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Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective

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Religion is often held up as a vessel of peace, both inner and social. How, then, to understand its violent currents? Given an uneven trend over the centuries toward cultural pluralism and freedom, modern theorists optimistically concluded that religion would either decline in significance or become a pillar of universalistic culture promoting a veritable community of mankind. Thus, as a flash point for violence, religion scarcely warranted attention in the metanarratives of modernity. Yet such a reading of historical development is far too optimistic, as the events of September 11, 2001, all too vividly demonstrate.

A moment's reflection attests that religion and violence are often woven together in history's tapestries. Any number of religions have justified violence under certain circumstances, and others have become caught up in its processes. In the ancient world, Zoroastrianism transformed earlier combat myths into a theology of eternal apocalyptic struggle between good and evil (Cohn 1993: 114), and ancient Judaism forged a confederacy under conditions of war (Schluchter 1989: 185, 200). Early Christianity had its martyrs, and the medieval Roman church, its crusades and Inquisition. As for Islam, the close association between rulership and religion -- together with the principle of jihad (or holy war) as a vessel of reformation -- infuse politics with enduring potential for violence.

[Note: letters in Japanese words with a circonflexe should have a straight bar --long vowel sign -- over the letter instead of the circonflexe.]

To be sure, no modern religion promotes violence in its central tenants, and certain religions -- Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism -- leave little room for violence in either theology or practice. Moreover, modern social institutions diminish the power of religion by developing legal-rational frameworks legitimated only remotely by religion, if at all (Schluchter 1989: 235). But these developments cannot undermine the now incontrovertibly real connection between religion and violence.

Even the violence of modern movements toward the nation-state was interwoven with religious thread, whether in struggles of reformation and counter-reformation (England), or secularization that would eliminate religion (France, the Soviet Union). Religion also could facilitate colonizing expansion, frequently with violent consequences for the colonized. True, in core regions of the world economy, religiously framed conflicts became displaced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by social struggles that played out along class lines and, in the latter part of the twentieth, between superpowers. However, these conflicts themselves often had "religious" overtones. Historian E. P. Thompson showed how religion influenced nineteenth-century English class formation. And the central struggle of the post-World War II era -- the Cold War -- was frequently portrayed by its Western protagonists as a struggle of Christendom against godless Communism. From formative phases to high modernity, metanarratives of universalistic modernization, class struggle, and the geopolitics of the Cold War obscured these connections between religion and violence. But with the end of the Cold War and the surge of capitalist globalization in the 1990s, status conflicts supplanted class conflicts, and the potential of religion as a central organizing basis of violence became increasingly obvious, to both protagonists and scholars, and now, to the general public.

In short, religion and violence are hardly strangers. Yet neither are episodes in which they become connected all of a piece. The September 11 terrorist attacks; continuing struggles between Jews and Palestinians; the Troubles in Northern Ireland; the nationalist conflicts in the Balkans; ethnic wars in Africa; simmering conflict between Pakistan and India; terrorist actions by extreme right Christian fundamentalists in the U.S.; the subway poison gas attack by the Aum Shinrikyō sect in Tokyo; the deaths of hundreds in a burning church of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda; the persecution of Falun Gong in China -- this is but a cursory list of some of the most dramatic violent events involving religion at the turn from the modern era's second to its third millennium.

Modern social theory and research have not provided a ready-made basis for understanding these diverse phenomena in large part because connections

between religion and violence have been down played. Major synthetic accounts of religion, it is fair to say, de-emphasize violence. On the other side, until recently, scholars studying violence tended to ignore cultural dimensions altogether (Theda Skocpol on revolutions is an iconic case). However, there are considerable scholarly resources for exploring the manifold relationships between violence and religion, and it is now urgently important to map them in ways that encourage further inquiry. I proceed by: (1) surveying sociological approaches and theories of religion that inform the analysis of violence, and (2) proposing an exploratory typology that identifies multiple linkages of violence and religion -- on the one hand, within established social orders, and on the other, in relation to countercultural religious movements. To emphasize the variety of affinities and parallels, I invoke wide ranging historical and comparative examples. But the scholarship is extensive, and this survey is hardly comprehensive (for a bibliographical essay, see Candland 1992). My focus is on key theoretical arguments, cases, and comparisons.

CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE -- THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Four theoretical issues seem important: (1) the analytic stakes of defining violence; (2) theories of violence not centered on religion; (3) theories that treat violence as an intrinsic aspect of religion; and (4) theorizations of religion, social order, the state, and violence.

Defining Violence

Defining violence has long been a vexed problem, and it is only exacerbated for a culturally freighted phenomenon like religion. Conventional definitions center on the use of physical force to cause injury to persons and, sometimes, damage to property. These definitions pose neat objective standards, and they underscore the point that the exercise of force is not always violent. However, they do not hold up very well, either in objective terms, or when cultural issues are considered. After all, any number of intentional practices may result in physical injury, even in the absence of force, and we would be hard put not to think of them as violent. Poison gas and other chemical and biological weapons, for example, have their basis in physical processes, but their use does not involve force per se. And although a woman might seek to avoid physical injury during a rape, and a person might decide not to resist being kidnapped, we ought not conclude that rape and kidnapping are not violent acts. The poison-gas example suggests that force is not an intrinsic feature of violence, while the second two examples suggest that physical injuries are not its only consequences. These difficulties point to a deeper meaning -- captured in the third definition of the

verb “violate” in The New World Dictionary -- “to desecrate or profane (something sacred).” Thus the problem of symbolic violence arises, for what is considered sacred and who has a right to control speech concerning it are matters of cultural prescription. For example, people who declaim desecration of religious symbols would not think of owning a work of art that does so, yet this hardly lessens their sense of moral outrage. On a related front, when religious objects themselves are desecrated (as with the destruction of the 800-year-old Great Buddha statues of Bamiyan in 2001 by Afghanistan’s Islamic Taliban government), the act will have a cultural significance exceeding any damage to property.

The twin difficulties of defining violence thus concern (1) the limitations of an understanding keyed to force resulting in physical injury, and (2) the difficulty of acknowledging the symbolic dimension without privileging one or another ethnocentric or hegemonic definition. These challenges have led Mary Jackman (2001: 443) to formulate an expansive but culturally neutral definition. Violence, she argues, encompasses “actions that inflict, threaten, or cause injury.” Violent actions, she continues, may be “corporal, written, or verbal,” and the injuries may be “corporal, psychological, material, or social.” This definition undermines the conventional tendency to assume that violence is always deviant, and it emphasizes that violence takes many forms (ear-piercing, industrial accidents that could be avoided, individual harassment, group repression, as well as assault and murder). It also usefully recognizes that what people view as violence tends to be culturally freighted. In Western eyes, Chinese footbinding is far more likely to be construed as violent than American parents’ fitting out a child with dental braces.

These considerations are important for tackling the puzzle of religious violence. Jackman's definition does not assume either that physical violence is the only kind of violence, or that visible physical violence occurs in isolation, or even that the targets of violence are necessarily unwitting victims. Even self-inflicted acts can be construed as violent, from relatively minor forms of asceticism to suicide. As reporting in the wake of 9-11 unveils, some people may seek martyrdom.¹ It is also the case that extreme violence may come as an act of escalation in relation to other, less visible violence. In situations where individuals and groups have differential access to tools of violence, less powerful parties sometimes use extreme violence against more powerful (or better positioned) opponents who are themselves engaged in violent acts, just not necessarily ones that involve corporal injury. Put differently, dramatic public violence is sometimes an extreme variant of what James Scott (1985) calls “weapons of the weak.”

Two difficulties with Jackman’s broad definition, raised by Benjamin Zablocki (personal communication), are that the violence of verbal actions

may rest in the eye of the beholder, and that psychological and social injuries are likely to be matters of assertion and contestation. His solution is to treat violent actions as a subset of a larger panoply of antagonistic and aggressive actions.

