

Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking

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Chapter I

Alternative Global Futures In The Balance

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An unprecedented level of paradoxical religious movement characterizes the contemporary era. On the one hand, there is a greater number of people than ever before who are expressing either a secular perspective on life or a view of their own religion that is completely independent of traditional religious authority, dogma and law. In fact, there is more and more experimentation in some quarters on the basic meaning systems of traditional religion. This is particularly due to the unprecedented level of involvement of women in public religious life, but primarily due to the interesting interaction of the liberal state and free religious inquiry and experimentation. Furthermore, the unprecedented mixture of people of all faiths in many parts of the globe, but especially in large cosmopolitan centers, has also given birth to great creativity in religious life.

At the same time we are witnessing an unparalleled invigoration of extreme enthusiasm for old patterns of belief and practice on the part of many others. Whereas the former depends on the liberal state, the latter is often expressed in active opposition to state authorities, secular authorities, and the basic institutions of global secular culture.

This has set many religious people on a collision course with the rest of society, and in some cases, is creating serious levels of destructive conflict and violence. On the other hand, this religious revivalism is shaking up complacent cultural institutions of the modern state, and it is

forcing most people to rethink their moral and political assumptions as citizens of their state, as well as citizens of global society.

This extraordinary level of religious activity takes place in the post-Cold war era. The post-Cold War era is also characterized by two countervailing trends. One trend is unprecedented economic integration and cultural homogenization, especially at the hands of materialist culture associated with the Western forms of investment, media, advertising and entertainment. But the other trend is unprecedented cultural/religious fractionalization. People the world over are rebelling against this materialist homogenization, searching out the roots of their identity, exploring the uniqueness of their background and its original systems of meaning.

The pattern of intense integration, referred to above, is also felt in the liberal religious sphere in terms of multi-faith communication and cooperation that has never seen its equal in human history. This too is transforming modern life and creating a common global culture. Thus, while the fractionating character of religious revivalism is more noticeable, and sometimes more violent, there is a quiet revolution of integration taking place as well.

It is not an age of a new world order, but an age of great social, cultural and psychological uncertainty in the context of an overwhelming and almost overpowering economic integration of the world. It is in eras of great uncertainty that we see some human beings gravitate to traditional religious systems in search of stability and identity. But how this search is undertaken, and how it integrates or dis-integrates with the world at large, depends very much on the socio-economic, psychological and political situation of the individual and the individual group.

The most important implication of this is that we see very different possible futures emerging from the human interaction with traditional religion at this point in time. There are patterns at work that indicate that religion is one of the most salient phenomena that will cause

massive violence in the next century. But there are other indicators from our current experience that suggest that religion will play a critical role in constructing a global community of shared moral commitments and vision. Religion's visionary capacity and its inculcation of altruistic values has already given birth to extraordinary leaders, such as Gandhi, King, the Dalai Lama, Bishop Tutu, who, in turn, have had a dramatic effect on pushing the global community toward ever greater commitments to human rights and compassion for human and non-human life, regardless of race or citizenship.[\[i\]](#)^[1] In other words, religion has helped set the stage for a fully functioning global moral community that may take a very long time to fully materialize, but that is unquestionably closer to fruition than a century ago. There have always been exclusive religious visions of a peaceful world. Never before in history, however, have so many leaders and adherents been inspired to work for a truly inclusive vision that is multi-cultural and multi-religious.

The contraindications to this trend are painfully apparent in the murders and tortures, and the religiously donated financial support for brutal regimes, that have been abundant in recent history. At the same time there is an unmistakable level of global commitment to shared values that is being upheld and defended every day by literally hundreds of government and non-government agencies globally who adhere to and legally uphold the international agreements of the United Nations. There is no doubt that, difficult as it is to imagine, the brutal abuses in places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Tibet, and Burma, would be even worse than they have been if it were not for this global consensus. Admittedly, the latter still lacks the teeth of enforcement, and we stand deeply frustrated at the tragic failures. But from the long view of history, there is a remarkable shift toward moral consensus. Religious leaders, visionaries and activists played no small role in this, especially since World War II.

