

Religious Factors in the Diplomacy of Violent Conflicts

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I would like to start with a challenge a least some of the conclusions from a key study of religion and violence which has held the field among theologians for much of the last century.

Rudolf Otto published, in 1917, his vastly influential book, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalem*.¹ We’ve known it in English as *The Idea of the Holy*. More recently, R. Scott Appleby, Dean of Notre Dame University’s Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies has endorsed and reinforced Otto’s thesis in his excellent and widely used book, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*.²

Otto argues, as Appleby explains,³ that “the holy is ‘a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion,’ the sine qua non of religion – what remains of religion when its rational and ethical elements have been excluded.” It has become practice among theorists of religion to use “the sacred” to express Otto’s “*heilige*,” so that Appleby is able to use “sacred” and “holy” interchangeably.

Otto ascribes to this “the holy” the concept of *the numinous* (Latin *numen*, meaning “dynamic, spirit-filled, transhuman energy or force”), something *neither good nor evil*, ultimate reality, the source of all being in the universe. He calls it *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*: *mysterium* in the sense that the emotional (not rational) encounter with it conjures up a feeling of dread, evoked by its overpowering and uncontrollable presence (*tremendum*), bound up also in feelings of awe, wonder and fascination (*fascinans*).

Paul Tillich acknowledged Otto’s influence as important to himself. Mircea Eliade acknowledged it as the source of his own book, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*⁴. C.S. Lewis, Carl Gustav Jung, Karl Barth, who saw in Otto’s description of God as

¹ Never out of print and translated into numerous languages, Otto’s book appears in English as *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923-1971).

² Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, for the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 2000. I draw on Appleby’s account in this description.

³ Op. cit/, p. 28.

⁴ Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York, A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1957)

totally other a reflection of Augustine's *aliud, aliud valde*⁵; Martin Heidegger, Leo Strauss, Hans-George Gadamer, and even such Jewish scholars as Joseph Soloveitchik and Eliezer Berkovits have paid their tributes to Otto. After falling somewhat out of favor between 1950 and 1990, Otto's concept was revived by Karl Rahner's presentation of man as creature of transcendence.

Given such endorsement, it is with some temerity that I bring my own dissent from many of these conclusions. I base it upon a distinction that has become fundamental for me between religion and faith. Religion has an agenda, and its agenda is faith. The term "religion" itself we can use in two ways: to describe a set of practices that are the expression of a community's faith – hands folded in prayer, genuflection, many other gestures of reverence, devoted reading of the Scriptures of a faith, practices of worship; or alternatively the institutional structure that is a requirement if we are to be a community of faith, sharing and feeding it among one another. And here I use, for the first time, the term "community" or "communion" of faith.

It is this latter, the institution, that we generally mean by the term "religion." No association of people, from the local stamp club to the world Church, can exist without some kind of structure. Without it, the association is not associated at all. We need no more of it than is actually needed. The Pauline house-churches could live with minimum structure, but a world Church is more complex, Christians of every sort regard the Church as vital to their practice of faith, and I expect the same is true for people of other faiths. Reducing faith to a privatized God-and-me relation always seems a poor substitute for a life in communion of faith with others. We live in constant conversation and exchange with one another, sharing much in our lives. It is a lonely life to be without this, and to be unable to communicate with others about something so important to our lives as faith – if we happen to have it – means painful deprivation. This is a grave problem for the disaffiliated, the "nones" of our own time, who live in distrust of the religious associations and their structures.

We always hope that the objectives, the principles, the interests of the leadership in such a structure will be identical to those of the association itself. But there is always likely to be at least one small divergence: the leadership of an institutional structure is usually anxious to continue being the leadership, and that may not be in the interest of the association itself. We generally learn to live with small divergences, but if the gap widens, we know there is trouble. If once the objective of the leadership is concentrated basically on the retention of power, it may be very difficult to dislodge. Martin Luther faced that difficulty. It is at the heart of a book I published this last year, *The Crisis of Confidence in the Catholic Church*.⁶

For Catholics, the sense of Church as authority tends to overshadow this wider concept of Church as fellowship or communion in faith. For the Catholic it has great importance to be at

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.10.16.