In their central concerns, Jackman and Zablocki do not seem so far apart. Both emphasize that purely physical violence does not typically happen in isolation from other forms of aggression, and that various parties may lack equal capacities to exercise one or another kind of aggressive action. For the analysis of religion and violence, these considerations require us to locate extreme physical violence within the context of differential capacities of coercion, symbolic violence, and organized social repression. As Georges Sorel (1950) understood, an established social order marshals considerable capacities for the exercise of authority, force, and violence. On the other hand, opponents of the established order, Sorel argued, may try to shake the general public out of complacent conformity by violating the norms and laws that keep the peace. Violence, then, is a problem for some, a tool for others.

In matters of religion, there is considerable discussion concerning the character and significance of extreme violence. Mark Juergensmeyer (2000) argues that religious violence sometimes involves symbolic and performative pursuit of a war that cannot be won, in which defeat nevertheless is unthinkable. In a broader context, Brian Jenkins (1975: 1) argued that terrorism is violence for effect. But neither Juergensmeyer nor Jenkins suggests that symbolic violence is devoid of instrumental goals. As both Juergensmeyer and S.N. Eisenstadt (1999: 50) affirm, even purely symbolic violence may legitimate physical violence. And the effects of terrorism are not just symbolic. Rather, terrorist actions can play into larger dynamics in causally substantial ways. For instance, the absolute numbers of deaths in Ku Klux Klan lynchings, was small relative to the black population in the U.S. South, but lynchings gave white racists a potent device of social control (McVeigh 1999). In India, even seemingly spontaneous riots aid and abet a “rational” pogrom against a minority (Basu 1995). Terrorist acts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may fail to achieve any direct military objective but to date they have derailed the prospects of peace. And finally, the 9-11 terrorist attacks using planes as weapons targeted particular buildings (the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and, if the fourth plane had reached its target, the White House) as symbols of global capitalism and American geopolitical hegemony, but they killed thousands of innocent people, and provoked an extended military response. Any given act of violence may simultaneously have symbolic and other consequences.

General Theories of Conflict and Violence

In order to better understand the myriad relationships between religion and violence, it is important to try to distinguish between specifically religious violence and violence that may have religious dimensions, but can be better explained in other terms. The general analysis of violence falls within a larger domain of conflict studies, ranging in topic from interpersonal interaction, families, and small groups to large-scale rebellions, revolutions, and wars (Rex 1981). Sometimes violence -- for example, a kidnapping -- is inflicted on a victim who lacks any social connection to the perpetrator. More often, it is an escalation of conflict which, as Simmel (1995) emphasized, occurs within an ongoing social relationship. Thus, war is a condition in which antagonisms stemming from mutually irreconcilable objective interests come to a head. Building on Simmel, Coser (1956) pointed to the functional consequences: conflict can enhance in-group solidarity.

Though utilitarian, rational choice, and game theoretic approaches might seem far removed from Simmel and functionalism, Simmel's formal approach readily incorporates structuralist propositions (Hall 1999: 122-27), including utilitarian ones. James Rule (1988: 54) traces the latter approaches back to Hobbes, but notes that rational-action models typically do not explain the exogenous determinants of violence even if they show why people become involved in, or hold back from, violence once it starts. Concerning people's actions, game theory is useful for modeling dynamic processes (for a review, see Bennett 1987). Among many insights, it reveals a central irony: actors pursuing substantively rational strategies may become involved in scenarios with unintended consequences that fail to maximize their objectives. Thus, in religious arenas, a "deviance amplification model" describes a dialectical process that can tip over into unintended violence (Barkun 1997: 256-57). In this and other scenarios, as social psychologists have emphasized, conflict escalation -- and sometimes de-escalation and resolution -- are fueled by cognitive judgments and attributions of conflicting parties toward one another (Stroebe et al. 1988).

James Rule documents a rich history to explanations of civil violence, from Marx's class theory to Vilfredo Pareto's elite-circulation theory, to "irrationalist" theories of crowd behavior -- initiated by Tarde and LeBon at the turn of the twentieth century, influenced soon thereafter by currents of psychoanalytic thought, and carried forward during the heyday of modern American sociology both by mass-society theorists and by symbolic interactionists and other theorists of collective behavior. From the 1960s onward, Ted Gurr and other social scientists advanced a theory of "relative deprivation" based on a social psychological thesis that frustration leads to

aggression. But as Rule (1988: 223) observes, relative deprivation has proved more resilient as an interpretive precept than as explanatory theory.

The most important recent macro-level analysts of violence are Charles Tilly and other theorists of social movements, and Theda Skocpol (1979) and Jack Goldstone (1991) on revolution. Each explains large-scale violence on the basis of collective action mobilized in relation to shared interests, undertaken by rationally motivated actors who take advantage of strategic opportunities. Skocpol and Goldstone emphasize the structural conditions giving rise to action, while Tilly (1979) gives more attention to contingent conditions and opportunities, and describes forms of collective action such as French protests at the barricades as cultural “repertoires” that may not work as well in other societal contexts. With the “cultural turn,” a new wave of analysts has become interested in the role of ideology in mobilization and legitimation of social movements and revolutions. Here, religion is seen as important for its capacity to create a sense of divine destiny and forge solidarity across social cleavages (Goldstone 2001). In geopolitics, religion can be used to sanctify violence and to crystalize and legitimate what Huntington (1996) calls civilizational struggles, dangers of which, he argues, have now displaced the bipolar Cold-War conflict.²

General theories of violence suggest two points. First, some religious violence -- for example, the bombing of abortion clinics in the U.S. -- may be explicable in the same terms as non-religious violence (e.g., murder by the Unabomber). Second, religion can amplify violent processes that have their central causes elsewhere. This latter thesis has its uses and its limits. No doubt it applies to the Troubles in Northern Ireland and ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, but it is less useful for explaining the surge of religiously inspired fundamentalist revolutions and terrorist campaigns over the past quarter century. This limitation suggests that although general social theories of violence have begun to acknowledge the significance of religion, they have not centrally addressed religious meanings, and they have not gone far toward theorizing mechanisms involving religion.

The Violence of Religion

Is there, then, some intrinsic relationship between religion and violence? This question has been addressed by René Girard, Walter Burkert, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Georges Bataille, who developed their analyses in parallel during the 1960s. In essence, they took up the longstanding debates among structuralist, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic theories of religion that address the puzzle of sacrifice -- the ritualized taking of animal and human life (Hamerton-Kelly 1987; Bataille 1989). These debates connect back to Emile Durkheim’s (1995) more general theory that religion involves the practice of a community of believers who affirm both their idealized vision

of society and their own social relations through ritual action in relation to positive and negative cults of the sacred. As subsequent analysts have noted, in Durkheim's model, the sacralization of society delineates cultural boundaries of deviance and Otherness that continue to operate in more secularized social formations (Alexander 1988, 1992).

Keeping to the sphere of religion, the sacralization process described by Durkheim is open as to its contents, and thus, war and martyrdom potentially can become sacred duties. For instance, in Japanese samurai culture, the zen buddhist monk was idealized as a model for warrior asceticism and indifference to death (Bellah 1970: 90-92, 182; Aho 1981: chap. 7).

Beyond explaining the sacralization of violence, Durkheim's model of ritual offers a more general template for theorizing the fundamental embeddedness of violence in religion. René Girard's (1977) analysis has been particularly influential, for it can be applied both to sacrifice within a social group, and to a group's violence toward external opponents. Girard theorizes sacrifice as a resolution of the cycle of violence that stems from mimesis -- an imitative rivalry centered on desire for the objects that the Other values. A "surrogate victim" who stands in for wider ills, crimes, or malfeasance becomes the object of collective murder. Because the victim lacks effective defenders, the ritual killing requires no further retribution, and the cycle is brought to an end, while simultaneously achieving a goal of sanctification -- establishing the purity of the sacred in its positive aspects, and separating it from sacred evil, and from the profane. The ritual cleansing so widespread in religious ceremony originally takes the form of sacrifice that destroys a representative bearer of evil. In essence, the core ritual practice of religion is a process of scapegoating (Girard 1986).

