

# RELIGION AND PEACEMAKING

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The subject of religion in political conflict is vast, and it is not possible to do justice to it in these few pages. Fortunately, scholars, political analysts and policy-makers can refer to two extraordinary new studies, Marc Gopin's, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, [\[1\]](#) and R. Scott Appleby's *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, [\[2\]](#) for comprehensive treatments of both the destructive and constructive roles religion can play in the lives of ordinary people and nations. [\[3\]](#) Rather, this chapter will focus on the complicated but discrete intersection of religion and mass psychology, and the way sacred beliefs can be used to intensify violence and warfare or mitigate against violence and serve the cause of reconciliation and peace between groups and nations in conflict.

In proposing his concept of "the ambivalence of the sacred," Appleby makes a critical contribution to the understanding of the way religion reinforces the human psychological construct, where we are all capable of love and creativity but also hatred and destructiveness. He cites the work of German theologian and philosopher Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) who described the concept of "the holy" as exclusive to the sphere of religion, indeed, the sine qua non of religion. Yet "the holy" or "the sacred," the terms can be used interchangeably, is neither "good" nor "evil" per se. It is the fundamental essence of reality. Its power is undifferentiated. It can create and it can destroy. Quoting Otto, the sacred, "...may burst in sudden eruption, up from the depths of the soul with spasms or convulsions, or lead to...intoxicated frenzy, to transport and to ecstasy. It has wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering." [\[4\]](#) As humankind evolved, we began to substitute salvation religions for the more primordial magical rituals to appease a frightening,

willful and destructive God-power. People came to identify the sacred with the enhancement of life as well as a threat. Thus religion emerged as a dichotomy. “The devout,” according to Appleby, “spoke of God as alternatively wrathful and merciful, vengeful and forgiving.” [\[5\]](#)

The great world religions vary widely in their substantive differences, but as Appleby says, “one can trace a moral trajectory challenging adherents to greater acts of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The competing voices of revenge and retaliation that continue to claim the status of authentic religious expression are gradually rendered as ‘demonic.’” [\[6\]](#) This sets the stage for the examination of secular, psychological man, especially in the wake of humanity’s most murderous century to see how it might be possible to have a parallel trajectory of life-enhancing ascendancy over the demonic in the affairs of nations, with, perhaps, important help from religion.

## **Psychological Man**

It starts with the reality that while humankind is one species, we act as though we are divided into endless species. This is the phenomenon of “pseudospeciation” defined by Erik Erikson, one of the greatest of the twentieth century’s psychologists and students of the individual in society. We appear on the scene divided into identity groups whether tribes or nations, religious or linguistic groups, castes, classes and even ideological groups. These groups “provide their members with a firm sense of distinct and superior identity—and immortality. This demands, however, that each group must invent for itself a place and a moment in the very center of the universe

where and when an especially provident diety caused it to be created superior to all others, the mere mortals.” [\[7\]](#) In simpler terms, the world is divided between us and everyone else. “We” are superior—we need to believe this to feel safe—and other tribes and nations are inferior and real or potential enemies.

There is a complimentary analytical perspective in the physiology of psychological development. Psychiatrist Charles Pinderhughes has studied what he has called “the drive to dichotomize” in human beings, defined as seeing others as safe or dangerous, good or bad. He believes that even young animals and birds are physiologically imprinted or “wired” in their brain’s limbic system to distinguish between threatening or safe “other” birds and animals. In the case of forms of life below primates, this phenomenon could be called an autonomous survival mechanism. [\[8\]](#)

The development of the human brain and mind is infinitely more complex. The baby learns to divide the world into aspects that are comforting and those that are frightening. A good mother or mother surrogate helps the child to overcome the negative feelings associated with hunger and pain, loneliness and vulnerability. But frustrations are inevitable and as the child develops, its capacity for anger and hostility grows. Another developmental psychiatrist, John Mack, has written that:

In the representational phase [of psychological development] the dichotomization of experience becomes elaborated through language into familiar paired opposites, such as tall and short, strong and weak, good and evil, dark and light... Thus notions of good and evil, me and not me, self and other, our people and them, God and the Devil, become powerful organizing representations in the realm of human relationships, and serve as the perceptual foundation for the organization of the

internal and external worlds and constitute the psychological foundation upon which social organization takes place. [\[9\]](#)

