate you will find scant mention of any feature that might be called religious. Alternatively, where the discussant has a primarily religious vision, religious facets may well dominate the narrative, whether it is about a practical health challenge or an economic strategy. At one extreme is a broad tendency to ignore religion, whether because of unease about the topic or a perception that religion is a private matter, the significance of which has declined in public life or should do so. At the other is a worldview so coloured by religious beliefs that everything falls within its ambit.

These extremes reflect widely differing understandings of what religious beliefs represent in the 21st century and how they influence international affairs. They also reflect the distorted lens through which religious faiths and institutions are often viewed. This

is applicable at many levels, involving many very different kinds of issues. Analysis tends to be coloured by how the perceiver views religious matters: positive or negative, central or peripheral, cerebral or practical.

This disjuncture matters because we urgently need insightful, objective and probing analysis of religious factors at work in international development. This is in part because most people in the world consider themselves part of a religious community.¹ It is also because the vast network of religious institutions can and should be allies in global efforts to end poverty, assure quality education and health care for all, protect the environment, end wars, promote human rights and advance other worthy causes.

Even a cursory review of social, political and economic forces at work in world affairs makes it clear that religious institutions, ideas and leaders play important roles in most societies and countries. Religious roles may be most visible where religion is seen to

fuel conflict, but religious actors are involved in virtually every sector and activity, whether at the level of speaking about ethics and values or in shaping daily lives. Religious influences on domestic and international affairs are complex and dynamic. As globalisation shapes ever more plural, inter-faith societies, these complexities increase.

A first order of business is thus to make rigorous and professional analysis of religious roles in global affairs a *sine qua non*, integral part of policy analysis in the various reaches of professions involved in international affairs.² A second is to address the root causes of tensions between religious communities and other religious or non-religious actors. And a third is to engage religious actors positively and actively in advancing the global goals that promise a better world for the future.

In 1998, a dialogue about development and religion, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), was jointly initiated by the World Bank President, James D. Wolfensohn and then Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, in which I have been engaged from the outset. The initiative's goals are broad and ambitious. Firstly, it aims to stimulate constructive partnerships that would extend the reach of development programmes and enhance their quality and impact. Secondly, it attempts to address critically the misunderstandings, biases and tensions that handicap collaborative work between religious and secular development actors. It was from the outset an inter-faith project, in the sense of engaging leaders from a wide range of world faiths.

This 15-year journey in inter-faith dialogue, focusing on the broad agenda of international development, has spanned a turbulent period. The tragic events of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks brought about a significant change in the overall context, but not in the effort itself. This heightened attention to what many saw as a 'resurgence' of religion and particularly its potential to incite or fuel conflict, and multiplied inter-faith efforts and lively debates about religion's role in international affairs.

Inter-faith work ranges from the very global to the very local. It can be highly intellectual and philosophical, focusing on beliefs and teachings, or be very pragmatic and action-focused, assuming that if people from different religious communities work together on any practical problem both better understanding and co-operation will result. The WFDD is primarily about common engagement on practical issues of common concern, and thus falls on the pragmatic end of the spectrum. An example is work to better understand and support strategic co-operation among different faith and secular actors on a range of health issues, such as malaria, HIV and AIDS, maternal health and child health. Mobilising faith coalitions to fight corruption, or redefining approaches to the care of orphans and vulnerable children, a traditional area of focus for many faith traditions, are other examples of common causes. However, the WFDD cannot be corralled solely into pragmatic, action-focused areas. Questions about the ends and ethics of development arise in virtually all cases and the dialogue or engagement needs to find ways of addressing these critical issues. An example is gender equality

and justice, a topic seen quite differently in different religious communities, but where there is increasing convergence on global norms and standards.

Inter-faith dialogue, which should encompass intra-faith dialogue, for example among different Christian denominations or approaches to Islam, can vary from widely inclusive, including atheist or indigenous religions for example, to a more selective focus on bringing together a limited group of specific traditions. The WFDD in fact extends beyond faith traditions to include non-faith actors, an important bridge that is often harder to cross than those among different religious traditions.