As with all scientific predictions in the post-modern era, we now have to acknowledge that what we say and do, and how we decide to respond to these trends, is a fundamental part of

the formation of the future. There is not an objective account of the future, but patterns of the present that we, by virtue of our reaction to them, steer in one direction or another. If, for example, we as a culture act as if religious violence will simply disappear on its own, perhaps believing that good jobs will solve all social unrest, then the future of religion will be set on one course. If, however, we see the problem of religion and conflict in all its complexity, as something that is a permanent fixture of modern life until it is addressed in a new way, then it is likely that religious history will move in another direction. How we see reality determines the future of that reality.

It is the argument of this book that religions have always interacted in highly dynamic and complex ways with the world around them. If, then, the traditional forms of analysis of religions and of social conflict insist that religions must continue to do violence to democratic culture and to the pursuit of a peaceful, civil society, then that is what the scholars will find, and what some theologians will create. If, however, the world of thoughtful people is open to the infinite hermeneutic variability of religious traditions, one may discover, in the most surprising places of the religious world, the basis for a future that allows for coexistence between religious and secular people globally, and even a shared vision of civil society. [\[ii\]](#) [2]

Another way to look at the alternative futures is to look at these two countervailing trends as expressions of two human needs. [\[iii\]](#) [3] One is the human need for integration. This need to merge with the larger world has always motivated human beings to search out new parts of the world around them, to meet new people, and to look for underlying causes and origins of things that give an overarching unity to existence. Certainly numerous religious mythologies, as well as scientific enterprises, typify this human need. Both mystical and scientific drives to account for or merge in one's mind with the whole universe is typical of this need. For example, the mystic meditates on the ends of the universe, while the physicist works hard on sub-atomic formulas that should in principle apply to the ends of the galaxy as much as they apply to his backyard.

On the other hand, there is a clear human need for uniqueness, for being different from others. This expresses itself through the infinite ways in which human beings make themselves different, from dress and odd habits to various formal expressions of allegiance to some small, special group. The latter, paradoxically, often involves a complete submergence of the individual character into the larger whole of the subgroup. But the price for many of us is worth it, because joining a group paradoxically fulfills our need for some distinctive identity and meaning system in the context of the mass of humanity and the indifferent character of the universe. The same universe that captivates the mind and heart of the mystic and physicist is also so overwhelming in its physical and chronological magnitude as to make individuated human life feel meaningless. Unless human beings discover a meaning system that makes them unique and important, they feel the weight of an indifferent universe that has no interest in their past, present, and future, in neither their lives nor their deaths.

What happens often, and what is the central problem of religious militancy and violence (and, I would argue, many other forms of cultural and political totalitarianism), is the confusion or melding of these two human needs. Instead of developing a psychological and moral self capable of dealing with these two needs--the need for integration and the need for uniqueness--and balancing them with the help of one's will, many people are tempted to do something much more violent. They create or submit to structures that both give their own subgroup a strong sense of uniqueness and then couple that with the need for integration with the world. But they do not integrate by visiting the world nonviolently, but rather by making it in one's own image, by consuming all of it, or developing fantasies of doing this. This becomes an insatiable drive of conquest in the hands of many ideological systems, including religious systems.

There are many unmet human needs that are active elements in causing religious conflict, including basic issues of material resources, issues of psychological trauma, issues of humiliation and shame, needs of empowerment that go unmet, to name a few; we will address these varied

needs and their complex interaction. But it is the need to integrate that is at war with the need to be unique that seems to be among the most fundamental causes of conflict at the level of basic identity. [\[iv\]](#) [4] Furthermore, it seems to be the case that those religious people who discover a balance between the two needs stated above, the need for integration or merging and the need for distinctive identity, are the ones who seem to negotiate their religiosity in the most peaceful way.

The ability to have a clear sense of one's uniqueness that combines with a willingness to explore and visit other worlds of meaning, without destroying them, is a central ingredient in religiosity that is oriented to peacemaking and conflict resolution. In a lecture that I delivered in Belfast I introduced to the Catholic/Protestant audience the Biblical idea of *ger*, the stranger, who is both different than the majority group addressed by Biblical law, but also a person who must be included at Jewish celebrations, cared for, and even loved. He is the quintessential outsider, who is also a litmus test of the ethical conduct of the majority group. [\[v\]](#) [5] In fact, it is the loving care of strangers that is stated by the Bible as the essential lesson of Jewish enslavement in Egypt. The Exodus and its accompanying freedom are meant to give the Jewish people the opportunity to treat outsiders in a fundamentally new way than they were treated in other societies. Furthermore, and equally important, the religious law is meant to counteract the natural tendency of an abused group to pass that abuse onto others.