Up until about age two, a child's sense of "ethnicity" is based on family contexts. There are familiar clothes, foods and smells, songs, dances, religious rituals, or sports. These are value-neutral in terms of relationships with other people outside the family or extended family setting. Beyond two, the child starts picking up signals from family and other group members that some people out there are not like his people. They do not wash very much and they tend to smell bad. They are tricky, not to be trusted. In other words the construct of the inferior or dangerous other enters the growing child's consciousness. The dichotomous us and them begin to be rooted. This, in turn, lays the basis for nationalist identification. People need to feel that they belong somewhere. The ethnic group or nation is the basic political unit of identity, and nationalism is the manifestation of the sense of collective identity. It presumes membership in a specific group defined by overlapping shared characteristics like religion, language, common history, laws, social institutions and customs. Nationalism as defined here is neither good nor bad, but normal. Indeed, psychotherapists have found that patients who have no sense of belonging to some identifiable group show symptoms of schizophrenia. Extreme nationalism is another story. It is a state of collective mind that is filled with rage alternating with despair, and it can create an environment that can lead to political violence and war.

Extreme nationalism is a result of painful, traumatic experiences in history or in recent times, or both, with each reinforcing the sense of loss, which has not been mourned. [\[10\]](#) Extreme nationalism is usually nourished by a powerful sense of injustice on the part of the victimized nation or identity group, and a feeling that the outside world does not care about the injustice it has suffered. The historic wounds

are felt as assaults on the self-concept and therefore ultimate safety and security of the victim group. Its very existence could be threatened. Such assaults generate an automatic instinct toward counter-aggression, or revenge.[\[11\]](#) The situation is also psychologically intolerable because one of the principal characteristics of victimhood is the fear that the aggressor is only waiting for a chance to commit another act of violence. Thus the group, tribe or nation is in a more or less permanent state of vengeful rage and fear of further attacks. If the victimized side is too weak to fight back by traditional means, it may resort to terrorism as an instrument of revenge.

We are working our way back to the intersection of psychology, religion, political violence, and eventual peacemaking as we approach the critically important phenomenon of dehumanization. This occurs when one group or nation prepares its people for repression of or aggression against another group leading quite possibly to all out war and even genocide. Dehumanization is a group psychological process that combines unconscious denial and repression of truth, depersonalization and compartmentalization of moral reasoning. One of the most well known examples of the latter is found in Robert J. Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors*,[\[12\]](#) based on extensive interviews with German physicians who worked in the death camps, support staff for the most meticulously organized genocide in recorded history. The doctors found ways to wall their minds off from the moral demands of their Hippocratic oath to serve all humankind and above all do no harm. As this writer put it in another essay, the Nazi doctors' "consciences appeared to be separated into the half that accepted systematic murder and the other half that enjoyed a quiet evening at home with wife, children and dog."[\[13\]](#)

An understanding of the dehumanization process is key to developing a practical strategy wherein the universal, human values of the great world religions

come front and center in the struggle to reverse the destructive effects of dehumanization. In *Sanctions for Evil*, a very important study of the way societies prepare the way for destructive behavior, Nevitt Sanford and Craig Comstock write that dehumanization protects the individual from the guilt and shame he would otherwise feel from primitive or antisocial attitudes, impulses, and actions that he directs—or allows others to direct—toward those he manages to perceive in these categories: if they are subhumans they have not yet reached full human status on the evolutionary ladder and, therefore, do not merit being treated as humans; if they are bad humans, their maltreatment is justified since their defects in human qualities are their own fault. [\[14\]](#)

Some examples of the dehumanization process at work include nineteenth and early twentieth century English political cartoons depicting Irish Catholics as knuckle-dragging primates with large heads and protruding jaws and teeth, very similar to caricatures in journals and magazines in the United States of African Americans during the same time period. During World War II, the U.S. government distributed color posters to cities and towns throughout the country depicting Japanese soldiers as monkeys in trees. Arab publications had a tradition of representing Jews as hooked-nosed, money-mad, conspirators who steal Gentile children to kill for blood sacrifices. In fairness to the Arabs, the anti-Semitic imagery was created by European Christians in the nineteenth century and widely disseminated in the twentieth. Palestinian Islamist terrorists have had no compunction about bombing defenseless, Israeli men, women and children. The humanity and innocence of the victims was no factor in the decision to kill.