⁶ London, Bloomsbury, 2014.

one with a central teaching authority in the Church. Much has happened in recent times to shake the confidence of many Catholics in that authoritative center, but for others any questioning of that center equates with disloyalty to the faith. And that is our civil war.

Associations are zealous in the protection of their reputation. In the widespread scandal of sex abuse that has engulfed the Catholic Church, it went without saying that any bishop who, before the catastrophe, divulged news of this embarrassment to the public would cease to be a bishop, just like the official of any major bank or government, with the result that the shame was covered up as long as it could be, to the colossal discrediting of the institution when the tide finally burst its banks. The institution by now was following an agenda vastly divergent from its agenda of faith. It was asking that faith be placed in the institution itself, rather than in God.

Let's attend then to the place of faith: what do we trust, in what do we see our safety? The spectacle of priests sexually abusing altar boys and other young people, and their bishops appearing more concerned to look innocent than to address the subject, has left a great many of our Catholic people adrift, reckoning the Church irrelevant even to the best, most generous concerns of their lives. In the face of troubles, they then wonder what they can really rely on. That is a faith question. We may, even if we are regular church-goers, be looking for alternative objects of faith that we can rely on: governments, "forces of order," friends in high places, whatever would make us safe, or safer than we would be without them.

We see opinion polls listing the degree of trust the public invests in various institutions – government, President, Congress, political parties, press, schools, churches, etc. Churches, bishops, clergy now rank pretty low. Sunday attendance falls, and its importance, in the minds of increasing numbers of our people, shrinks. The question that the press used to ask regularly: what has the Church, i.e., its hierarchy or the institution, to say on any given subject, even if it is on one of the grand moral topics, evokes little interest. People have come to expect that the Church, when asked such questions, will answer only in a way that supports its institutional interests, and even with the best of good will that does not impress us as very important.

All of us face the question, at some point, whether our belief in our own faith means to us that, because we are right, everyone else must be wrong. Openness to the faith of others is truly one important measure of our commitment to peace. It becomes especially important in our own time, when we have to realize that we Christians, together with Muslims, make up more than half the world's population. We shall have a very miserable and violent 21st century if we do not learn together how to treat one another with respect.

You can hear me talking about religion in general from the perspective of a Catholic – indeed of a Jesuit. Cynthia Salloum asked me, in inviting me here, to say something about the distinction between religious mediation and faith-based diplomacy. I'm afraid I'm a bit of an extreme case of the latter, faith-based diplomacy – Track II of course – as my first deep dip into conflict intervention came when the Northern Irish conflict, understood to be between Catholics

and Protestants at one level, began to look like the 17th century. I, as celebrant of the Christian Eucharist, stand before people speaking in the person of Christ, to say: “This is my body, which is given up for you.” When I found that the Body of Christ was being shot at in Northern Ireland, where else could I be but there among those who were that Body?

We Christians have long been accustomed to think that everyone must, for their salvation, become like us. Missionary zeal has characterized Christian life and we have always rejoiced in converts, not always recognizing, as a definition of that conversion, that conversion of heart is something recommended to the membership of our own faith community itself. It is in this sense that John the Baptist and Jesus himself preach conversion to their fellow Jews. But when it comes to recognizing and validating the faith of others, we are aware that not everything goes, that the answer to the problem is not a generalized “That’s all right” to every perception. Where are the criteria?

Growing up, as I did myself, in the time of the Holocaust/*Shoah*, and understanding even then the horror of the deed and the innocence of the victims, I had learned well before the time of the Second Vatican Council that Jews remained, as they had always been, beloved of God, their Covenant a permanent and irrevocable promise from God to which he would be faithful. And so, when the Council produced, in the Decree *Nostra Aetate*, its recognition of the validity of Jewish faith, I found myself already in the cheering section. A corollary to this is that Christians should neither despise Jewish faith nor look for conversion to Christianity as a necessity for Jews. When a significant number of Christian theologians signed a document to this effect a few years ago, many other Christians were bent out of shape, but when we look to the actual practice of the years since the Council we find that Christian efforts to proselytize Jews have for the most part disappeared.