In a move of exquisitely brilliant irony, this special care for the outsider is supposed to take place every time that the religious group gathers for its most special and unique times of identity, the holiday cycle. Thus, the need for distinctive identity and for celebration in one's own land must not overshadow the requirement of respecting the boundaries of others, and the latter's need for those boundaries in order to maintain their own identity. The *ger* is a part of one's moral universe, but is not consumed by one's universe. The *ger* is included but not overwhelmed, loved but not consumed. Thus, there is integration and uniqueness, sameness and difference, which coexist in a creative set of moral and ritual practices and obligations.

I was amazed that this Belfast crowd was so receptive to this model of inter-religious interaction, many of them expressing such profound gratitude to me. My prejudices, based on my own history of injuries, led me to expect that a Christian audience would not accept what I presented as a *ger* theology that celebrates particularity and boundaries. I was expressing a not so subtle critique of universalist religious systems that assume everyone must be under one banner. It would seem, however, that both groups in Belfast feel vulnerable, excluded, and, at the same time, keen to maintain the borders of their own identities. Yet as Christians they cannot help but long for integration and love between all human beings, especially fellow brothers and sisters in Christ; they know this is missing from the Irish context, and it causes pain and shame. The *ger* law and metaphor gave them a profound but simple way to embrace the deepest prosocial values of Christianity, most notably love or *agape*, without this devolving into a destruction of their respective group's unique identity.

The *ger* concept moves well beyond a legal category of obligation to be a metaphor of the human condition. It reifies the human situation of simultaneous sameness and difference, of the need for integration, love and acceptance, but also the need to have boundaries of the separated self or group.

This is a central theme of the book, and I will return to it often as a possible solution to seemingly intractable religious militancy. It also may address some fundamental questions of human community in the modern world, and how we negotiate integration, dis-integration, and the building of community despite our deep differences.

The concrete plan of the book is to explore the question of how we can understand the relationship between the violent actions of people motivated by religious zeal, but also explore the ways in which world religions have contributed to peacemaking. It is the argument of this book that organized religions can, with the aid of a series of interventions, become a major asset

in the construction of a global civilization that manages to limit conflict to its nonviolent, constructive variety.

There are a series of reasons why the relationship between religion, conflict and peacemaking has been misunderstood until now. It is partly due to mistakes of students of religion, and partially related to mistakes on the part of students of human conflict. Mostly it is due to the unusually complicated set of influences on religious belief and practice that make predicting and understanding religious behavior very difficult; this sends most analysts running for cover. Furthermore, there has been a natural tendency of religiously motivated actors to distrust theoreticians and practitioners of conflict resolution, and vice versa.

But we cannot run away from this problem, because it is plainly apparent that the standard mechanisms of conflict management that have been developed by global civic institutions, as well as those of the modern state, are failing to adequately address the needs and problems of religious militants. Until they do, we face the possibility of a very large section of humanity becoming increasing alienated from the entire experiment with the modern state, as well as from the modern international system of cooperation on the basic civic issues of health, human rights, social justice, and basic freedoms.

Part II of the book outlines the need for and the parameters of a new field of study on religion and peacemaking, examining the challenges and complexity of mastering so large a phenomenon.

Part III examines what has prevented the students of conflict from understanding religious conflict, and why religious studies scholars have tended to overlook the pro-social elements of religion that would be critical to constructing conflict resolution and peacemaking ethics in each tradition. I also analyze two historical models of conservative religious philosophies, how they could form the basis for peacemaking, and what are their limitations. It is the conservative

expression of most religious traditions that presents the deepest challenge in terms of peace and conflict, and thus I direct my energies to exploring how one constructs conservative paradigms that are nevertheless committed to peacemaking on a deep level. In particular, the challenge is always to move beyond the righteous rhetoric of peace, and explore the pro-social basis and the anti-social problems of a religious paradigm, as these would interact with contemporary constructs of the liberal state, or the global community.