In the wars of former Yugoslavia there have been vicious stereotypes of Orthodox Serbs—“Asiatic barbarians”—by Catholic Croats, who in turn have been

collectively called Nazis by Serbs. Both "Christian" peoples, Serbs and Croats, have been ruthless in degrading and dehumanizing Muslim Bosniaks with the former justifying genocidal acts, as in Srebrenica, as revenge for Ottoman Turkish rule. "Orthodox" Russian leaders have had no compunction about bombing Muslim Chechens who belong to a category of Caucasian and Central Asian Muslims Russians traditionally dismiss as "black asses." During the 1975-79 reign of terror by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, Pol Pot committed "auto-genocide" of educated Khmers whose ethnic and religious roots he shared, but his killers made a special effort to wipe out entirely the Chams, Khmers who were Muslims.

This is not an exhaustive list of dehumanizing tragedies. The bad news is that throughout history dehumanization and its resultant brutality have been predictable and "normal" as tribes and nations set out to conquer or confronted stresses in their lives. Identification of enemies, the seeking out of scapegoats, is a regular feature of intergroup relations in times of stress. To illustrate the process, there is the story of a social scientist who put two dogs on an electric grid with the current turned off. At first the dogs simply stood together in a normal, "social" manner. Then the scientist started to turn up the current and the dogs became obviously distressed. At a high point in the voltage, one dog attacked the other. It is clear from what is known that neither dog had done anything else to provoke the other. Both were innocent. Both were also increasingly distressed, feeling that they were in real danger. They also sensed that they had no control over their circumstances. There was nothing they could do to stop the pain. The situation was, indeed, out of control. Either of the dogs could have taken the initiative to attack the other. The instinct to attack came from a powerful urge to restore the sense of control by identifying whatever was available as the source of distress and attacking it to make it stop. [\[15\]](#)

The foregoing makes it easier to understand the brutal repression and mass murder of Jews during the fourteenth century outbreak of Black Plague in Europe. The disease first appeared in Constantinople in 1334 and moved westward through the Crimea to Europe where it raged from 1348-49. It was a bacterial infection transmitted to human beings by fleas from infected rats causing delirium, black hemorrhages, swollen, suppurated lymph nodes, fever and blood poisoning. Victims died within three or four days of infection. There is a mordant irony in that the disease, scientifically the bubonic plague, was brought to Europe via rats and returning Crusaders. Millions of Europeans died. As Avner Falk describes the situation, the people:

lived in constant fear , terrified of touching one another, deeply suspicious of everything and everybody...They searched for explanations and could not find any. This lead to paranoia... Amid all the sufferings and upheavals, the Jews became the scapegoats. The special ferocity of Christian hatred of the Jews was due to their terrible fear of the plague, which they could neither understand nor prevent. The medieval Christians attributed it to the hated Jews and to the devil, which in their minds were one and the same.” [\[16\]](#)

Jews were rounded up and burned to death in the German-Swiss cantons of Aargau, Bern, Basel, Zurich and in the Rhineland towns of Worms, Mainz and Cologne. On February 14, 1349, the entire community of Jews in Strassburg, 2000 people, were locked up in a wooden building in the Jewish cemetery and burned alive. Today, plague is easily treated with penicillin. (There was a brief outbreak in India in 1994.)

Medical miracles would be of little comfort to the Jews of twentieth century Europe, however. The setting was very dangerous. After World War I, Germany endured enormous stress having lost the war and been burdened with the humiliation



of the Versailles treaty. There was enormous economic stress and destructive hyperinflation. There were large refugee flows into Germany from Eastern Europe and Russia including many Jews. The situation seemed to be out of control.