Although Girard's model of sacrifice concerns mimetic competition within a shared domain, the scapegoating thesis broadens its applicability to individuals or groups that become stand-ins for both wider sins within a culture, as well as external threats. The former instance -- within a culture -- is exemplified in the ritualized mass-media scapegoating of Jim Jones in the wake of the murders and mass suicide that he and his Peoples Temple followers committed at Jonestown in 1978; Jones bore much sin of his own making, but the scapegoating loaded onto him blame for practices (for example, in politics, public relations, and social control) that were much more widely shared (Hall 1987: 294-311). As for the second possibility, of intercultural conflict, Girard's theory has been invoked in studies of nationalist struggles (Chidester 1991), ethnoreligious violence (Appleby 2000: 78-79), and religious terrorism (Juergensmeyer 2000: 168-69).

Girard meant his theory to apply to archaic religion. In turn, he argued, the crucifixion of Jesus exposed the mythic process of scapegoating, and

thus transformed human history by making it possible to reflexively critique the violence of scapegoating (Girard 1986: 205; cf. Williams 1975). The hope of Christocentric theories is that subsequent incidents of religious violence amount to historical remnants or resurgences of archaic religion. Yet this quasi-teleological view fails to square with recent critiques of modernization theories. As these critiques point out, there have been limits to the processes by which modern universalistic social institutions have displaced ones based on status honor. Thus, the salience of Girard's theory exceeds his theological frame. A theory of ritual offers a powerful basis for interpreting religiously charged violence -- from the highly symbolic but nonetheless physical violence of desecrating religious objects and shrines (and sometimes rebuilding on top of them, as the Spaniards did after the Reconquista in Andalusia) to "ethnic cleansing" (for debate and case studies centered on Girard, see Juergensmeyer 1992).

Theories that posit an essential or functional relationship between violence and religion are compelling in their parsimony. However, they must be approached with caution. Both Jackman's trans-cultural definition and game-theoretic analyses (e.g., Myerson 1991: 108-12) show that violence will take different forms according to the circumstances of its expression. Put differently, religious violence is embedded in moments of history and structures of culture. Under these circumstances, it seems inappropriate to embrace a single general theory linking religion and violence. Instead, the task is to theorize the possible institutional relations of religion to society, and explore alternative scenarios under which violence occurs.

Religion, the Social Order, and the State

It was Max Weber who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, most energetically mapped out an alternative to functionalist and essentialist accounts of religion -- by centering his analysis on how religion trafficks in the ultimate meaning of life. Yet he did not take ultimate meaning as a constant; to the contrary, Weber famously remarked, "'From what' and 'for what' one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, 'could be' redeemed, depended upon one's image of the world" (1946: 280). And despite his emphasis on meaning, Weber rejected idealist reductionism. For meanings to become salient to social action on a wide basis, they would have to become institutionally elaborated by religious virtuosi and other practitioners who operate within particular structures of social organization, and in social relationships with their audiences, typically drawn from some social strata more than others (Weber 1978: ch. 6). In turn, relatively bounded social strata take on the character of "status groups" that share a sense of honor and solidarity centered on a distinctive style of life --

nobilities that justify their positions in relation to lineage and tradition, workers who affirm the dignity of labor, and so on. Religious meaning thus can refine, consolidate, and sacralize status honor, thereby sharpening status-group alliances and boundaries (Weber 1978: 452, 932-33).

In order to theorize violence, it is important to consider relationships between a typical religious community and other religious communities, as well as with any secular or military power that claims political jurisdiction in the territory where the religious community exists. Interestingly, charisma blurs the relationships between religious community and political community. As Guenther Roth has noted, Weber “transferred the concept of the congregation or community [Gemeinde] from the religious to the political sphere and came to define it as the typical charismatic association” (1975: 151). This conceptual affinity extends to the military organization of patriarchal violence in the “men’s house,” for which Weber commented, “The communistic warrior is the perfect counterpart to the monk” (1978: 1153).

Weber analyzed relationships between religion and the political by identifying two kinds of domination: political domination by means of authority and “hierocratic coercion” -- a form of “psychic coercion” implemented by “distributing or denying religious benefits” (1978: 45). Thus, at the center of Weber’s sociology of domination there is (1) a recognition of continuities between religious and political organization, and (2) a specification of different sources of (and potential conflicts between) religious and political authority. Various possible relations thus obtain between secular powers and religion. When a hierocratic organization affirms a monopoly over religious practice within a given territory (approximating the “church” as an ideal type), it typically seeks to define the limits of political authority, either by subsuming it completely in theocracy (as the Taliban did in Afghanistan in the 1990s), or by legitimating secular rulers. At the other extreme, in caesaropapism, the state asserts legitimacy in non-religious terms, and on this basis, claims to exercise authority over the exercise of religion (Weber 1978: 1158-1211). Paradoxically, each of these resolutions yields a structurally similar situation in which the legitimacy of state power is cloaked in religion, and struggles against the state tend to become framed in sacred terms.

Over the course of modern Western development, there has been a general decline in church monopolies, coupled with development of religious pluralism and the rise of secular public culture. With secularization (however incomplete), the state has inherited the Durkheimian religious community’s function -- policing the boundaries that define legitimate religions -- while leaving room for pluralism within those boundaries. However, the consolidation of modern religious pluralism within nation-

states is precarious, as recent ethnoreligious conflicts, theocratic-national movements, and casaeropapist regulations of religion (especially in Communist states) attest. Moreover, any social order advantages certain social strata and subordinates others, and today, this occurs both within states and in the global spread of the world economy and modernity. The latter are often culturally marked by their Western provenance, and sometimes opposed by actors within alternative civilizational complexes, in particular, Islam (Huntington 1996). Thus, Osama bin Laden's al Qa'ida holds as a primary goal ridding Saudi Arabia of both its U.S. military presence and the particular Arab regime which that presence supports. Religions deal in ultimate meanings that bear a claim to exceed merely secular authority. Thus, they remain a potent basis for contesting political legitimacy both within and beyond nation-states, a point underscored by al Qa'ida's appeal to Muslims on the street.

Historically and today, religious movements that challenge a given social order sometimes arise on the basis of a shared commitment to ultimate values that links participants across social cleavages in a déclassé alliance. More typically, movements originate in social strata that are negatively privileged politically and economically, or socially ascendent but blocked from power.³ For either negatively privileged or excluded groups, religion represents a special case of status honor that, as Weber comments, is "nourished most easily on the belief that a special 'mission' is entrusted to them.... Their value is thus moved into something beyond themselves, into a 'task' placed before them by God" (1946: 276-77). Religion under Western monotheism, in Weber's account, develops a possibility of "holy war, i.e., a war in the name of god, for the special purpose of avenging a sacrilege." Weber argued that the connection of the holy war to salvation religion is "in general only a formal relation," and "even the formal orthodoxy of all these warrior religionists was often of dubious genuineness" (1978: 473-74).⁴

Not surprisingly, the idea of the holy war that Weber sketched has received considerable scholarly attention. One of the most significant theoretical refinements is James Aho's (1981) distinction between "immanentist-cosmological" versus "transcendent-historical" myths of holy war. In the first, warfare itself is a glorious ritualized exemplary activity that ought to symbolize the divine order; the latter myth underwrites a utilitarian pursuit of war as a means to fulfill a covenant with a deity. Important as this distinction is, actual instances of warrior ideology sometimes mix the two (Chidester 1991: ch. 5).