The WFDD offers four valuable lessons that highlight the imperatives and pitfalls of engaging religious actors directly in international development.³ A first lesson turns on the difficulties of integrating religious dimensions into policy and operational work. Wolfensohn and Carey were keenly aware of strong feelings that divided religious actors but did not anticipate the tensions and ambivalence they found, somewhat to their surprise, among secular institutions when the topic of religion was raised and among religious actors vis-à-vis their secular counterparts. As illustrations, when the World Council of Churches debated whether to engage with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in a dialogue, their discussion document was entitled, *Lead Us Not Into Temptation*.⁴ Wolfensohn found among the World Bank's governors near unanimous opposition to any formal engagement with religious institutions. These tensions underscore the strong

preconceptions and emotions that many bring to a discussion about religion. They also reflect large knowledge gaps. Few development professionals bring to their work a broad and deep understanding of religious institutions, making it difficult for them to understand the contemporary world's complex and changing religious tapestry.

To advance a meaningful dialogue about the roles of faith in development work, care and professionalism in broaching religious topics are vital, as are setting standards and developing mechanisms to enhance basic 'religious literacy' among international affairs professionals. This task is easier said than done but a first step is to acknowledge how far educational and training approaches have left basic understandings about the world of religions to the side. A counterpart among religious institutions engaged in development work might be termed 'development' or 'economic literacy'. Both are essential to equip those engaged in dialogue and partnerships with something approaching a common vocabulary and understanding.

A second lesson is that the religious dimensions of development work are extraordinarily broad. Quite literally any issue, from HIV and AIDS, to education, energy access and extractive industries, engages religious actors and institutions. Yet these actors rarely form part of the core analysis and policy dialogue. The need for knowledge and research is obvious once the links are highlighted. So is the need to broaden the understanding of who is at the 'policy table'. The religious dimensions are often difficult to measure and attention to refining

monitoring and evaluation is needed. But a first step is to remove the blinkers that, deliberately or inadvertently, obscure the faith dimension.

A third lesson is the importance of religious actors and issues in addressing the challenges for fragile, failing and conflict-ridden states. There is attention to the role of religion in these conflicts and especially to the perils of violent religious extremism, but far less to the potential of religious actors to deliver services and shape attitudes in constructive directions. In the 2014 Ebola crisis, for example, religious leaders and communities should have been engaged far more actively and directly from the start in responding to the epidemic in situations where state institutions are weak and overstretched. Religious roles in education, health and post-conflict reconciliation are often vital.

The fourth important lesson is the need to avoid the perception and reality of what is commonly termed 'instrumentalisation'. This is essentially a desire by some organisations to 'use' faith-inspired actors to achieve ends that are determined and defined by others. This approach can provoke a negative reaction from faith actors who perceive that their roles are viewed in this purely instrumental light with little interest for their particular concerns or challenges. This has various important implications, notable among them that both faith and development actors need to engage with each other at reflection and planning stages of projects, not just the implementation stage and that a focus is needed on developing partnerships that avoid the pitfalls inherent in ill-planned and poorly balanced co-operation arrangements.

Removing the blinkers that have obscured religious dimensions seems a 'no-brainer'. The magnitude and dynamism of religious institutions, their social, political and economic power and above all their importance to so many people and communities, is a powerful argument for taking religious factors far more seriously. The potential of religious actors to contribute to achieving vital global goals of peace, progress and human rights is another. However, taking the next steps towards their full inclusion presents important challenges and deserves careful reflection. The lessons from WFDD are offered in that spirit. The importance of knowledge, professionalism, openness to new understandings, an inclusive approach and a careful focus on fragile and conflict states are among the most important lessons.