In the Munich archives there is a memorandum of a conversation in 1922 with Adolf Hitler who reportedly went into a rage at hearing the word “Jew.” He said:

As soon as I have power, I shall have gallows after gallows erected. For example, in Munich, in the Marianplatz, the Jews will be hanged one after the other and they will stay hanging until they stink. They will stay hanging as long as hygienically possible, and as soon as they are untied, then the next group will follow and we’ll continue until the last Jew in Munich is destroyed. Exactly the same procedure will be followed in other cities until Germany is cleansed, purified of the last Jew. [\[17\]](#)

A haunting *déjà vu* in the destructive dichotomy between Christian and Jews from the fourteenth to the twentieth century.

These are extreme cases. Six million Jews killed in Europe in the last century is extreme. The Cambodian killing fields and the genocide of Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda are extreme. Ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia is extreme. But this fact should not discourage humankind from trying to find a way to end the dehumanizing acts that lead to violence and genocide. First we must recognize that more “normal,” less extreme dehumanization occurs in almost all countries. Communities or nations will always react to generalized anxiety and stress by regressing into more primitive group psychological defenses. Group paranoia is not hard to generate. The search for scapegoats is common. The witch hunt in Salem, Massachusetts in the seventeenth century was an early America example. Its twentieth century counterpart could be seen in anti-immigrant passion exemplified by the trial and execution of Sacco and

Vanzetti in the early 1920's or the the Communist witch hunt spearheaded by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the late 1940's and early '50's.

But even less dramatic cases of “hypergroupism” with its anxiety and scapegoating are common in places we would not think to look. As the psychoanalytic anthropologist Howard Stein has written:

The doctrine in behalf of which the expulsion, eradication, and extermination are done can be virtually anything: religious, political, racial, even organizational. The root from which all group ideologies derive is group psychology itself, specifically group panics that lead, via regression, to totalistic images of the social universe and the need to engage in cleansing the group of all badness. In workplace organizations in the United States...corporations, industries, hospitals, universities... under the chronic dread of mass firings...downsizing, reengineering, restructuring, deskilling, outsourcing...managers and workers alike strain to tell ally from foe, and speak of one another as potential ‘Gooks.’ [\[18\]](#)

Human beings constantly deal with *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies*, as Vamik Volkan entitled his insightful study. [\[19\]](#) In most case we adapt to stresses, get through the day, and perhaps sublimate aggression through sports. In extreme cases we might “go Postal,” as when an individual goes to his place of work and kills supervisors and fellow workers, or when students kill their schoolmates. In cases of group psychology we have seen the range of modest to extreme up to genocide. For the purposes of this essay on religion and peacemaking, the focus must be on the dehumanization process. Insult, degradation and dehumanization are the early warning indicators in groups and nations that one part of a community is getting ready psychologically to kill another. Religious values have a very significant role to play in highlighting and then reversing this destructive group process. But first religions have to examine their own tendencies to marginalize, dehumanize and justify the killing of the “other,” to yield to the demonic in the sacred.

## **Religious Man**

There are increasingly strong voices in the three Abrahamic faiths focusing on the dignity and rights of the individual as central to all religion. The fundamental importance of human rights in this perspective is not merely the sentiment of liberal do-gooders. Protection of the rights of all human beings of all races and religions is seen as the foundation stone for any conception of peace and justice. Thus, there is a direct correlation between the state of human rights and domestic, regional and international security. One need not be a moralist to see this empirical fact.

## **Christianity**

From a Christian perspective, Father Theodore Hesburgh, President Emeritus of Notre Dame University, has written that the central point in Pope John XXIII's encyclical, "Pacem in Terris," is that all social systems based on peace and justice must be built on the concept of the human person and human rights. Further:

There will be no peace where there is no justice and no justice where human persons do not have these basic human rights. Too often these human rights are demanded for one's own religious or ethnic group but not for the human person, whatever his group or location. It is their search for justice that inspires the exemplary religious leaders to guarantee people, whatever their nationality, religion, or ethnic background, an opportunity to pursue these fundamental human rights. Indeed, the significant religious leaders of our time see the pursuit of justice as a sacred obligation. [\[20\]](#)

This theme dominated a special address Pope John Paul II made to the UN General Assembly, October 5, 1995. He said:

In the context of the community of nations, the church's message is simple yet absolutely crucial for the survival of humanity and the world: The human person must be the true focus of all social, political and economic activity....This truth, when effectively put into practice, will point the way to healing the divisions between the rich and the poor, to overcoming the inequality between the strong and the weak, to reconciling man with himself and with God. *For men and women are made in the image and likeness of God* (emphasis added). So people may never be regarded as mere objects, nor may they be sacrificed for political, economic or social gain. We must never allow them to be manipulated or enslaved by ideologies or technology. Their God-given dignity and worth as human beings forbid this.