TOWARD A TYPOLOGY OF RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

On the face of it, theories of violence and religion do not yield any obvious grand synthetic model. In this circumstance, the task at hand is to identify alternative situational “cultural logics” by which religious violence manifests. Such an approach makes it possible to formulate generic ideal-types, while at the same time recognizing the historical circumstances and microcauses of any particular instance of violence (Hall 2000). It also acknowledges that any given religious phenomenon -- fundamentalism, for example -- may arise in different circumstances, and lead to (or defuse) different kinds of violence.

Given the complex possibilities, the delineation of types of violence associated with religion cannot follow any tidy expository sequence. However, the following discussion may be usefully divided by way of a fundamental distinction between normative ideological versus countercultural utopian violence (Mannheim 1937). In the first case, religious practices that may be described as violent within one or another definition are legitimated within a given social order, and the violence does not typically become a basis for condemning the religious organization in which it occurs; ideology either explains away violence or treats it as deviant aberration (such ideologically normalized violence occurs in much the same way within deviant religious groups that have their own institutionalized social orders). On the other hand, Mannheim emphasized, utopias should not be regarded as unworkable fantasies, but rather as projects that are unrealizable only so long as a given established social order is sustained. Compared to phenomena wholly within an institutionalized social order, countercultural utopian movements cannot be so neatly divided between the religious and the non-religious, for if a given movement proves viable, it brings to the fore questions of ultimate meaning, and is thus religiously tinged (Hall 1978). Thus, as Frederick Engels already acknowledged in the nineteenth century, revolutionary socialist movements often exhibit sectarian tendencies.

IDEOLOGICALLY NORMALIZED VIOLENCE WITHIN A SOCIAL ORDER

The kinds of violence associated with religion “within” a social order depend to a great extent on the particular social formation and its historical moment. An important contextual factors concerns whether there is a single established religion or religious pluralism.

Violence under Hierocratic Domination

The possibility of routine violence that is part and parcel of a religion’s practices has received only scattered attention -- most sustained in

assessments of accusations concerning religious movements labelled as “cults.” However, the issues bear a potentially wider salience. As Weber (1978: 54) observed, a religious organization that claims a monopoly on the control of religious benefits may thereby exert a kind of “psychic coercion.” In these terms, two aspects of hierocratic violence may be identified -- self-inflicted mortification and violence as a device of social control.

In the first place, people acting under a religious regimen may become willing to engage in self-inflicted violence (ascetic practices of fasting, self-flagellation, and so forth) in order to achieve religious benefits or fulfill religious values. Of course, most devotional acts are non-violent; they may even benefit the practitioner independent of any ultimate salvation prospects. However, sometimes acts in fulfillment of religious faith are violent. For example, Ronald Knox reports about medieval European Catharists committing suicide by fasting. Possibly believers wanted to avoid illness or senile decay that might yield death under the control of the alien force of Satan, or it may be that in preparation for death they sought to avoid soiling the body with food after purification (Knox 1950: 97). In contemporary times, parallel issues arise for Christian Scientists who refuse medical treatment for life-threatening but curable illnesses. On an entirely different basis, Buddhist monks engaged in self-immolation during the Vietnam War as testaments for peace. And from all we can glean, the 1997 collective suicide of Heaven’s Gate in Rancho Santa Fe, California, was freely chosen by its participants -- all adults -- who had spent years in perfectionist self-regulation to prepare to enter “the next evolutionary level above human.” For them, an apocalyptic narrative of escape animated a pseudo-mystical theology of transcendence through death (Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000: chap. 5).

The moral stakes of these examples differ dramatically. Any given instance of self-inflicted violence can be regarded as either a testament of ultimate commitment or a demonstration of how far a practitioner has fallen under the sway of psychic coercion. Thus, such practices raise the vexed question of whether individuals are freely exercising choice, or subjected to forces that they are more or less helpless to resist.

The latter trait marks the second aspect of hierocratic violence -- its use for social control. Within a given culture, hierocratic control tends to be normalized and naturalized unless it becomes extreme. The standard may be lower for a group considered deviant. Thus, corporal punishment used for “loving correction” of children in the Northeast Kingdom Community in Island Pond, Vermont during the 1980s provoked accusations of child abuse (Hall 1987: 125). More recently, the issue has received broad attention (Bartkowski 1995). Casting a wider warrant, critics of religious social movements have raised charges about deception, psychological manipula-

tion, and control of communal settlement boundaries. The critics argue that such groups control their members to the point where those members lose their will to resist participating. If such social control practices can be shown to eliminate individuals' normal exercise of will, social control becomes tantamount to violence -- certainly violation of individuals' rights. A similar issue arises with participants whose commitment to a religious organization begins to erode. If individuals hint at apostasy, they may be subjected to extreme psychological and social pressures to remain within the fold, and they may be physically restrained from leaving it. In turn, controversies about apostasy often have consequences for religious organizations themselves (Bromley 1998a).

Religious organizations have no monopoly on the uses of social control to maintain participants' commitment and solidarity (Hall 1987: 138-39). If social control under religious auspices differs from broader practices, it is because participants seek salvation, and thus may have heightened incentives to submit to hierocratic domination. In doing so, they can undergo "conversion" that normalizes hierocratic violence, rendering themselves accomplices in their own cultural domination. The study of hierocratic domination and violence is thus a vexed agenda in the sociology of religion in part because scholars disagree about the ontological relations between conversion, coercion, faith, and individual identity. In the debates of the past quarter century, cult opponents have often treated psychological coercion as an intrinsic and essential feature of "cults" (Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000: 10). Such a sweeping definitional thesis has not been sustained, however, since it fails to account for the large numbers of people who successfully depart supposedly tyrannical religious movements. Yet the limitations of a strong psychological-coercion thesis should not lead to the conclusion that hierocratic domination never involves coercion. Rather, two agendas ought to be pursued. First, there is a need for more nuanced, situationally detailed, and broadly comparative study of hierocratic domination, since techniques of social control are likely to vary according to the type of religious organization (Hall 1987: 138). Second, to date, the issue of psychological coercion has been addressed most vigorously in the research of religious-movement opponents. Here, culturally biased approaches that differentially focus on hierocratic violence in deviant religions while ignoring it within established religions need to be rectified by a comparative analysis of both (for diverse views on the issues, see Zablocki and Robbins 2001).

Competition between Religions

As Simmel observed, competition is an indirect form of conflict in which both parties seek the same prize (1955: 57). In the absence of church-like hegemony within a social order, sectarian factions within a religious

organization or heterodoxical religious groups may compete for converts, for control over organizational doctrines or resources, and for other advantages -- such as state recognition. A systematic causal analysis of religious conflict by Fred Kniss (1997) shows that, for American Mennonite communities, the outcomes of such conflicts are influenced especially by how defenders respond to challengers, and by third-party intervention. Much competition between religious groups is peaceful, and it unfolds within a larger frame of mutual respect and sometime cooperation. Yet in order to gain advantages, religious groups may be tempted both to increase hierocratic domination over followers (see above), and to exceed what competitors regard as fair practices. A sociological catalog of such episodes would be extensive, diverse, and revealing. In the West alone, it would include: factions among fifth-century Christians that sought to prevent opponents from venturing out of their monastic domains (Gregory 1979); skirmishes among rival Protestant groups during the English civil war; Protestant violence toward Catholics in the nineteenth-century United States; probably the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X after he broke with the Black Muslim movement and converted to orthodox Islam; and the gunfire exchanged by rival factions of the Branch Davidian sect, years before the shootout between the Branch Davidians and government agents (Pitts 1995: 376).

Though violence growing out of competition is unusual, when it becomes amplified on a large scale, it can organize broader social boundaries, and thus crystalize nationalist conflicts, anticolonial struggles for independence, or civil war (for instance, in contemporary conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria). When religious boundaries roughly align with boundaries between nation-states, religious competition may become the grist on which international conflict is ground (as in contemporary tensions between India and Pakistan).