From the outset the word dialogue has evoked lively debate. Those who hesitate when confronted with the word dialogue are concerned that it suggests all words and no action, a talk-shop or an endless process without a clear end. We have continued to use the word quite deliberately, to stress the vital importance of communication as a pathway to common action. Dialogue, as opposed to discourse or debate, suggests a balanced exchange and, still more, openness to transformation. Dialogue takes courage and a willingness to seek common ground, as, for example, theologian Hans Kung and his colleagues have embodied in *A Global Ethic*.⁵ It also calls for an honest and forthright discussion of differences as well as creativity in resolving them or in finding ways to co-operate despite them. Religious diversity needs to be seen as a strength

of the human condition. The clear threats of fundamentalist traditions that espouse violence and of traditions that are exclusionary of women or of other communities do need to be confronted. The conviction anchoring this engagement is the recognition that

dialogue and action can lead to better understanding, including a better appreciation for difference, which can provide the foundation that will allow communities to work together to achieve vital global goals.

Endnotes

1. The most recent *The Global Religious Landscape* study from the Pew Forum shows that 84 percent of the world's people are religiously affiliated [<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>].
2. For an example of such an approach to "faith literacy" see K. Marshall, *Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers*, London and New York, Routledge, 2013.
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Supporting Communities for Action

Despite great progress in recognising religious communities as partners in development work, it is an illusion to think that the argument that they should be is won. A lack of trust on both sides remains and serious work is needed to overcome this. Not least because when resources are at a premium there is no alternative to co-ordinated action, but also that the benefits of collaborative work and dialogue go far beyond development, building resources for conflict resolution and countering extremist narratives, writes Ian Linden.

In her short, measured, essay Katherine Marshall describes the state of play between the sub-culture of international development and religion. In a few words she analyses how this relationship could, and should, be so much better and more constructive. A great deal of experience and wisdom is distilled here.

Our experience of her first lesson about “the difficulties of integrating religious dimensions into policy and operational work” reflects the frustration that seems to underlie Marshall’s concern. The mindset that has blinkered the institutions that dominate the development scene, and their frequent unwillingness to take a pragmatic approach to religious groups, only serves to exclude the wider community from development work. Critically, this precludes the important co-ordinated, far-reaching and responsive action that faith communities are perfectly situated to offer governments and that their agencies deliver. If, as she claims, removing “the blinkers that have obscured religious dimensions

[to development] seems a ‘no brainer’”, then why are the blinkers still so painfully slow in coming off?

The developmentalist Denis Goulet memorably used an African description of colonialists, ‘one eyed giants’, to describe the powerful international multilateral agencies and non-governmental development agencies in the 1980s. He was referring to their blinkered view of development that ignored any normative account of the good life, local configurations of the just society and how people should behave towards nature. This plea to take seriously Paulo Freire’s popular participatory methodology coincided with Amartya Sen’s paradigm shift in thinking about development away from economic growth towards the expansion of what he called an individual’s ‘functionings’, capabilities and freedoms.¹

These ideas filtered into the international development world in the simple premise that culture was important. But, of course, this whole

discourse about normative accounts of development and the good life intersected with religion and ethics. Goulet himself was a Catholic and quoted liberally from the French Dominican priest Louis-Joseph Lebret, who wrote a large chunk of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*.²

It was one thing for the great sociologist of modernity, Peter Berger, to call for 'cognitive respect', what is often called 'attentive listening', in dealing with other, non-secular world views; human nature was such that often this respect was not readily forthcoming. It was acceptable to talk about 'culture' in ways that camouflaged the importance of religion inside an anthropological concept that fell within the comfort zone of governments. But informed discussion about the different 'worlds of religion' was another matter. 'Culture' soon became a coded reference to religion.

Marshall's prescriptions for facilitating this discussion, what the groundrules have to be for religious bodies and those meeting them, are extraordinarily helpful. But in this article, in diplomatic fashion, she does not explore a core bone of contention between worldviews about the significance of sexuality and gender in development.