Carl Evans, chair of the religion department at the University of South Carolina extends the human-centered theme in a paper called "The Scriptural Basis for Peace among Islam, Judaism, and Christianity." [\[21\]](#) He starts with a recognition that Scripture often serves to create conflict and division among groups. As an example, he cites the doctrine of the supersession of Judaism by Christianity, at least in certain interpretations of the New Testament. Thus the appeal to Scripture per se is no guarantee that peace and harmony will result. A basic problem is the presuppositions that various all-too-human interpreters bring to Scripture.

Then there is the problem caused by the fact that Scripture itself is a collection of many pieces of writing by many authors at different periods of time. The writings are naturally shaped by the authors' personal experience with the Divine and the world. Thus, when one reads Scripture one should remember that the writer of a given passage *claims* that God said whatever is recorded. Thus the encounter with God is necessarily indirect. Evans says, "God is reflected in Scripture, yes, but just as importantly God is beyond Scripture as the living, sovereign deity of the universe." The challenge, then, is to discern the presence of God within and beyond Scripture, and this is much harder than just citing Scripture. One must work to determine the core values in Scripture. Evans offers fruit of his efforts.

The *first* core value is that we all live in God's world. Muslims, Christians and Jews answer to the same God. The world is His, not ours, and His authority is not there to affirm our sectarian biases but for us to become attuned to the presence of God in all of life. The *second* core value is the recognition that human beings are created in the image of God. "Human beings have been given sacred worth as their birthright and are therefore deserving of dignity and respect in all relationships." All of the world's great religions teach this truth, "and, yet, we often act as if we never knew it." The *third* core value is the recognition that our faith requires us to cross the

boundary lines that normally divide us from each other. The *fourth* and final core value is the recognition that justice is required for human flourishing and peace. There is no peace without justice.

The moral compulsion to inclusion of “all God’s children,” is clear and inescapable. It is usually a struggle for ordinary people—and often clergy-- to accept. Indeed, it takes a good deal of work. It took this hideousness of the Holocaust to persuade most, if not all, Christians that they were wrong to condemn the Jews as a people whose religion had been superseded, a people who should have had the decency to just disappear. Pope John Paul II symbolically put an end to this pathological Christian/Jewish dichotomy when he recognized the legitimacy of God’s covenant with the Jewish people. The next logical step would be for the Vatican to recognize the legitimacy of God’s covenant with the Muslim people. While considering the matter, the papal advisers in Rome might examine the introspection of a Jesuit peacemaker. Father Raymond Helmick shares his thinking in a paper entitled “How Can a Catholic Respond, in Faith, to the Faith of Muslims?” prepared for a meeting with former Yugoslav Christian and Muslim divinity students in Caux, Switzerland in February, 2000.

As I pondered [this question] I recognized that God, who reveals himself, can require of me that I remain faithful to his revelation as it is transmitted to me through Christian tradition. Equally clearly, I have to admit that I cannot own God. I cannot demand of him that he act or reveal himself only as I know him through the tradition I have received. He remains free... He can reveal himself as he chooses.

I do not have the experience of knowing God through the tradition of the Muslim faith... But as I see the piety and the life of faith of the Muslim community—imperfect, of course, like my own—I find myself bound, even in faithfulness to God as he reveals himself in my own tradition, to recognize him at work in the faith of Muslims. This constitutes, I believe, no derogation of my Christian faith, but actually springs from it.

This is a wonderfully simple, and quite moving, statement of faith and it reveals a special problem for exclusivist doctrines in any religious system. Does any religion have a right to tell God whom he may embrace and whom he may not? Is it not his choice to love and save Hindus and Buddhists and animists—people with a Book and people without a book?