Conversely, broader political events sometimes exacerbate religious competition to the point of violence. Thus, in the first century of the modern era, Zealots assassinated Jews in rival factions deemed insufficiently opposed to Roman rule (Lewy 1974: 80, 84), and in recent years, the Jewish-Palestinian conflict has led to violent actions of both Jewish and Palestinian fundamentalists against moderates in their own nations (Friedland and Hecht 1996). As Eisenstadt (1999: 102) notes, fundamentalist movements often encompass rival organizations. Under such conditions, violence can result from sectarian and schismatic competition for countercultural predominance that occurs in the context of broader counterhegemonic violence (discussed below).

Religion as an Organizing Aspect of State Domination and Colonization

A “colonial” logic consolidates internal or external territory for a state claiming monopolization of the legitimate use of force. Religion can become a tool of conquest, both through cultural hegemony, and more materially, by settling and organizing populations in a colonized territory. In some cases, as with the Cistercians’ medieval expansion into eastern Europe, the religion itself is a colonizing movement. At the extreme, in the Christian crusades, St. Bernard de Clairvaux promoted a fusion between military organization and religious order, arguing that a member of a crusading order “serves his own interest in dying, and Christ’s interest in killing!” The Crusades -- and especially the Iberian reconquista -- provided the original template for subsequent European colonization, according to the great nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke (Partner 1997: 160-61). In the beginning, Roman Catholicism sanctioned state violence, for example with the papal bulls that authorized Henry the Navigator to enslave peoples he encountered on his voyages “to convert and combat the infidel” (Houtart 1997: 2). This pattern continued in the Latin Americas. But with the papal bulls, religion became a subordinate partner. In the spread of the Portuguese and Spanish empires to the Americas, violence was the prerogative of the expansionary state, and conquest was first and foremost a military achievement. For its part, the Roman Catholic Church engaged in forced conversion and organization of indigenous populations through its networks of missions (Rivera 1992).

Even if religion is not directly involved in the exercise of violence to secure and control territory, to the degree that it sacralizes a political regime, it lends legitimacy to that regime and thus functionally supports regime violence. Tacit or explicit religious support of brutal regimes can be significant. The religious justification of slavery in the U.S. South during the nineteenth century is an obvious example, as are religious acquiescence to Hitler’s Germany, the United States’s prosecution of the Vietnam war, and the Argentine dictatorship in the twentieth century.

UTOPIA, HEGEMONY, AND VIOLENCE

Given that religions sometimes participate in or legitimate state violence, it is not surprising that religion also can be a significant force in counter-hegemonic conflict. There are many kinds of utopian religious movements, and the vast majority of groups do not become committed to violence unless they become objects of establishment repression, and for the most part, not even then. However, two countercultural orientations -- the mystical and the apocalyptic -- have distinctive potentials for grounding violence. Of the two, mysticism recently has underwritten hierocratic violence in the Solar

Temple and Heaven's Gate by producing a metaphysical understanding of death as transcendence through suicide (Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000). In other cases, mysticism is invoked in counter-hegemonic movements to promote an aura of invincibility, as with the proclamation of participants' immunity from the effects of the colonizers' bullets during the Mau Mau rebellion.

However, the apocalyptic orientation is far more broadly significant. Its temporal structure posits a final battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil -- a conflict that leads to the destruction of the existing temporal order and the arrival of a new "timeless" era of "heaven on earth." Ideal typically, there are three significant social orientations toward apocalyptic time. A post-apocalyptic orientation posits that a pacifistic other-worldly sect has somehow "escaped" the apocalypse transpiring in the wider world, typically by decamping to a refuge "beyond" the apocalypse (Hall 1978: 68-79; cf. Lanternari 1963: 314). On the other hand, in a pre-apocalyptic movement, life unfolds in historical time either leading up to, or in, the throes of apocalyptic struggle. Relatively peaceable conversionist sects (especially active within Christianity) have used millennialist motifs to recruit new members before the second coming of Christ. Conversely, pre-apocalyptic warring sects see themselves as agents of apocalyptic history battling to defeat the forces of evil. As I have described this latter type of group,

the sectarian mission involves a struggle with opposing forces in historical time. A band of true believers, who become certified as charismatic warriors through a process of rebirth, acts alone or in concert with a wider underground network of sympathizers and similar bands. These warriors engage in the moment-to-moment coordination of guerilla-style action in pursuit of strategic, symbolic, and terrorist missions. The members of the sect come out of the quiescent masses to act in historical significance far out of proportion to their actual numbers. ... [T]he successful execution of actions related to missions and contingency plans depends on interpersonal trust, the development of high proficiency at various technical and strategic skills, and acts of commitment and bravery which place mission ahead of personal survival (Hall 1978: 206-7; cf. Wilson 1973: 23).

Such groups invoke a value commitment to what Weber called an "ethic of ultimate ends" -- a refusal to sully commitment to a transcendent value by brooking any sort of "political" compromise. This is the essence of the holy war described by Weber (1978: 473-74), recently identified by Mark Juergensmeyer (2000: ch. 8) as a central theme of religious terrorism in what he calls "cosmic war."

The missions carried out by militant warring sects are often dramatic, but as the 9-11 attacks make all too evident, it would be a mistake to regard them merely as isolated aberrations. To the contrary, when warring sects arise, it is almost always in the context of wider countercultural ferment, often in relation to social conditions construed within some social strata as constituting a crisis of legitimacy for an existing social order (Lanternari 1963; Wilson 1973; Hall 1978). Yet the cause pursued via apocalyptic war is historically mercurial: at one point it may reflect the assertion of manifest destiny by a rising social stratum, at another, the attempt to salvage honor by a stratum in decline. Whatever the cause, warring sects pursuing violence as the basis for social reconstruction typically are simply the most extreme groups within a broader countercultural milieu. Historically, such groups have ranged in scale from small bands of committed guerrillas to complex, far-flung terrorist organizations and even small armies. Although occasionally the causes embraced by warring sects are centrally religious, more often religious language and organization animate broader nationalist, anticolonial, and revolutionary class movements. As for outcomes, some movements are completely overwhelmed by superior force; others respond to such circumstances with martyrdom and collective suicide. And some movements have far-reaching historical consequences.

Nationalism, Rebellion, and Revolution

Recently, Eisenstadt (1999: 150-52) described modern “Jacobin” political ideologies that seek a total revolutionary transformation of society. Their roots are to be found, Eisenstadt suggests, in earlier monotheistic religions and millenarian movements in conflict with society-at-large. Indeed, there are intimations of a revolutionary impulse to make the world anew to be found in a variety of premodern religious movements, although there are also notable exceptions to Eisenstadt’s monotheism thesis, for example, among the numerous syncretic religious sectarian rebellions in ancient China (Lewy 1974: 60-69). Even here, however, the cult of the emperor constituted a de facto casaeropapist monotheism (Weber 1978: 1208). In other cases, the monotheistic thesis is more easily established. The ancient Jews reacted to first Persian and later Roman colonization in various sectarian movements, for instance, the revolt of the Maccabees (175-164 B.C.E.), and the struggles of the Zealots (Lewy 1974: 70-86).

W. H. C. Frend, the religious historian, has argued that martyrdom is one continuity that binds the New Testament to the Old. But motifs of martyrdom shifted in their meanings for the early Christians. Under both the old and the new covenant, believers would embrace death rather than forsake their religion. But whereas Jews regarded their acts as a testament to their faith, after Jesus’s crucifixion, some Christians came to believe that their

martyrdom might actually quicken the coming of the apocalypse that would establish the kingdom of God on earth (Frend 1967; Hall 1987: 296-98). Nor was martyrdom simply an individual act; instead, as Riddle (1931) demonstrated, early Christian martyrdom was collectively organized through techniques of socialization and social control. Much the same techniques as those catalogued by Riddle obtain today in the training of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists.