The United Nations Population Fund, as early as 1975, was the first major international body to sit down in dialogue with religious leaders to found the Al-Azhar Centre for Population Studies. I would suspect that they realised that, when it came to these issues, dialogue was essential. They had reached the not-unreasonable conclusion that their

global success would be greatly aided by co-operation rather than trench warfare with religious organisations and followed up on it. It was probably no accident either that the year Sen received his Nobel Prize for Economic Sciences, 1998, another major marker event occurred: the World Faiths Development Dialogue led by World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn and the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. And it was, as she does not say, Marshall who acted as chief midwife to this.

But it would be foolish to imagine that the argument had been won. The uninformed observer might still conclude that GDP is the touchstone of international development. There remains an entrenched reluctance to engage with religious leaders and their communities amongst many secular development practitioners. Since 1998, inside and outside of religious institutions, gender and sexuality have become front lines in 'culture wars' that are as much religious prescriptions as they are embedded cultural practices. One thing that different forms of religious extremism do have in common is the ruthless pursuit of maximum control over women in patriarchal structures and relationships.

Whatever partnership principles are agreed, issues related to gender and sexuality often rule religious actors out in practice as partners for development by secular agencies unwilling to climb down from the moral high ground and to take more pragmatic stances. If the only efficient primary health care centre, clinic or hospital in town is run by people with the 'wrong ideas' about gender and sexuality, should the people

they serve be left to die on the street because they cannot get funding? It is increasingly becoming a live question.

It hardly needs saying that these difficulties have been compounded as the terrain has shifted since 1998. This was also the year of al-Qaeda bombings in Uganda and Kenya. The rise of violent religious extremism has had two contradictory consequences. On one hand, interest in religion has grown apace. This has meant that religious ignorance is no longer a true reflection of all secular institutions. Intelligence agencies do a great deal of 'attentive listening' with corresponding understanding and development practitioners might begin to wonder if they should too. On the other hand, the narrative about religion as a divisive and dangerous force to be quarantined in a private space has gained ground in a more strident and dogmatic, though minority, secularism.

For local governments and religious organisations dealing with the fallout of violent extremism and balancing pressure from both sides of this contradiction, further problems arise from historic relationships. Distrust can arise on the part of governments when organisations have unclear funding sources; they dislike parallel forms of authority and networks independent of the ruling party. Though they are reluctant to draw them 'into the tent', they also do not wish to be upstaged before their electorates when these non-allied religious institutions perform public services better, as they often do. On the part of religious organisations, mistrust arises from resentment at rarely being consulted by governments early in policy formation; and the assumption that relations

with government will result in more clientship relations defeating the spirit of public service.

All of these problems could be resolved by serious dialogue and a realism that recognises that there is no alternative to a co-ordinated health system when resources are at a premium. But the obstacles should not be underestimated. Poverty and corruption greatly limit the capacity of weak states to combat religious extremism. External agencies should be acting as facilitators in removing tensions instead of aggravating them by their funding stance and advice which may often reinforce distrust. Sadly it is in times of crisis, such as the Ebola epidemic, when the need for co-ordinated action with religious leaders and communities becomes most apparent that these disconnections prove to be most harmful.

Our own experience is that when religious leaders reach out to government in co-ordinated action, for example the National Malaria Unit in Sierra Leone, national preventative health campaigns are given a significant boost. Religious networks can spread information, reaching isolated areas government and foreign organisations often cannot. Muslims and Christians training and campaigning together generate understanding that can help build resilience to religious extremism, as well as improving skills in local healthcare provision to combat a range of tropical diseases. The religious idiom of sermon and *khutba* lend themselves to authoritative health messages by the nature of who is conveying them, the language they use and where they are delivered. Such methodologies are replicable, cheap and effective.

Moreover they build up trust and social capital for under-resourced states. As Marshall says, it is a “no-brainer”.