I didn’t need, until the early 1980s, to pursue this question with regard to Muslims and Islam. I had known Palestinians for many years, Muslim and Christian, without ever having to confront questions of their difference. Palestinian Christians and Muslims had their issues, but those were not what their life was about; they had problems in common as Palestinians. It was only when I spent time in Lebanon in the midst of a civil war that presented itself as between Christians and Muslims that Muslim faith and my response to it became a serious theological and even existential question for me, something I had to discuss with everyone, of either group, I met. Did I mean it when I spoke, ever so easily, of the spiritual riches of Islam? I knew the difference between our mutual monotheistic faith, shared with Jews, and the classical paganism of the ancient world from the midst of which all three of these Abrahamic faiths had arisen.

For Greek and Roman “pagans,” and the family of religions, with their Middle Eastern origins, of their time, the world was composed of a bewildering number of challenging forces: love and hate, fire and storm, drought and flood, war and peace and many others. These were what life and the world and experience were about. They personified these forces, attributing

personal will to these hypostases. Of course, some believed more and some less of this, but it was the socially accepted view of their world, and for true believers this was the stuff of religion.

It meant that the world was a place of terror. The disparate forces, hypostatized as gods and goddesses, might have a king of the gods, but no true unity. All had their own agendas. So far as we were concerned, they were at best indifferent, at worst actively hostile. The work of religion was to hold these dangers at bay by the bribery of sacrifice, always risky as too much deference to one might incur the jealousy of others, and *hubris* was sure to incur punishment. By bribery we could strive for the safety of ourselves, our families and those others who were dear to us – a tribe, a community, a nation – but it was hard to get beyond that. And we knew that in the end we would lose, that these dangerous forces would ultimately defeat us. We could only be doomed. It is a religion of terror.

The Abrahamic monotheisms tell us that none of the above is true: that God is one, not a menacing monster out to ruin us or catch us out in faults (sins!) for which we will be punished, but for us. At the heart of these faiths is the proposition, common to all our scripture traditions, that *we must not fear, but should take courage, because the Lord is with us*. That means that our life, the world and history make sense, that we can in fact live with courage and joy in service to God and one another. This is the meaning of monotheistic faith, not terribly complicated but never easy to follow.

I know Sigmund Freud's complaint that the monotheisms are imperial, demanding submission, but this is a matter of misbehavior by monotheistic believers rather than anything essential to the belief.⁷ In this they are not unlike other religions, whose truth-claims are taken as demanding universal acceptance. The monotheistic believer, surrounded by actual perils, is always left in the position of saying: "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." But to the extent that we are able to live in such faith, this is an empowering insight. Many are the differences in Jewish, Christian and Muslim formulations of these beliefs, and of the initial historical circumstances in which we have understood them as revelation, but there is a core of faith that is common.⁸

As a believing Catholic Christian, I take these things not as merely religious phenomena, to be studied without commitment, but as matters of actual faith. The study of theology, for Jew, Christian or Muslim, as distinct from a mere religious phenomenology, is built on this supposition of faith. On that basis each of these faiths looks for understanding of itself (the

⁷ *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (Knopf, 1931), published in English, *Moses and Montheism*, translated by Katerine Jones (Knopf, 1939).

⁸ This too has been a long-term preoccupation of my own over at least the last fifty years: the recurrent refrain that runs all through the Hebrew Scripture and continues unabated throughout the New Testament: "Do not fear, do not be alarmed; take courage and act with faith; *because I am with you*." I wish I were as able to track this formula through the Qur'an, but I know it is equally there. It was the topic of another book I published this last year, *Fear Not: Biblical Calls for Faith* (Cambridge, MA, Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity; Newton, MA, Boston Theological Institute, 2014).