## **Judaism**

The Jewish people have not had the doctrinal problem of dealing with the New Testament and the Koran. They have had enough of their sacred Scripture, Torah and

Talmud, to keep them busy with study and interpretation. Their greatest challenge has been to physically survive Christian instincts to eradicate them from the earth. Coexistence with Muslims has, in fact, been a much easier road for the Jews, since the Koran accommodates them as People of the Book. Indeed, Jews and Muslims together created an extraordinary level civilization in medieval Spain under Muslim sovereignty from the eight to the fourteenth century. And Jews do have Scriptural sanction for embracing the Gentile other. It has just been difficult to get them to focus on the embrace during pogroms and in the extermination camps.

In *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, Marc Gopin offers an extraordinarily introspective, wise and simply brilliant analysis of the complexities and promise of religion in peacemaking. He is especially skilled in the art of conflict resolution and what it can contribute to the effective engagement of religious values in peacemaking for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For the present, we can only deal briefly with Gopin's treatment of the place of the stranger, the Gentile, the other, among Jews. Gopin describes his introduction of the *ger*, the stranger, in Biblical law, to an audience of enthralled Catholics and Protestants in Belfast. The *ger* is both different from the Jewish minority, but "he must be included in Jewish celebrations, cared for, and even loved. He is the quintessential outsider, which is a litmus test of the ethical conduct of the majority group. In fact, it is the loving care of strangers that is stated by the Bible as the essential lesson of the Jewish enslavement in Egypt... Furthermore... the religious law is meant to counteract the natural tendency of an abused group to pass that abuse onto others." [22] Gopin writes that the gratitude of his Northern Ireland audience seemed to reflect his emphasis that the embrace of the *ger* did not require the Jews to surrender any of their identity as Jews. Indeed, the embrace strengthened the quality of their Jewishness. In Northern Ireland, where the sense of religious identity has been hardened in centuries, as well as recent decades, of Protestant/Catholic strife, the reassurance that one can value the other without sacrificing identity seemed to be warmly welcomed.

In dealing with the compassionate pole of the dichotomous religious/psychological Jew (and Christian), Gopin does not avoid the destructive pole of the "sacred." As we contemplate the role of religion in peacemaking we need to confront the scriptural God both in the Hebrew Bible and Revelations, chapter 16, in the New Testament. The "Day of the Lord," Hebrew prophecies describe the most horrible punishments of death and destruction awaiting the "enemies of the Lord," or "infidels." Armageddon in both testaments anticipates a 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 way imaginable." Note that

psychological early warning terms, the use of “beast” and other epithets to describe enemies is classic dehumanization.

Gopin notes one way of interpreting God’s Biblical retribution, citing a rabbinic discussion Exodus 15:3, “The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name.” In this discussion the Lord is acknowledged as, indeed, a man of war. He fought the Egyptians. But in His name, the Lord has compassion on his creatures. He hears the prayers of everyone who inhabits the world. Gopin explains that God’s full name serves to circumscribe the definition of God as a man of war. “God punishes violently the guilty while simultaneously hearing the prayers of all creatures, serving their need and having compassion upon them. The terms [used] indicate a specific rabbinic intention to emphasize that God’s compassion is universal, not just for Jews, even as he punishes Egypt.” [\[23\]](#)

There is a poignant account of the teaching’s of Samuel David Luzzato (1800-65), an Italian, Orthodox Jewish theologian whose central scholarly and ethical theme was the Italian moral sense of *compassione* or the Jewish moral sense of *hemleh*. This sentiment extended to all God’s creatures, even the non-human. He wrote:

The compassion that Judaism commends is universal. It is extended, like God’s, to all of His creatures. No race is excluded from the Law, because all human beings, according to Judaism’s teaching, are brothers, are children of the same Father, and are created in the image of God. [\[24\]](#)

The poignancy arises from the fact that Post-Holocaust translations by Orthodox scholars of Luzzato substitutes “all Jews” for “all human beings” in the phrase above. The misrepresentation reflects, in Gopin’s view, the pessimism and defensiveness of Orthodox in particular, who were the targets of vicious repression and pogroms by Eastern European Christians, and who suffered indescribable losses in the Holocaust. It is little wonder that the all-embracing, all God’s children theme has been hard to sell in the modern period.