Endnotes

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Islam Versus Secularism: Muslim Democrats and a Third Way

Too often we assume that secularism is a monolith, an oft-imagined separation of church and state, an avoidance of overt religion in public life. But this aspiration was born out of a particular history and place. Today, public expressions of religion around the globe can no longer be contained by Western European-style secularism. But alternatives do exist. The West must take stock of its position and realign its policies to ensure that they reflect the public's religious sentiments, argues Ed Husain.

The secularism project in most parts of Europe, it can be argued by observers, is not about separation of powers, but about minimising the public appeal of religion. Church attendance is declining; rationalist, materialist and modernist interests are supreme; and talk of religion is taboo. French government officials preach the 1871 doctrine of *laïcité*, removing religious instruction from elementary schools. In France and Germany, only one in ten Catholic adults have said they attend religious services on a weekly basis in Pew Research surveys conducted in 2009, 2010 and 2011.¹ The West is now home to populations who no longer understand religion and are therefore intellectually disconnected from the majority of the world.

This lack of understanding and interaction with religion flaws foreign policy formulation. European diplomats are trained to think in compartmentalised terms, separating religion from politics in their interactions with other nations. They approach conflict zones with

materialist analyses, overlooking the powerful appeal of religious narratives in Israel, Palestine, Nigeria, the Caucasus or Pakistan. Domestically, we are troubled by the assertive religious identity of European Muslims, children of immigrants, who do not conform to the quietist surrender of the segments of Western European societies who still attend churches and synagogues.

The French outlawing of *niqabs* or face veils, the Swiss ban on minarets and the German persistence that German Muslims are 'guest workers', immigrants who will go home one day, are the symptoms of a deeper resentment of a rising Islam.² Globally and domestically, hardline secular attitudes are determined to confront religion anew. However, liberal democracy will not win the argument unless it identifies allies amid religious communities. There is a lot to learn about different visions of secularism and its religious partners from recent events and, in particular, the rise of new forces in the Middle East.

In India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, in varying degrees, we have witnessed the rise of Hindu and Buddhist political assertion. In Israel, secularist forms of Zionism are fading as revived Judeo-inspired political ideologies of Zionism become the norm. Across Africa and Latin America, Christianity is increasingly more muscular in public expression. But the real challenge comes from politicised strains within Islam for several reasons. First, Islam's adherents are numerically stronger and geographically widespread. Second, Muslims' historical political experiences of a caliphate have revolved around the merger of the religious and political offices of state. Third, there is widespread acceptance among Muslims that interpretations of sharia should be introduced in some form in state law. Fourth, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is advancing an extreme experiment of a new caliphate with implications for territorial borders. Fifth, 30 million Muslims are Western citizens. Islam is now the second largest religion in the West. Unravelling and addressing this abiding challenge of Islam and secularism in the modern world could not be more urgent.

To do this, we need to better understand the battle of ideas inside global Islam, within and between Sufism, Salafism, Islamism and modernism. The struggle with the modern West is but a spillover of this raging conflict. We make the mistake of focusing excessively on the Sunni-Shia conflict, failing to realise that it is the rise of Salafism within Sunni Islam that explains this revived Sunni-Shia sectarianism. In the Marxist context, Antonio Gramsci described how an organised minority

of aggressive ideologues could control disorganised masses. In the Muslim milieu, it is a small number of extreme Salafis that are on the ascendance. They are advocating a more confrontational, literalist Salafism manifesting itself in anything from reluctance to integrate and promoting more puritanical forms of gender inequality, to intolerance of religious minorities and endorsing terrorism as jihad.

The Salafis have three major advantages over more mainstream, disorganised Muslims. First, extreme Salafis have the perceived advantage of claiming to be truer Muslims because of their literalist adherence to scripture. They are visibly Muslim in their unkempt beards and burkas. The more mystically inclined majority of mainstream Muslims cannot compete on this level of religious ostentation. Second, Salafis are exceptionally well-financed through Gulf *zakat* or charitable sources from businesses and royalty. For several decades, they enjoyed the benevolence of the Saudi state. No other Muslim faction can currently compete with revenues in Salafi coffers accrued through a global web of non-governmental organisations. Third, a variation of Salafism controls universities in Mecca and Medina. There is, therefore, a constant supply of Salafi preachers and proselytisers with shining credentials from Islam's sacred cities.