Because Christians did not treat their religion as limited by ethnicity or nation, monotheistic war escaped the box of tribe and nation. Ronald Knox (1950: 61-63) notes that the Circumcissiones of the fourth century, who practiced martyr-suicide, could be construed as revolutionary Africans opposing domination by Rome. And as Norman Cohn (1970) shows, a direct lineage connects early Christian apocalypticism to the sometimes violent religious movements of the Middle Ages in Europe -- from the Crusades to the self-flagellants of Thuringia to the sixteenth century peasants' movement around Thomas Müntzer. For Frederick Engels (1964), the religious wars of the sixteenth century embodied a revolutionary class consciousness. Others, such as Walzer (1965) and Lewy (1974) reject any reductive class thesis, but nevertheless recognize that religious movements such as the fifteenth-century Bohemian Taborite uprising and Reformation movements such as England's Fifth Monarchy Men were complexly connected with revolutionary transformations of Europe.

In Lewis Namier's pithy formulation, religion is a sixteenth-century word for nationalism. Social scientists may be tempted to try to disentangle European nationalism from religion. However, Eisenstadt (1999: 46) argues that it was the specific combination of class and religious intellectuals and their sectarian movements that propelled various European revolutions toward modernity. The Fifth Monarchy Men anticipated the secular Jacobin totalistic urge of the French revolution to make the world anew, according to a utopian plan. In turn, Karl Marx's theory of revolutionary transformation toward communism consolidated secularized apocalyptic struggle as a dominant motif of the modern era.

Religious Responses to Colonialism

Obviously, not all modern and postmodern revolutionary movements have been secular. Quite to the contrary, religion sometimes animated "archaic" prophetic movements during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hobsbawm 1959). In some cases -- such as Tai Ping in China (Boardman, 1962; Spence, 1996) and Ch'ondogyo (the Religion of the Heavenly Way) in Korea (Weems 1964) -- nationalist and anticolonial politics grew out of a this-worldly millenarian religious movement aimed at the rectification of colonialism and economic domination. In the face of such examples, Bryan

Wilson nevertheless argues that violent opposition to colonialism typically has had little to do with religion *per se*, even if religious calls for supernatural aid are sometimes invoked and militant political movements sometimes use religious movements as organizing venues, for example, in the Jamaica Ras Tafari movement of the 1960s. However, he acknowledges that occasionally resistance becomes organized through prophetic charismatic leadership under fundamentally religious auspices (1973: 68, 222, 228, 234-36, 258).

Both Wilson and Vittorio Lanternari identify a variety of tendencies among what Lanternari called “religions of the oppressed.” Faced with military defeat, some anticolonial movements -- such as the indigenous American Ghost Dance religion -- consolidated a redemptive cultural heritage (occasionally mixed with religious motifs of the colonizers). Others, more firmly under colonial administration, have sought this-worldly redemption -- in escape to a promised land (the Ras Tafari movement), or the anticipation of a new era of abundant wealth (Melanesian cargo cults). Elsewhere, mystical and apocalyptic motifs of armed struggle infused messianic movements such as the Joazeiro movement in early-twentieth century Brazil and the Mau Mau rebellion in sub-Saharan Africa (Lanternari 1963; Wilson 1973: chaps. 8, 9). As Michael Adas (1979: 184-85) observes, not just the poorly educated and dispossessed participate; rather, a millenarian leader sometimes transcends differences of social status and mobilizes a specifically anticolonial rebellion.

The significance of religion is highly variable. In the Lord’s Resistance Army operating in northern Kenya and the southern Sudan beginning in the 1990s, charismatic warriors seemingly lack any agenda beyond obtaining the spoils of war through brutality. On occasion, however, religion underwrites a broad nationalist movement. For example, in the struggles for India’s independence, tensions between Hindu and secular nationalism were never fully resolved (Lewy 1974: 277-323). Today, this religious ambiguity remains a flash point for secular-religious tensions, Hindu-Muslim conflicts (Kakar 1996), and Sikh ethnic mobilization (Juergensmeyer 2000, chap. 5) -- all within India, and conflict between Hindu-dominated India and Muslim Pakistan, itself exacerbated in the wake of 9-11.

Sometimes religion is more than shallow pretext or deep ideology. As Kakar (1996) demonstrates for south India, it can not only manipulate cultural symbols, but also construct communal and personal identities. Moreover, the involvement of Buddhist monks in militant politics in Sri Lanka shows that religions sometimes provide concrete organizational resources and personnel for broader movements that employ violence (Tambiah 1992). And even where such direct connections are absent, religion is a source of potent cultural material for repertoires of collective

action. As Esherick (1987) argues for the Boxer rebellion, anti-Christian rituals drew on a habitus of rituals and narratives rooted in shamanistic practices widely understood within Chinese peasant society.

Perhaps religious violence is a bridge that traverses modernity. In contrast to Jacobin utopian movements, Eisenstadt regards “national-communal” movements as less fully modern because of their emphasis on putatively primordial ties of solidarity, which yield a reactionary rather than a utopian program (1999: 116). However, communalist nationalist violence has increased after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The reasons for this development are complex. Juergensmeyer (2000: 227) suggests that a “political form of postmodernism” creates a crisis of “secular nationalism” and uncertainty concerning “what constitutes a valid basis for national identity.” In a similar vein, James Aho argues that the postmodern theorization of social constructions as illusory comes head up against fundamentalist quests for certainty in uncertain times. The result is nothing less than the “apocalypse of modernity” (1997).

Countercultural Religious War

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century messianic movements against colonialism usually were overwhelmed militarily. By the latter half of the twentieth century, however, strategic and symbolic violence by so-called religious fundamentalists became a force of substantial significance. Eisenstadt (1999) holds that religious fundamentalism may seem reactionary, but is thoroughly modern not only in its techniques and strategies, but in its assertion of a Jacobin utopian impulse to remake the social world via transformation of the political center. In theoretical terms, both Jacobinist and fundamentalist movements can be located within the broader domain of the apocalyptic utopian conviction that the old order will be transcended through a decisive struggle of the “warring sect” against the putative forces of evil (Hall 1978). Often, warring sectarians participate in and feed back upon a broader movement, which inspires particular groups to take action in fulfillment of utopian doctrines.

The first major harbinger of apocalyptic war as a serious possibility in the contemporary era came in Japan, where the sect Aum Shinrikyō developed an apocalyptic ideology within a quasi-buddhist framework. Rank-and-file members knew only that by learning buddhist self-discipline they were preparing to survive an apocalyptic onslaught, but the inner circle of the movement developed chemical weapons as a basis for waging apocalyptic war, and used them in a poison-gas attack on the Tokyo subway system on March 20, 1995 (Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000; Reader 2000). Nor has the West immune been completely immune from internal movements. In the United States, a militant, racist, right-wing Christian

countercultural milieu yielded a number of paramilitary groups, several of which participated in robbery, arson, murder, and armed skirmishes and standoffs with authorities (Aho 1990; Barkun 1997). Also in the United States, moral opposition to abortion diffused a dualistic vision within a wider movement that inspired a small number of individuals to engage in coordinated bombings of abortion clinics and assassinations of abortion providers (Blanchard and Prewitt 1993). Here, as with terrorism more generally, violence had both a symbolic effect and a dampening effect (Joffe 1995). In the wake of 9-11, however, such tactics will delegitimize their perpetrators outside a very narrow counterculture, at least in the near term.