## **Islam**

The Muslim dilemma in embracing the other is not unlike that of the Jews. The guidance in the Koran is explicit even though there are apparent contradictions over the issue, again, of the supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity. This and several other issues of Koranic values supporting the idea of democratic pluralism in

Islam are examined in the impressive new study by Abdulaziz Sachedina in *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. [\[25\]](#)

Sachedina, a professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, maintains that the cornerstone of the creative narrative in the Koran is the principle of diversity. The Koran suggests that the variety in humankind is one of the riches in God's world. The guiding verse is:

O humankind, we have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-Aware. (K. 49:14)

Thus the principle that God is the God of all creation and one who recognizes and embraces all his children is clearly established. Another key verse rejects the idea of exclusivism in Islam, offering salvation to, at least, the other people of the Book:

Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believe in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow. (K 2:62)

Sachedina notes that the Koran is remarkably inclusive toward the peoples of the Book. He says, “The unique characteristic of Islam is its conviction that belief in the oneness of God unites the Muslim community with all humanity because God is the creator of all humans, irrespective of their religious traditions. The Koran declares that on the Day of Judgement all human beings will be judged, irrespective of sectarian affiliation, about their moral performance as citizens of the world community.” [\[26\]](#) But Sachedina acknowledges that the liberalism of these verses caused discomfort for jurists who were trying to support expansionist political claims to exclusive chosenness of the Muslims.

And there is a verse to support this position. “Whosoever desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.” (K. 3:85).

Regardless of the contradictions, the preciousness of the individual and the embrace by God of all of his children is the dominant theme of the Koran. Indeed, it is the essence of monotheism. Thus Sachedina's reading of the Koran reveals a set of “core values” similar to those identified by the Christian, Carl Evans, who also contends that the three Abrahamic faiths embrace and are embraced by the one God they share.



## Working Conclusions

A short essay on a huge subject can at best suggest some working conclusions and guidelines for the integration of religious values in the work of peacebuilding. It is, of course, not enough to highlight the universality of God's embrace of all human beings as though a presentation of the facts will all of a sudden arrest the hatred of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo for Serbs, and vice versa, or undermine the suspicion among Jews in Israel that Arabs are simply treacherous assassins, only waiting for the chance to put a knife into the back of a Jew.

But there are ways that the embracing universal values of Scripture can be integrated into ongoing dialogue among adversaries in unofficial, "track two diplomacy" and injected into the more public discourse in conflicted relationships, not unlike Marc Gopin's session with Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. And beyond efforts at cognitive and moral persuasion, the international community can increase its pressure on regimes and groups that commit human rights violations or threaten to do so. Reinforced by our understanding of the pro-human ethics of the great religions, advocates of the defense of human rights, including the often diffident leading democratic governments, can be more militant. It is unacceptable that the international community should ever again agonize for years over the right thing to do when massive human rights violations are taking place as they did in Bosnia, in the last decade.

Religious leaders have a special collective responsibility to sound the alarm quickly whenever any of God's children are threatened. If governments will move only because of the pain of public opinion their hesitance generates, let there be pain. As Ted Robert Gurr writes in *Foreign Affairs*, there is an "invisible hand" at work in the world that explains the quantitative decline in ethnic violence. More antagonists are negotiating, usually with the help of third parties. Regional and international organizations are intervening earlier to prevent political violence. The shame of Rwanda and Bosnia have been gradually replaced by the "last resort" UN/NATO military campaign in Kosovo and the rapid deployment of international forces to East Timor in 1999. Further, most of the recent wars of self-determination fighting, while beginning with demand for independence have settled for increased autonomy. As Gurr writes:

The principle that serious ethnic disputes [the ones that result in the most brutal human rights violation] should be settled by negotiation is backed up actively by most major powers, the U.N., and some regional organizations...These entities mix diplomacy, mediation, sweeteners, and threats to encourage accommodation. Preventive diplomacy is widely popular—not only because early

engagement can be cheaper than belated crisis management but because it is the preferred instrument of the new regime. [27]

The environment for doing the right thing in protecting the preciousness of human life is improving. But the instincts of political leaders to avoid brave or painful choices is a constant counterweight, as is the aspect of human psychology that from time to time relishes the destruction of other people or is, almost as bad, indifferent to it, as one sees in so many of the tragedies in Africa.