Local forms of mainstream Islam in Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria or Bangladesh cannot outshine this Arabian, seemingly pristine, wealthy brand of Islam being unleashed from Saudi Arabia. This Salafi ideology and its assorted adherents have been spreading throughout the Muslim

world. It is the most vocal and visible alternative to Western secularism for Muslims. Mistakenly, Arab governments, such as that in Egypt for example, are keen to co-opt Salafis against Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood. That policy provides Egypt's new government with short-term consolidation of power as they imprison Islamists, at the cost of the long-term consequences of radicalising a population by providing public platforms for Salafis.

Ideally, governments, civil society and media personalities should endorse and encourage Sufi forms of mainstream Islam as the public norm, as in Indonesia, Bangladesh or Morocco. This rooted and historical strain of Islam is, however, too mystical, accommodationist and quietist for the zeal of the university activist. In that space, Sufis, who are focused on saints, litanies and spirituality, mostly cannot provide a political outlet for creating a sharia state in the way that politicised Salafis can through their offer of a renewed, invigorated, state-centric Islam.

Despite widespread and horrific atrocities, ISIS, which essentially comprises violent political Salafis, is now able to showcase its abilities in government, providing safety for its citizens, keeping schools open and the job market functioning, generating revenue from taxation and oil sales and expanding its territory. The risk is that Muslims across the world begin to see this as a viable option. An alternative path must be presented.

Arguing for Western secularism in this context, however, is a non-starter. Amongst many Muslims the term

'secularism' connotes atheism and anti-religion. But, for the past four decades, an array of leading Muslim individuals and institutions has been struggling to reconcile the modern world with a Muslim political discourse. Political parties change when realities around them evolve. In 1993 for example, the British Labour Party moved away from a far left commitment to 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' towards the political centre. Islamist political movements are no different. After decades of trying and failing to gain power, the more intelligent and creative Islamists have jettisoned ideology and sought new ways of succeeding at the ballot box.

They have all been on a journey of opposing the West; revolting against their hardline secularist governments; and slowly progressing to a political space that is pluralist rather than 'secular', democratic and broadly conservative. They no longer wish to impose literalist sharia, but wish to see the values of the sharia reflected in government. Known as *maqasid al-sharia*, it is a scripturally sound approach that can compete with Salafism's religious appeal. *Maqasid al-sharia* translates as objectives of the sharia, which are to maintain security in society, intellectual and religious freedom, property rights and family values. Any society that upholds these values is Islamic; by that definition, the modern West is fully Islamic. The proponents of *maqasid* are slowly growing.

These proponents were Islamists two decades ago, but today some are Muslim democrats. Working with them may at times be a frustrating

and expensive venture. To be credible and appealing, Muslim democrats must not only be theologically robust, but must also offer security, prosperity and better opportunities than ISIS and the Salafis. However, aligning with, and emboldening, these new Muslim democrats will be a strategic investment that opens a space for fostering a third way between Salafism and secularism in Muslim-majority countries and, importantly, in the public imagination. The most instructive examples of this intellectual trend are with Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AK Party and with Tunisia's Rashed Ghannouchi and the Ennahda party.

Turkey's Islamists do not refer to themselves as Islamists but as centre-right conservatives. They believe in the free market, are members of NATO and have consistently aspired toward EU membership. They have pioneered a new path that respects a secular polity, but empowers the personally pious to govern without imposing a rigid interpretation of sharia as state law. In the last decade, per capita income has gone from \$2,000 to over \$10,000.³ Turkey is far from perfect and there remain challenges around Kurdish rights and press freedoms, but it is far better to be incentivising Turkish Muslim democrats to improve on these contentions, than to be building alliances with Salafi forces in Saudi Arabia or Egypt.