Augustinian *Fides quaerens intellectum*, which always translates into the basic theological question: “What are we talking about?”

What then am I to believe of the faith of Muslims? Is it – to put it bare-facedly – of God, or is it simply a case of deception? My Christian faith teaches me that I do not own God, nor does my Church, but that God is free, and may breathe where he wills. Seeing the faith and practice of Muslims, I must conclude that it is gift of God, just as I had long learned of Jews.

So we have two basic religious forms to fit into **a taxonomy of religions**: monotheism and polytheism, radically different in their effects on us, the one an enabler in our lives, the other not.

I have to say here that I cannot with fairness classify any of the faith families or communions as inevitably one or the other. Looking, for instance, at Hindu faith, with its multiplicity of divine spirits, and seeing such lives as that of Gandhi, I have to recognize that there is a unity behind their beliefs. That is doubtless true, too, of those ancient Greeks and Romans who, in the abstract, provide my model of polytheism. Consider Socrates, consider Marcus Aurelius.

I have to admit here, also, that among the regular church-goers, synagogue-goers and mosque-goers, there are many for whom that life-shaping reliance on God who is with us and gives us the courage to live without fear is no feature of their lives, which instead are concerned with the many worries about family and fortune, about saving ourselves from perils of all sorts, and for whom the Friday/Saturday/Sunday pattern is basically cultural. It is difficult for any of us to maintain that fearless courage in the face of God that I describe as of the nature of faith. But if our lives are entirely circumscribed by saving ourselves and those dear to us from the perils, even though we are no longer in the habit of hypostasizing them, we fall into the classification of polytheist.

Where does that leave the paradigmatic Rudolf Otto thesis? I would say that, in the case of a faith that delivers us from fear, the Otto thesis has fallen apart altogether. My suspicion is that, in describing “das Heilige,” Otto was looking more to the object, institutional religion, rather than to the faith that is its supposed agenda. Perhaps “the Sacred” rather than “the holy” is the better translation of Otto’s term, as it refers to the compelling object/structure/paradigm, rather than to the inner state

If in fact we exclude any possibility of any of this enabling supernatural setting of our lives and see it all as superstition, we are in the existential position of a Jean Paul Sartre, for whom the world is The Absurd, and the only dignified response open to us the *défi*.

But we have not exhausted the religious possibilities in our taxonomy. There is also the dualist position, for which the world, our lives and our experience are the place of contest between the good and the evil. We know of ancient formal religions that profess this explicitly: that these two principles of Good and Evil are evenly matched; that the outcome of their rivalry,

absolutely or in our own lives, is ever uncertain; and that the meaning and task of our lives is to identify the evil (we will doubtless assume that we ourselves are the good), fight it and destroy it.

We have lived this through the times of the Cold War and the more recent War on Terror and doubtless at many other times as well. We will often have heard it preached in our churches, our synagogues and our mosques, and in many ways we have been brought up to believe it. This is not monotheism, but a radically different outlook on life, the world and experience. It may well be reason to assume or strive for a stance of heroism, but it has to be drenched in fear. We will also have heard, in our churches, mosques and synagogues, the hell-fire preacher who portrays God himself as devouring monster seeking to find us out and destroy us, trying to reduce us to cowering fear (presumably of himself, but it is common to find this as a threat from the religious establishment, that we will incur summary punishment if we do not accept it or its authority figures as voice of God). This is to reduce God to a frightening ogre, on the wrong side of the disjunction of Good and Evil. The Rudolf Otto thesis of the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* reigns here supreme.

It is impossible, then, to classify any of our religious homes as unambiguously and always inhabiting any one part of this three-way religious taxonomy. It serves better, then, as a test of what is actually believed in our several religious communities, and a reason to have a reasoned and discerning hope in any of them. That is no reason for any of us to treat our own religious home reductively or relativistically, but to respect them all. I think my taxonomy may be most useful in seeing whether a given “religion” (whether we take it as a set of practices or as an institutional structure) or faith position leads us to a personality able to function fearlessly in a hard world, even one of conflict, or reduces us either to timorous uncertainty or to a raging partisanship.