Today, apocalyptic religious war has taken center stage, in a situation presciently described by German social critic Walter Benjamin when he noted how an historical moment can be shot through with “chips of messianic time.” Warring sects active in the Islamic fundamentalist milieu now invoke the long established Islamic repertoire of holy war, or jihad. Historically, these struggles have typically been directed at national powers (see, e.g., the analysis by Waterbury 1970). But in the past three decades, Islamic fundamentalism has increasingly become the vehicle of a transnational, pan-Arab, and now even broader mobilization against the West and especially the United States. Its most organized warring sect today, al Qa’ida organized by Osama bin Laden, draws together terrorist cells operating in dozens of countries, from the Philippines to the Maghreb, and on to Germany, France, and the U.S. Through terrorist action without precedent, they have worked to precipitate a struggle between the modernity initiated by Western Christendom and an alternative, utopian fundamentalist version of Islam.⁵

Conflicts with Countercultural Religious Movements.

Warring sects range from small groups engaged in largely symbolic conflict, to violent but ineffectual ones, and on to highly organized armed militaristic cadre that operate effectively on a national or international scale, surviving with support from background sponsoring groups or extensive secondary networks. Sometimes, a strategy of repression is undertaken toward countercultural groups even in the absence of any violence, when such groups are defined by moral entrepreneurs of the established order as outside the boundaries of societal moral legitimacy. In other cases -- rare, but paramount now -- the call to war is heeded on both sides of the apocalyptic divide. In either case, when opponents act to counter an apocalyptic sect, this response is invoked by the sectarians to legitimate their apocalyptic ideology among a broader countercultural audience.

Two subtypes mark a continuum of responses to countercultural sects. First, private individuals and groups may take repressive actions against

religious movements into their own hands, without state or religious sanction, but as moral entrepreneurs for the established cultural order. Second, there are full-scale public campaigns of religious repression, persecution, or even war, organized either by a hegemonic religion against what is defined as heresy, or, in cases where states have assumed de facto authority for legitimation of religion or where a movement threatens state power, by one or more states themselves.

At the ad hoc end of the continuum, distraught family members sometimes forcibly seek to prevent relatives from associating with a particular religion, or they may use violent non-legitimate force to retrieve a relative from a religious organization. On occasion, internal family conflicts have led to violence, as when the husband of a nineteenth-century Bishop Hill woman murdered the sect's leader, Eric Janson (Hall 1988). In other cases, ad hoc action becomes more organized. In the "anti-cult" movements that developed in the United States and Europe in the wake of the countercultural religious ferment that began in the 1960s, family opponents often formed loose alliances, sometimes aided by a broader coalition of "cultural opponents." These anticult counter-movements operated within varying national cultural traditions concerning religious freedom, and some groups eschewed violence in favor of conflict mediation. However, the most militant anticult activists facilitated the kidnapping of sect members and forcible "deprogramming," in which sect members were subjected to re-education until they recanted their sectarian beliefs (Bromley and Richardson 1982; Bromley 1998b).

At the extreme, cultural opponents engage in direct campaigns of intimidation and violence against religious movements. An iconic case concerns the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints in the United States during the nineteenth century: not only were Mormons forcibly driven from certain states; in June of 1844, an angry mob broke into a jail in Carthage, Illinois, and lynched their leader, Joseph Smith. To only mention another example, Jehovah's Witnesses found themselves subject to similar albeit less extreme intimidations when their patriotism was questioned during World War II (Peters 2000).

At the opposite end of the continuum, public campaigns by established religions and states against religions deemed non-legitimate are diverse. They range from subjugation of Jews and repression of Christianity in the Roman Empire, to the Church of Rome's campaigns against sectarian heresy and witchcraft in the middle ages (and French King Philip the Fair's pogrom against the Knights Templar), Soviet suppression of religion, and the contemporary campaign of the People's Republic of China against the Falun Gong sect (for one review of contemporary international issues, see Hackett et al. 2000). Most recently, in the initial days after September 11,

U.S. President George W. Bush -- in a telling but quickly recanted choice of words -- called for a “crusade” against Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda movement and terrorism in general (in a similar vein, the military operation was initially named “Infinite Justice”).

The comparative research on such developments remains spotty. One line of inquiry traces how deviants or scapegoats become framed as the Other. An important historical study, Norman Cohn’s Europe’s Inner Demons (1975), traces the diffusion of speculations about secret practices of cannibalistic infanticide -- anxieties that fueled institutionally sanctioned campaigns of persecution from the Roman Empire through the seventeenth century. Researchers similarly have explored community accusations of witchcraft raised against individuals (e.g., Thomas 1971; Erikson 1966). Such campaigns of repression are subject to Durkheimian functionalist analysis of how social control contains anxiety and enhances dominant group solidarity (Klaits 1985).

Explanatory attention also has been directed to explaining the conditions under which repressive campaigns become unleashed; Behringer (1997), for example, argues that in Bavaria during the late sixteenth century, witchcraft purges came to a head during agricultural crises. In such circumstances, repression might occur even against a powerless religious movement or person, in order to reinforce general norms of cultural conformity. But other countercultural religious movements are harbingers of broad sociocultural change, and as Michael Adas (1979: chap. 5) argues, efforts at repression can badly backfire, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of a countercultural movement, channeling secondary mobilization of resources and followers to its cause, and undermining the capacity of an established order’s organizations to sustain their institutional dominance. This is the substantial risk of the current “war against terrorism”: that the coalition’s strategy will do nothing to change the conditions that spawn terrorism, and to the contrary, will further alienate and embolden Muslims already of a fundamentalist bent, inspiring further jihad against the West. The result could be a destabilization of states -- from the Philippines and Indonesia to Nigeria, and thus, an even further erosion of the established world order.

Violent Countercultural Responses to “Persecution” and Defeat.

How do non-legitimated religious movements respond to perceived repression? One outcome, historically important, has been the success of an insurgent religious movement to the point of either forcing a shift to religious pluralism or even achieving hegemony itself. A second alternative, which occurs when either success or survival in the country of origin seems unlikely, is collective religious migration. From the ancient Jews to

medieval heretics, European Protestants coming to North America, nineteenth-century Mormons migrating to Utah, Peoples Temple abandoning San Francisco for the jungle paradise of Jonestown, Guyana, the formula is similar: a group seeks to escape what its participants deem persecution by finding a region of refuge, a promised land, a Zion in the wilderness.

In the wake of the 1978 murders and mass suicide by Jim Jones's followers at Jonestown, a third long-standing possibility gained renewed attention. Conflict between opponents within an established order and a countercultural religious movement can follow a dialectic of escalation that leads to extreme violence (Hall 1987: chap. 9-11). As Robbins (1986) argues for Russian Old Believers in the seventeenth century, when a group of true believers finds itself the object of repression by a much more powerful adversary to the point where their survival as a meaningful religious movement is placed in doubt, they may choose collective martyrdom rather than defeat.

Under conditions of modern societal institutionalization (i.e., of the state, religion, and mass media), it is possible to specify a general model of collective martyrdom (Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000). Of course participants in a warring sect already subscribe to a stark ethic that settles for nothing less than victory or martyrdom. But this ethic can also develop within groups under the sway of a less militant, more other-worldly, apocalyptic worldview. In such cases, the apocalyptic character of the group does not in itself explain extreme violence. Rather, violence grows out of escalating social confrontations between, on the one hand, an apocalyptic sectarian movement and, on the other, ideological proponents of an established social order who seek to control "cults" through emergent, loosely institutionalized oppositional alliances, typically crystallized by cultural opponents (especially apostates and distraught relatives of members). Whether the social conflict has violent consequences depends on the degree to which cultural opponents succeed in mobilizing public institutional allies, namely, news reporters and modern governments or their representatives. If opponents credibly threaten or inflict social injury, other conditions being equal, the likelihood increases that there will be a response of violence on the part of movement operatives toward those opponents, followed by a collective suicide that believers take to affirm the collective honor of their sect through its refusal to submit to a more powerful external authority.