Similarly, after free and fair elections, Tunisia's Ennahda party have given way to the victors. Ghannouchi openly talks about both mosques and bars being open and about leaving people to choose freely. While Ghannouchi and others have avowedly rejected French

secularism, which seems more anti-religious than neutral on questions of religion in the public domain, he is on the record for endorsing British and American accommodation of religion as a possible model for Muslim democrats.⁴

These transformations do not happen in a vacuum. Tunisian and Turkish Muslim democrats have been in public and private discussions for two decades. Together, if the political conditions and incentives are put in place, these same organisations can assist in shifting the narrative of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and elsewhere.

If these Muslim democrats are supported and their success amplified, then we can envisage Salafi leaders shifting in this direction. Sheikh Salman al-Audah, a major Saudi Salafi leader not affiliated with the government, has already endorsed Ghannouchi. Ideas travel between geographies and individuals. If Muslim democrats are able to illustrate practical success in government and wider acceptance by the West, this process can be hastened. Greater and deeper Western support for Turkey's membership of the European Union, for example, would be a powerful way of illustrating European support for Muslim democrats.

After decades of struggle between Salafism and secularism, a new prototype of modern Muslim democracy has emerged in two important Muslim-majority countries. If we understand the significance of this historical moment, the potential to spread this model to other countries is

real. ISIS distracts us, but our attention should be on the reconciliation between religion, secularism and the public space underway in Turkey

and Tunisia. If this goes well, then Muslim citizens in the West will draw inspiration from Muslim democrats, not Salafists and Islamists.

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Dealing with Violent Extremism: Mainstreaming Understanding of Religion

A pervasive lack of knowledge and understanding about the role of religion in the modern world is increasingly putting Western policy makers at a disadvantage in a world dominated by religious narratives. A clear choice lies ahead. Mainstream this understanding in order to convene the consensus and strategy needed to prevent and counter violent religious extremism, or repeatedly face groups such as ISIS and its possible successors and the huge financial burden of militarily defeating them, write Matthew Lawrence and William Neal.

In August 2013 John Kerry, US Secretary of State, made what many may still see as an extraordinary statement, given his broad and complex agenda. "If I went back to college today," he said, "I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that's how integrated [religion] is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today."¹ This admission is testimony to a growing realisation among Western policy makers of the importance of understanding religion to properly address policy. It also attests to the long term, and in many cases wilful, disregard of the religious dimensions of international affairs by many in the West.

Religion is shaping the narrative of current geopolitics and will continue to do so. As such, this disregard amounts to a gap in knowledge and understanding that puts many Western policy makers at a disadvantage. If they are to collaborate with their global peers to formulate long-term strategies that lead to a successful

global future, then there is a pressing need for the development of a deeper understanding of and engagement with religious ideologies, motivations, perspectives and actors.

In the latter part of modern history the Western world largely removed religion, faith and beliefs from the public square. Whether or not this is a good or bad thing for those societies, it has had the consequence of leading to a significant lack of understanding about religion. This would perhaps be sustainable if this new 'secular' or 'rational' age meant there was no place for religion to publicly play a role in societies around the world. However, Western secularisation has not been a global phenomenon.

As Ed Husain discusses, merely transferring Western secularism into many of these situations is a 'non-starter'; models such as French laïcité, British laissez-faire or American separation, even where considered, have often been rejected. The social and political lives of many of the

world's fastest growing countries and geopolitically important regions continue to be dominated by religious narratives and agendas. As a result, Western diplomats and politicians have at times struggled to deal with major current world events and their foreign and domestic policy challenges. The rise of religiously motivated extremist violence requires this to change.