It is time we came away from these abstract notions and looked directly at conflict interventions, whether at the high level of diplomacy (Track I or II) or at ground level. My own initiation into this, as the basic thing I would do as my life, came only when I went to Northern Ireland in 1972, the most violent year of that conflict. I had had some experience with resistance to the U.S. war in Vietnam, and in the American civil rights movement. I had had interesting encounters, too, from some years of teaching in Jamaica, West Indies, with the Rastafarians. As those who had chosen to be outsiders to Jamaican society, they were, in the '50s and '60s, the chosen scapegoats for anything that went wrong.

Northern Ireland was understood in terms of religious warfare, low-level though it was, and in fact all these regional and infra-societal conflicts are so understood. Religion (I will say “religion” rather than faith) is always there. If we fail to see it, we are not looking closely enough, and the peace establishment always wants to know of each such conflict: is this about religion or is it not, and they want an answer: yes or no – preferably no, as we are reluctant to take on religion. Both answers are always wrong, because there is an ecology to a conflict.

There will be elements of religion, elements of economics, elements of political, ethnic rivalry, territorialism and other elements. Like the ecological elements without which a particular plant or animal species cannot survive, the conflict depends on the conjunction and interplay of all of them. If we miss one in our understanding of the conflict, we don't understand what is happening. I once met a bright young man who was political officer to an American ambassador in Syria. This is always a fellow in his thirties, thoroughly trained to know all about the local situation, whose job is to keep his ambassador from embarrassing himself. This man knew all about the conflict in Lebanon, except that he had never heard of the Maronite monks, who had brought together the heads of all the great Maronite families in the Christmas period of 1975 for a retreat, in the course of which the *Force libanaise* militia was formed. But his supposition – common then, less so now – was that religion could not count.

When I showed up in Northern Ireland, what was I there for? It was my perception that something was seriously wrong there. But it could not be in terms of judgment. This was the heyday, in 1972, of Catholic-Protestant ecumenism elsewhere, but not in Northern Ireland. We Catholics had made the surprising discovery that Protestants were Christians and I had been some years at Union Theological Seminary in New York trying to learn the thinking of American Protestants. The power difference between the Northern Ireland communities was obvious, and their antipathy to each other, leading to frequent violence. But I made a deliberate supposition that I was not dealing with psychopaths. Instead I was dealing with people who, at great personal risk of life to themselves, were trying to protect their own communities. That deserved my respect, however much I might detest the violence, and I had to meet and talk with every faction to discover their thinking. I had to know their local communities as well, their political and their church leadership.

Conducting such a conversation with such a diversity of groups gave me the opportunity to represent to each what the others were thinking and saying. People in conflict situations live in bubbles, speaking to no one but those in their own choir, and full of negative stereotypes of their opponents, but they are very curious about what makes the others tick. To hear other voices, even in a conversation where I had to see each faction separately, was very interesting to them. The militants are used to being classified as trouble. Nowadays we say “terrorists.” In Northern Ireland they were “the men of violence.” They were not used to being treated with respect, and treating them so helped to make them willing partners in such conversations.

There was a question of ethics in their conduct. It was not for me to bring the ethics. Instead I had to suppose they had their own ethics, even if they had to discover it for themselves. My own bias was clearly anti-violence, and I was always in search, in our conversations, of non-violent options they could use in pursuit of the varieties of justice they sought. Those options had to be convincing ways to achieve legitimate goals, and they had to be convinced themselves, in surveying a menu of such options, that some were real. It has been my experience, whether in

Northern Ireland or elsewhere, that once a group has become convinced that there is a genuine alternative to violence for the actual achievement of what they see as justice, they conclude that the violence is no longer legitimate.

I was myself following a very central precept of Jesuit conduct, though it may be one that relatively few Jesuits are aware of. That is the “saving of the proposition” of the other.