Part IV is dedicated to paradigms in the present of confronting deep social crises involving religious people, and utilizing indigenous religions and cultures to heal those conflicts. At the same time, it is an investigation of how to integrate the best available techniques of analyzing and resolving conflicts with a deeper understanding and utilization of religious resources in the various world religions. This is a complicated task that involves an engagement with the field of conflict analysis as well as an in-depth look at religious systems of meaning and ethics. This section is mainly meant as a paradigm for further work in all the world's religious traditions, and a challenge to the various schools of conflict resolution to adjust their insights and practices to the world of religious human beings. It also involves a deliberate process of synthetic construction of religious institutions, myths and values, which will be specifically geared to the art of conflict resolution in the modern context.

Chapter IV, in particular, engages in a constructive analysis of Judaism, providing a paradigm of how one can honestly investigate the anti-social and pro-social elements of a tradition, or the conflict resolving and conflict generating elements of a tradition, and utilize this analysis to hermeneutically construct a conflict resolution philosophy and practice. The aim is to produce a practice of peacemaking that could appeal to even the most militant of religious revivalists in the present period.

This is by no means a final model of peacemaking but an evolving set of explorations, nor do I ever recommend applying these models blindly and haphazardly to the field. It is a paradigm

of what we may be able to encourage and engender in future relations among and between religious and secular members of a given society or culture. I do not want to pre-empt or underestimate the importance of models of peacemaking being developed indigenously by the parties to a conflict. It is also meant to demonstrate at a very basic level just how far policy makers, diplomats, and peace activists need to move from their present rigid paradigms of peacemaking. If they want to truly engage the worlds of religious people as authentic partners in constructing the future of civilization they must fundamentally reconstruct their present interventions in conflicts.

This analysis is directed to a wide range of actors, including policy makers, diplomats, conflict resolution theoreticians and activists, theologians concerned with building practical paradigms of ethics for their fellow believers, and scholars of religion who would like to analyze religious institutions through the prism of conflict theory. In particular, I focus on the fascinating confluence of religious meaning systems, rituals, laws and myths that can only be understood in their relationship to peace and conflict through the prism of psychodynamic approaches to conflict. The relationship between personal and collective trauma, for example, and religious story, myth and practice, is critical to understanding the compelling nature of religious violence, but also to understanding the indigenous ways to heal those injuries and curtail that violence.

This brings me to the title of the book, and the importance of violence to sacred stories. Eden and Armageddon are terms that emanate from Western religions, and, while Eastern religions receive a decent amount of attention, the book is heavily weighted toward Western religions. This is in part due to the stage of my research at the present time, but it is also due to the overwhelming sources of religious violence in world history that emanate out of Western religions or the Abrahamic monotheistic faiths. [\[vi\]](#) [6]

Eden refers to the Garden of Eden, an idyllic original place of birth of the human male and female, recorded in the beginning of Genesis. Mythically, Eden was a place of limitless

vegetarian food, no toil, no suffering, no death, simple natural beauty, perfect weather, and no need for any clothing, as there was only one man and one woman. But there was one simple condition, namely, that just one tree of the garden would not be consumed. The Eden story is very much about the tragedy of the human inability to accept limitation, boundaries, and the need to consume everything.

As I said earlier regarding the Biblical concept of *ger*, a basic motif of this story involves the question of the need to merge with all and thus consume everything, versus the ability to make space for the “other” in the world. There are many other themes that underlie this timeless myth, but it is clear that the inability to set boundaries, the failure to recognize a separate space for that which one cannot have, is a central theme. Eden is lost because of this inability, when the snake entices Eve, who entices Adam, to eat from the one forbidden tree. Then they are expelled.

While Eden is a mythical, supernatural place, it has always excited the religious dreams of devotees of the Bible, and it has stimulated the belief that Earth can be a more blessed place than it is currently. It is the protean place of mythic home and imagined homecoming. Thus, as we think of how religion can contribute to or thwart our attempts to make the earth and the global community of humankind better than it has been, especially in the twentieth century, I thought it appropriate to place Eden as one of the polar antipodes of the religious contribution to the future. This is especially the case because the ideal of Eden entailed the ability to exult in an integrated environment of ultimate beauty, spiritual fulfillment and deep meaning for the individual. But it also expresses a perpetual warning against the excesses of the human need to merge with the whole, to consume everything, and thus destroy the beauty that one has been given.