Writing on the battle against international terrorism, Madeleine Albright states that, "[t]he military has a role in this struggle, but the decisive battlefield will be one of ideas."² The solution for Western policy makers is not, necessarily, to weave the values of faith back into the texture of their own societies. Rather, to properly confront religiously motivated terrorism and extremism we need to ensure that political and civil society leaders are increasingly conversant in the ideas at play and able to collaborate with faith communities in advancing narratives and policies to counter them.

There is a growing international recognition that we need a comprehensive strategy to counter religious extremism, beyond immediate security measures. Initiatives such as the establishment this year of the new Global Community Engagement and Resilient Fund are positive steps towards this. But, if this broad consensus over strategy is going to be turned into concrete action, it is imperative that foreign and domestic policy makers have the knowledge, analysis and skills to negotiate and engage the complex religious landscape of the 21st century.

Those who wish to divide communities along sectarian lines have a head

start in this battle of ideas. They are experts in using religious justifications for their actions, to promote their concerns and to enlist and galvanise their recruits. Their strategies often differ greatly from economic driven Western development agendas, but they are consistent over years and decades, transcending democratic election cycles. We will only defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or its successor, or its successor's successor, if we understand and respond to its use of religious justification and symbolism and collaborate with religious and civil society sectors that are best positioned to engage communities at risk of violent radicalisation. It will be necessary to show the same long-term resilience: planning strategically and with cross-political consensus; countering not just militarily but ideologically; and providing the informed, long-term practical support necessary to help prevent religious prejudice and extremism.

Furthermore, this battle of ideas needs to take place in all societies. Divisive narratives of religiously motivated prejudice and hatred do not respect Westphalian concepts of nation states, a process accelerated by technology and social media. Secularism has perhaps too easily become the denial of religion and its role in society. Western societies may have largely removed religious discourse from the public sphere, but they cannot afford to disregard their increasingly globalised and diverse, often religiously diverse, communities. Societies must allow religion to flourish alongside the civic state if we are to avoid isolating communities and aggravating the cycle of grievance that, ultimately, can lead to violence. Religious leaders

need to be engaged as part of the solution and the benefits that religious communities bring should be affirmed and encouraged.

To equip our decision makers to act, we need to engage academia more fully with the world of policy. We need to encourage insightful and thought-leading research, making policy resources and data available for the pragmatic study of, and research into, complex situations. This should not only improve governments' understanding of the ways in which religion is influencing the modern world now and how it will in the future, but also analyse and map possible policy pathways. In particular, understanding how the impact of policy decisions involving social action, education and community engagement can make a difference in countering religious extremism is still at a very inchoate stage and its development needs to be encouraged.

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation has attempted to map and develop these policy pathways across our programmes, in delivering training and resources, supporting academic enquiry and research and engaging with religious actors on social action and conflict prevention. At the heart of them all, lies the fundamental need for those making, informing and enacting crucial decisions, now

and in the future, to have the skills and knowledge to understand where religion is at play, to what end, and to have the capability to engage with religious leaders and groups. This will empower policy makers, journalists, business leaders and other key groups to better assess and deal with domestic and global challenges to bring about successful and lasting solutions. These skills will be crucial to confronting the threats and diminishing the power of extremist narratives wherever they arise; to helping countries from the Balkans to South East Asia continue to evolve and build successful post-conflict societies; and to working with some of the world's fastest growing and largest countries, including Nigeria, Indonesia and India.

Clearly a more sophisticated understanding of the complex role religion plays in contemporary global affairs will not in itself solve all the problems the world faces in the short term. But in the long term an approach that embeds a more informed scrutiny of the religious dimension will contribute to improved public policy making. Given the huge amounts of capital put into military engagement with the problem of religious extremism, informed engagement with the battle of ideas, the critical arena for religious conflict, is an area surely worthy of more investment of time and resources.

Endnotes

1. J.F. Kerry, 'Remarks at the Launch of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives', 7 August 2013, [<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/08/212781.htm>].

2. M. Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, New York, Pan Macmillan, 2007, Preface.

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