Our Jesuit founder, St. Ignatius Loyola, after going through a profound process of reflection that led to his own decisions about what to do with his life, produced a book called *The Spiritual Exercises*, familiar since to anyone who has made a Jesuit retreat, exercises intended to help others make such choices about the fundamental direction of their lives. At the very beginning of the book is a brief page called the *Praesupponendum*, a basic supposition which was to underlie the relation between a person making the retreat and the director. It reads:

To assure better cooperation between the one who is giving the Exercises and the one who receives them, and more beneficial results to both, it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to save the proposition of another than to condemn it as false. If he is unable to save the proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it, and if he understands it badly, it should be discussed with him with love. If this does not suffice, all appropriate means should be used so that, understanding his proposition rightly, he may save it.

This short paragraph has been put through many processes of translation. The original was in Ignatius’ rough local vernacular Spanish. It was rendered into Latin and into a more literary Spanish and eventually into numerous other languages, those more often translated from the Latin or from the more elegant Spanish than from the original. The paragraph scandalized many editors of the *Spiritual Exercises* to such an extent that it was left out of several editions, and when it was retained the final sentence was often translated to mean that the one giving the Exercises should argue the case with the exercitant so as to win the argument and make him abandon his proposition. Not so the original, in which Ignatius is still, even at that stage, arguing that he should be helped *to save* his proposition, not to abandon it.

You see the radicalism of this procedure. At one time I used to carry it about, copied out by hand in the original rough Spanish, as Ignatius wrote it, in a diary/date-book which I carried about in my pocket, until I ripped out the page to give it to a close associate of the great Lebanese Shi’ite Imam Musa al-Sadr, the Ghandi-like figure who had founded a Movement for the Dispossessed of all creeds in Lebanon and was most universal in his dialogue with all creeds, Christian and Muslim, an ever radical voice of peace. Musa, by the time I met his associates, holy man that he was, had already been “disappeared” in Colonel Khadafi’s Libya, surely killed, but his Shi’ite followers in Lebanon, used to the idea of vanishing Imams who would return,

sought in every way to plead with Libya for his release. I found that his spirit closely matched what I had learned from the Ignatian *Praesupponendum*.

You note that this is not simply a proposal of Christian charity in our discourse. It is a theory of knowledge, applicable to all, specific to the Christian only insofar as it is a practical living-out, in its openness to the other, of Christian faith. If I am to win all the arguments, know it all beforehand, my mind has already shut down. The proposition of the other, of course, refers to what is truly important in the other's perception, experience, conviction. It is not as if there were no truth criterion. If I am to learn, I must approach the other's proposition with openness. Winning an argument will get me nowhere and I will lose the light that the other's perception could give me. But the other will learn also, coming to an understanding of his own proposition that will enrich it and lead deeper into truth. I raise this matter often in connection with the quest for orthodoxy, faithfulness in teaching, but this is a very different concept of orthodoxy than being equipped with unshakeable certainties at every point.

I would say that I find, in this Presupposition to the Ignatian Exercises, the most Jesuit thing by which I would like to define myself. We Jesuits are often seen as people who win arguments, who have an answer to everything, whose objective is to turn people away from their own "propositions" to ours. But that is the very opposite to what Ignatius proposes here. There is a bit of the "Don't, please, turn me over to the Inquisition, at least until you've thought about this some more." But at its root there is a way of life.

Of course, in dealing directly with people engaged in conflict, we are confronted often with absolutes: the militant, encountering someone who treats him with respect, demands at once that we prove our respect for him and his faction by declaring our hatred of the other. We need never do that. In fact, if entering a relation to people in conflict, we declare ourselves partisans of one side, even if we may see clear violations of justice by one side (most often, though not to the same degree, by both!), we have become excess baggage. There are enough partisans already. No one needs more. That, as a principle, must apply at all levels of diplomacy.