And in the Middle East, where Jews, Muslims and some Christians battle over who will guarantee the peace of Jerusalem, every human, ethical and spiritual resource is needed for the task. It is perhaps more important there than anywhere else in the world that the preciousness and dignity of human life God embraces in the Torah, the New Testament and the Koran be put first in the peacemaking by the peacemakers.

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[1] New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[2] Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000

[3] In 1991, *Daedalus* devoted an entire issue to “Religion and Politics,” (Summer) launching a new examination of the subject. But it could be said that *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, edited by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), restored the subject of religion in politics and diplomacy to broad scholarly and policymaking respectability after perhaps two hundred years of deliberate neglect. Edward Luttwak’s trenchant essay in the collection, “The Missing Dimension,” describes the origins of the Enlightenment conceit of dismissing the significance of religion in public affairs that in retrospect was one of the most anti-intellectual of the modern West’s intellectual biases. The interest in *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* at the policy level of the U.S. and several other democratic governments, may reflect the fact that the book was a project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a centrist public policy research institution in Washington, D.C. The author of this essay was a member of the steering group for the project and later joined CSIS to establish its preventive diplomacy program.

[4] Appleton, p. 28.

[5] Appleton, p. 31.

[6] Appleton, p. 31

[7] Erik H. Erikson (1969), *Gandhi's Truth: In the Origin of Militant Non-Violence*, New York: W.W. Norton, p. 431.

[8] Charles A. Pinderhughes, (1979). "Differential Bonding: Toward a Psychophysiological Theory of Stereotyping." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 136 (1), pp. 33-37.

[9] John E. Mack (1979), "Nationalism and the Self. *The Psychohistory Review* (Spring), 2 (2-3), pp. 47-69.

[10] Incomplete mourning is characteristic of historic wounds incurred in political conflict over time. Mourning cannot be completed unless and until the perpetrators of the losses acknowledge their wrongdoing and ask forgiveness of their victims. This process is explained at some length in Joseph. V. Montville (1995), "Complicated Mourning and Mobilization for Nationalism," in Jerome Braun, ed., *Social Pathology in Comparative Perspective: The Nature and Psychology of Civil Society*, Westport, CT: Praeger., pp. 159-174.

[11] See Gregory Rochlin M.D (1973), *Man's Aggression: The Defense of the Self*., Boston:

Gambit for a clinical description of the automatic aggressive reaction in human beings to an act of aggression.

[12] Robert J. Lifton (1986), *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*.. New York, Basic Books.

[13] Joseph V. Montville (1990), "The Pathology and Prevention of Genocide," in Volkan, Montville and Julius, eds., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*, Vol II, p. 124.

[14] Nevitt Sanford and Craig Comstock (1973), *Sanctions for Evil*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p. 105-106.

[15] The writer heard this experiment described at a scientific meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology more than twenty years ago. One assumes that with contemporary standards barring cruelty to animals, such an experiment is no longer permissible.

[16] Avner Faulk (1996), *A Psychoanalytic History of the Jews*, London: Associated University Presses, p 494.

[17] Quoted in Montville (1990), p. 137.

[18] Howard F. Stein (1999), "Hypernationalism and Xenophobia: A Thirty Year Retrospective," in *Mind and Human Interaction*, Vol 10, No. 2, p 126.

[19] Vamik D. Volkan (1988), *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships*, Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

[20] Forword to Appleby (2000), p. x.

[21] Presented at a symposium at Coker College, Hartsville, South Carolina, April 5, 2000.

[22] Gopin (2000), mss. p. I/4.

[23] Gopin (2000), mss. p. IIIB/4.

[24] Gopin (2000), mss. p. IIIC/6.

[25] New York: Oxford University Press, 2000

[26] Sachedina (2000), mss. p. 51.

[27] "Ethnic Warfare on the Wane," in *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, 2000, p.58.