Armageddon refers to a place of final, cosmic battle between good and evil, between those who follow God and those who are less than human, “the beast”, who will be utterly destroyed in the most horrible ways imaginable. It too is a place that is dreamt of with great

imagination, but imagination that is by definition sadistic. This is a vision of extreme violence, whose roots are found in the New Testament book, Revelations, chapter 16. This, however, is part of a much larger history of predictions of terrible cosmic battles that permeate Middle Eastern religious traditions, including the “Day of the Lord” prophecies that are to be find in the Hebrew Biblical prophets. [\[vii\]](#)^[7] All of these apocalyptic visions utilize human imagination to fantasize about the most horrific forms of retribution imaginable. All three monotheisms contain apocalyptic visions that generally involve horrific retribution against those who are “enemies of the Lord”, or “enemies of God’s people” or “infidels”, with a parallel vision of the salvation of the few who are true to the one God, whichever name that God goes by.

There are some important themes of the apocalyptic myths that include the uncanny level of violence, but also critical references to the deep injuries of those who have suffered for God, and the way in which this final act of violence is retribution for that injury. [\[viii\]](#)^[8] This is an important clue to why and when Western religions, in particular, turn to solutions of extreme violence in order to resolve the problems and tragedies of life. That is why we will pay special attention to collective injuries of religious people, and how religious institutions both offer comfort for those injuries but also magnify their reality, and perpetuate their damaging effects, fixing the injury as a permanent feature of life. This is what makes processes of reconciliation so hard in religious cultures. It is the natural resistance to reconciliation by those who have experienced terrible injury, unrecoverable personal loss, and humiliation, but coupled with religious rituals that turn this reaction into a permanent fixture of the cosmos, the way the world must be until some great act of revenge is perpetrated.

As will be shown, world religions have a reservoir of pro-social values of profound subtlety and effectiveness that, if utilized well, could form the basis of an alternative to violence in coping with conflict or coping with devastating injury. But this will take a conscious process on the part of peacemakers, theologians and average people, who interpretively engage the world

of religious institutions with an eye to creating a nonviolent future. In particular, it will involve an effort to dismiss no group, give up on no subculture, as we attempt to build a peaceful future. That is not to say that one cannot condemn certain acts, and achieve important consensus on delegitimizing various forms of destructive conflict. But it does mean that, in principal, we develop the courage and the skill to engage all religious communities in the belief that no community is incapable of pro-social practices and peaceful paths to future dreams. In particular, it will involve the ability to share space with secular communities, and envision a future of coexistence with them, even if a religious person's ultimate, private dreams include a hope that such communities find "the truth" of one particular religious vision.

There is an infinite set of possibilities associated with religious institutions and their behavior in terms of peace and violence. I never cease to be amazed by how the seemingly most violent religious institutions or texts in history give way over time to the most exalted set of values and moral practices. At the same time, the most pacifist foundations of a tradition can be turned toward the service of the most barbaric aims as history proceeds. It all seems to depend on the complex way in which the psychological and sociological circumstances, and the economic and cultural constructs of a particular group, interact with a ceaseless human drive to hermeneutically develop religious meaning systems, texts, rituals, symbols, and laws.

This is a deeply dynamic process, no matter how rigid religious institutions may appear to the unskilled eye, or to the unsympathetic or fearful critic. This means that what we do, how we all address this vital issue in the coming years will directly affect the course of this great interpretive enterprise. We must find the way to engage this period of religious history with intelligence, with skill, with compassion, and with an eye to creating a more peaceful twenty-first century in which religion is integrally involved in creating the good global community.

To believe that we can create a perfect global community, given the serious divisions of religion, and exclusive claims to truth, is somewhat naïve. But the evidence of history and the

hermeneutics of religious traditions strongly indicates that we have, over time, done both better and worse at this task, and that, with the development of better skills and deeper understanding, we do have the capacity to move the world community in a far better direction, in terms of peace and conflict resolution for religious communities, than has been attempted until now.

Two points should be emphasized about the structure and thrust of the book before proceeding.

There is an overall argument that I make in this book about world religions, violence and peacemaking. On the other hand, the case studies are a. not exhaustive, and b. heavily focused on Judaism and the Abrahamic faiths. Each religion is unique in terms of its approach to peace and conflict, and, as I will show, has multiple voices within the tradition as well. At the same time, there are lessons to be learned that cut across religions, both East and West. It is true, for example, that Judaism is heavily focused on this-worldly ethical concerns, whereas much of Buddhist discipline is geared toward the inner life, and the attainment of *nirvana*. At the same time, elements of Judaism have always been distinctly other-worldly, and there are central aspects of Buddhism that are distinctly practical and political. No major religion with millions of adherents and that is thousands of years old has not had broad experience with ethics, politics and the psychology of war, peace, and interpersonal relations. Thus, all of them have lessons to both learn and teach each other. Therefore, although this volume's case studies have a certain emphasis, I hope that they will be instructive by way of contrast and comparison for numerous religious traditions which we will investigate in other studies.