As a way of conversing with those engaged in violent uprisings, and with those they see as their oppressors, this is fundamental. Both need to understand one another's thinking, both need to understand, recognize and respond to the grievance the other feels. This will likely be a lengthy process, marked by frequent denial.

That denial is rooted in questions of loyalty. A community in conflict with another has strong negative convictions about what must be thought of the other side. Failure to conform to this mandatory view of the others raises question of loyalty to one's own identity. Religious identity, of course, plays a role in this, and one to which powerful emotions are attached. The person who comes into actual contact with the others, or looks more deeply into the relation with

them, is likely to experience some cognitive dissonance, ideas which he feels it is wrong for him to feel. For the core militants in the community, the other is the definition of the enemy. But the representative, on one's own side, of doubts about the community's supposed core truths is more dangerous than the enemy himself. If one finds those doubts in oneself, it can be a tearing experience which one must resist and deny all the more vehemently. I'm sure I have seen instances of persons who put themselves at maximum risk and went to what were regarded as heroic deaths for the cause, but which were actually suicides to battle such doubts in themselves.

What can one do about such community-wide irrational convictions? The best solution is somehow to make it possible in the community to talk about these forbidden topics.

Psychiatrists are likely to be fearful of raising such questions in public in a community. Because of their knowledge of transference in cases of such challenge to deliberate denial, they prefer to hold all such encounters in a room, in which they can maintain control. It always has to be handled with delicacy, but there is really no alternative to bringing these things out in public for all to see. When that is accomplished, these same things, which have been the source of the greatest dangers, become the most important instruments of healing.

That brings us to where we need to go, to the Middle East.

Right now I see constant appeal to religion in the summonses to violence in our current world. Basically, it is about religion as token of identity, rather than about religion as a structure for communities of faith. Everyone is excited, of course, about ISIS, and Sunni-Shi'ite power rivalry. There are worries too about Russia and the Ukraine, with only vague and occasional acknowledgements of a religious background to this. The appeals to religion here, on the part of Russia or of Russian-speaking and Russian Orthodox Ukrainians are about territorial claims for an identity group. Faith is really no part of the conflict. Another arena of worry is the manifest antipathy of government in China to any kind of religion.

There is a vast amount of denial in the West – the Christian/post-Christian West – about the origins of this violence that so frightens people, a refusal to recognize the uncomfortable fact that it results from a couple of centuries of colonialism. When the imperial banners fell from the grasp of the British and French after the Second World War, they were picked up basically by the United States,⁹ whose custody of the Middle East has culminated recently in the devastation of Iraq and Afghanistan. ISIS is an effect of all this tremendous insult, understandable only as such. The fascination of ISIS with the ancient Caliphate is what has revived the Sunni-Shi'ite

⁹ The best account I know of this, from the pen of a Middle Easterner, is Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Beacon Press, Boston, 2004).

rivalry Much opinion in the Christian/post-Christian West seems to be that the right solution now is to hit them harder, not recognizing that this would simply serve the cause of recruitment for the forces we so fear.

The Russian moves that so disturb the West arise also from religious-identity clashes, religion still serving principally as a label for identities -- ethnic, regional, national -- rather than in any real connection with faith. So much seemed solved by the end of the Cold War, but the West followed a siren voice summoning it to push its own defensive alliances right up to the Russian border and claim all that new territory for the ideology of an unregulated free market. Actual faith seems to be making marked progress in China but the Chinese State, seeing these power encroachments elsewhere, looks at any kind of religion, even something as innocent as Falun Gong, as a potential power rival.

Over the past year I have been engaged, along with some friends, in an effort of bring a conference of the World Council of Churches to Iceland, a country which, like the other Scandinavian countries, has learned much about the making and keeping of peace, to consider the theology of a Just Peace, a contrast to the familiar Just War theory but one that looks not to whether a war can be justified but rather whether a war can be prevented. I wasn't at the 2012 World Conference of the WCC at Pusan/Busan, but I was in Jamaica for the widely attended conclusion, in 2011, of the Council's Decade to Overcome Violence. My feeling is that the wheels came off the WCC's peace efforts over the course of that decade.