Some scholars (e.g., Robbins and Anthony 1995; Robbins 1997) suggest that internal factors -- such as an aging or diseased leader -- can set a religious movement on a path toward martyrdom. No doubt the Hall-Schuyler-Trinh model detailed in ApocalypseObserved is best treated as a

heuristic to be used in comparative analysis. It provides a robust explanation of certain recent cases of violent confrontation -- notably Jonestown and the conflagration in which Branch Davidians died near Waco, Texas. But as Apocalypse Observed shows, the generic scenario can be altered by situational factors (e.g., cultural meanings of suicide in Japan for Aum Shinrikyô or the permeation of apocalyptic theology with mystical elements in the Solar Temple in Switzerland and France).

Before 9-11, incidents of collective martyrdom mostly seemed isolated and bizarre. Yet even before "everything changed," comparative historical analysis suggested a different view. Collective martyrdom is usually the violent edge of a much broader apocalyptic movement that realigns cultural frameworks of meaning. Authorities may respond to apocalyptic violence by tracking down and neutralizing its perpetrators, and by increasing vigilance against terrorist acts. A policy of preemptive repression may justify state actions against groups deemed potentially dangerous, prior to any concrete acts of violence. But incidents of martyrdom and repressive violence encourage a sense of solidarity among even disparate countercultural movements, and loom large in the public imagination, thus fueling a generalized culture of apocalyptic preoccupation (Wilson 1973: 67-68; Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000). In November, 2001, the dénouement of the present apocalyptic moment remains unwritten.

CONCLUSION

Theories that point to sacrifice as primordially embedded in practices of ritual suggest a deep connection between religion and violence, and interpreting violence as sacralized action thus sheds light on the symbolic structures of conflicts. However, this model does not exhaust relationships between religion and violence, nor does it explain the different types of situations in which religion and violence are connected. Sometimes, religion seems epiphenomenal: it is an ideology that gets invoked, or a social cleavage along which other struggles become mapped. Conversely, even when violence occurs completely within the frame of religion, its explanation may lie elsewhere. There is no firewall between religion and other social phenomena, and many social situations that lead to violence -- efforts to control people, for instance -- occur both inside and outside of religion. Nonetheless, in various strands of historical development, religion is more than symbolic currency, more than epiphenomena, more than merely a venue of violence; it becomes a vehicle for the expression of deeply and widely held social aspirations -- of nationalism, anticolonialism, or civilizational struggle.

Both the varieties of insights produced through different analytic approaches as well as the variety of empirical relations between violence and

religion should warn against seeking a single general theory. Nevertheless, and even if some religious violence has a decidedly symbolic cast, the diverse (and often overlapping) kinds of violence seem for the most part occasioned by a rather narrow set of specifiable substantive interests:

- Maintenance and expansion of religious commitment (through social control, conversions, competition with other religious organizations, colonial expansion, and repression of deviant movements);
- Affirmation of religious beliefs through culturally normative (routine) practices of violence;
- Struggles for independence from the regime of an established social order by nationalist, anticolonial, or other countercultural movements; and,
- Countercultural martyrdom under conditions of apocalyptic war, “persecution,” and/or defeat.

To date, the study of violence and religion has been strikingly uneven. There have been many good case studies, as well as important comparative and general investigations. Yet our understandings of social processes involving religion in violence remain rudimentary. The explanation for this state of scholarship lies, I suspect, in (1) the complex ties between violence and religion, (2) the variety of value-based, theoretical, and methodological approaches to research, and (3) the often liminal and non-rationalized character of religious violence. The study of religion, like history, tends to become located within one or another morally inscribed metanarrative. Hierocratic domination receives more attention in countercultural religions than established one. Religious persecution receives more attention when it happens in other countries. And religious wars of independence look quite different depending on who is seeking liberation, and from what. Yet the relationships of religion to processes of violence have become the focus of wide attention at a time when sociologists are well positioned theoretically and methodologically to analyze them. By going beyond conventional moral categorizations of religious phenomena and working to identify relevant analogies between social processes even in disparate cases (Stinchcombe 1978), we can make significant advances in understanding processes that link religious phenomena, conditions that give rise to violence, generic processes by which it is organized, trajectories that tend to lead to escalation, and outcomes. Understanding violence in the context of religion in turn may hold some promise for reducing its likelihood. Thus, studies of recent apocalyptic standoffs and mass suicides (Wagner-Pacifici 2000; Hall, Schuyler, and Trinh 2000; Wessinger 2000) have the potential to sensitize various actors to the potential ramifications of alternative courses of action,

both in standoffs themselves, and in more macro-social phenomena that take similar forms.

Specifically addressing such larger scale, more diffuse, and more enduring conflicts, writing before September 11, 2001, both Scott Appleby and Mark Juergensmeyer assessed the prospects for ending religious violence. But their approaches were different. Appleby wrote that religion can be a transformative force toward peace as well as war (2000; cf. Gopin 2000). He acknowledged that structural economic and social conditions can be the spawning grounds of religiously tinged violence, but promoted religious pluralism, ecumenicism, and dialogue in relation to “the politics of forgiveness” and “conflict transformation,” even across cultural divides pitted with mistrust and violence. On the other hand, Juergensmeyer (2000: 229-43) described a range of possible outcomes to struggles involving “religious terrorists”: either terrorism is defeated militarily or through repression, or terrorist movements gain sufficient political leverage to force a negotiated settlement. In the longer term, he argued, it would be helpful to disentangle religion from politics, and even, to use religion to provide a moral compass that would defuse conflict.

Of the two, Appleby is more the optimist seeking a realistic basis for hope, Juergensmeyer, the cautiously optimistic realist. The present survey, completed shortly after September 11, 2001, warrants a fusion of the two. Even when violence is “internal” to religion, it is subject to the same forces that operate more widely -- competition, social control, rebellion, and revolution. And religiously infused violence is often externally connected to broader social conflicts. Precisely because of religion’s capacity to mark the socially sacred, social struggles that become sacralized continue to implicate religion in violence, and in ways that make the violence much more intractable. To sever this connection between religion and violence is an important yet utopian goal that will depend on promoting peace with justice. More modestly, sociological studies of religion should develop reflexive knowledge that can help alter the channels and trajectories of violence, and thus, mitigate its tragic effects. These are both tasks worth our intellectual energies and our social commitment.

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Notes

1. On this point, see, for example, Joseph Lelyveld, "all suicide bombers are not alike," New York Times Magazine, 28 October 2001, pp. 48-53, 62, 78-79.
2. Huntington's analysis has been criticized as overly simplified and dualistic; his defense after 9-11 has been to point to al Qa'ida as one of competing groups seeking to prevail within Islamic civilization, in its case, precisely to precipitate civilizational struggle. See Nathan Gardels's interview with Huntington, in Global Viewpoint, October 22, 2001.
3. Sometimes, a wider déclassé alliance is led by a blocked elite. Al Qa'ida's movement would seem to demonstrate this possibility. Those identified as 9-11 terrorists and key participants in al Qa'ida are almost all well educated, and some of them, notably Osama bin Laden, quite wealthy. Despite their relatively privileged social origins, they have demonstrated a capacity to appeal to a much wider audience of Islamic fundamentalists, many of them desperately poor, and living at the margins of the globalizing world economy.
4. If so, the Taliban - al Qa'ida alliance would seem to be an important exception, for theocracy is central to the Taliban regime, and al Qa'ida's terrorist training camps have drawn their recruits from madrassahs, or Muslim religious schools.
5. For a journalistic report on Osama bin Laden's group prior to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the U.S., see the three-part series in the New York Times (January 14, 15, and 16, 2001). As Martin Riesebrodt points out, Islamic fundamentalism shares the typical features of fundamentalism more broadly -- patriarchy, gender dualism, and pietism; however, all Islamic religion is hardly fundamentalistic, and thus, Riesebrodt questions the Huntington clash-of-civilizations analysis (lecture, University of California - Davis Center for History, Society, and Culture, 18 October 2001).