The second point is that my emphasis in this volume tends to be on the more conservative, strident--fundamentalist if you will--expressions of modern religion. The reason for this is that these expressions generally have been the ones to evoke the most conflict and violence in the modern world. My recommendations of how these expressions of religion can be engaged in a more productive way, and ways in which civil society can proceed in better

relationship with them, in no way implies a disparagement of the liberal or modern expression of these same religions, the latter being far more ready to engage in a peaceful coexistence with modern states and cultures. It is true, however, that I call upon liberal streams of secular and religious cultures to rethink the dichotomy between themselves and these religious enthusiasts. There is a need, both for the interpreters of traditional religion, as well as for the interpreters and proponents of liberal secular or religious culture, to confront the othering and demonizing of their counterparts or adversaries. This has been painfully apparent, for example, in Jewish Israel as a major component of their culture wars and the corresponding or derivative lack of Jewish consensus on transforming the relationship with Palestinians. Thus, progressive and liberal wings of a society, sometimes especially the so-called “peace camp”, can be rather destructive in their indulging their own sets of fears and hatreds. This only makes religiously sanctioned violence even more extreme.

There is a need to work on all sides to construct hermeneutics of religious traditions, as well as hermeneutics of modern culture and the modern state, that work together to prevent a descent into the kind of religious warfare that plagued the Middle Ages, the last time that religion came to dominate the lives and psychologies of millions of monotheists. There will also be a need to plumb the depths of human psychology in these matters of conflict and deep injury, understand the nature and complexity of human conflict, and apply this learning in new and constructive ways to religious adversaries and the conflicts in which they are engaged. Let us now begin the exploration.

[ix][1] Less well known globally, but equally revolutionary in their context, are people such as Badshah Khan, the nonviolent Islamic leader of the Pathans, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, of U.S. civil rights era fame, Dorothy Day, and many others.

[\[xi\]](#)^[2] Rorty is right that rigidified notions of Truth, Right, Science, or God, always get us in trouble when we expect them to solve our problems. He is also right to embrace a Deweyan hope in the future that leaves the future an open possibility that is based on human thought and action, not absolute categories. But he misunderstands that, in the history of human thinking and believing, it is also the case that “absolutes”, such as Truth, God, or religious myth and ritual, are made dynamic by the endless hermeneutic drive of human beings, and therein lies hope as well. Hope does not have to be only in a humanistic embrace, but also in the power of human beings to constantly reinterpret the absolutes that they live by. This makes many futures possible even for religious people, with all the peril and promise that accompanies the uncertainty of hermeneutic engagement with ancient values and texts. See Richard Rorty, “Method, Social Science and Social Hope,” in *The Postmodern Turn*, ed. Steven Seidman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46-64.

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[\[xv\]](#)^[6] In general, there was an obvious need to be interdisciplinary in this work. This necessarily required a degree of imprecision in each religious tradition, and many generalizations that would rankle the experts. My purpose is not to be the last word on this subject, but rather to stimulate further research and better recommendations that will be finely honed to individual religious traditions. However, as we will note, all recommendations have to include methods of inter-religious conflict resolution as well, methods that assume divergent traditions adhered to by different combatants. In other words, comparative work is inescapable, with all of its inaccuracies.

[\[xv\]](#)^[7] See Amos 5:20; Joel 1-3; Zephaniah 1:7-2:2; Zachariah 14; Malachi 3.

[\[xvi\]](#)^[8] See, for example, Revelations 16:6, where the theme of blood is central. The blood of the prophets and the innocent will be paid for by rivers of the blood of the “wicked”, whoever this may be. Of course, this is what is so dangerous about violent literature: who decides in every generation who the “wicked” are, and are there any controls on this fantasy of bloody revenge? Rivers of blood tend to have no limit in history, and always sweep up in their furious currents the innocent together with the guilty. The Crusades are perhaps the most poignant example of this in religious history. But it is only a lack of historical records that makes us overlook parallel events in other places and cultures.

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