It had seemed a very reasonable thing, in 2001, to declare that Decade to Overcome Violence, after a decade that had ended the Cold War, and had seen evidence of progress in South Africa, Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland, despite the tragedies of the Balkan countries and Rwanda,. But right away, before the year was out, we had the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center buildings in New York, and the whole climate for peace changed abruptly. It became instead a decade for the extirpation of evil and its *Leitmotif*, coming from the United States, was revenge.

I knew some of the planning for the Jamaica event, that people such as Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz¹⁰ were overruled, such valuable people as Andrew Bacevich¹¹ were not even invited, and that the tone of the conference was that the positive religious forces, such as WCC, were much more in charge than in fact they were. That may have been attractive before 9/11 but it had proven presumptuous then, and I felt that the WCC's formulae in Jamaica -- even with their four just-peace goals, included a lot of denial.

¹⁰ *America's Battle for God: A European Christian Looks at Civil Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

¹¹ , Ed., *The Long War. A New History of U.S. National Security Policy since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Right now I see so much appeal to religion in the summonses to violence in our current world. Basically, it is about religion as token of identity, rather than about religion as a structure for communities of faith. There is a vast amount of denial in the West – the Christian/post-Christian West – about origins of this violence that so frightens people, a refusal to recognize that it results from a couple of centuries of colonialism. Much opinion in the Christian/post-Christian West seems to be that the solution to ISIS is to hit them harder, not recognizing that this would simply be recruitment for the forces we so fear. Russian moves also arise from religious-identity clashes, religion still serving principally as a label for identities – ethnic, regional, national – rather than in any real connection with faith

I recently attended a meeting Boston College about the European Union’s rule of non-retaliation in economic matters. It was the very concept of non-retaliation that attracted me. The presenter described the rule as an anomalous one, on the basis that retaliation was of the very essence of diplomacy, and the discussion around the table turned to finding in what subtle ways retaliation could be brought back into this picture. I found myself at a loss in this discussion and explained that I work consistently with a very different sort of conflict, in which retaliation will be violent and the very thing we seek to eliminate or prevent. Paraphrasing the proposition as “Either you do what I wish, or I will hurt you,” I could not accept that this was a moral or acceptable solution to problems. I believe that applies to diplomacy at every level.

I’ve felt that the WCC agenda, at least what prevailed in Jamaica 2011, ignored these basic facts of life. I don’t know what they discussed at their meeting in Sweden last year. When I spoke, a year ago, to a conference that included all the out-groups from China – from territories like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao to Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongolians, to the whole spectrum of religions who are so excluded in China and the human rights activists, many of the lawyers – my basic advice was that they make themselves so useful/helpful to Chinese society that they could not be ignored or marginalized: Chinese government has itself become so conscious of the environmental threats to the planet that it would have to be grateful for their help in meeting that crisis.

And to conclude on that note: For all the religious and other stimuli to violence that we find in our world, this one monstrous problem hangs over us all, that since the beginning of our industrial era, we have been pouring so many green-house gasses into our atmosphere that we stand now at a moment of truth, in which the irrevocable warming of our planetary world may very soon render it radically uninhabitable. This is not a threat that comes from religion, but from simply greed. The extractive industries that fuel our factories and automobiles, and the energy-producing industries have produced such wealth as the world has never seen before, and the corporations that control them hire indiscriminately anyone who will give a patina of credibility to their denial that any such problem exists.

This is a justice question, as the entire generation of those now undergoing their higher education, those who are my students now, will be the first to be drastically affected by this degradation of the earth. Their own children will inherit a terribly depleted planet, and will live in an atmosphere of desperate wars over the supply of any kind of resources. If there is anything that deserves our full attention, it is this.

It may be that the very extremity of this situation, if we once recognize it and overcome our habits of denial, will help to solve some of our smaller problems, as there is no way we will deal with or contain this mega-menace unless we develop a culture of radical cooperation.