RELIGION. PEACE. PARADOX?

by

SARAH ASHLEY D’ANDREA

(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

In a time when religious conflict is on the rise, this thesis will explore general themes of religion, peace and conflict. In 1968, the year considered the beginning of modern international terrorism, there was no religious terrorist group operating among the terrorist organizations. By 1996, twenty-five of the fifty-eight terrorist organizations were religiously based. Religion lies at the heart of this quandary, but can it also be the cure? Most faith traditions advocate for love, compassion, and humility. How does religion go so wrong and how can we use it to fix the problem it has been accused of creating? Examining the world’s religions, interfaith models, and successful advocates for peace provides potential solutions to this very question.

INDEX WORDS: Religion, Peace, Conflict, Terrorism, Fundamentalism, Inter-religious Dialogue
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All the social sciences suffer from the notion that to have named something is to have understood it, but nowhere is this more true than in the comparative study of religion. There, the overvaluation of classificatory modes of thought, the pigeonhole disease, has grown to such alarming proportions that one suspects some deeper passion to bring perverse phenomena to comforting terms is at work.

--Clifford Geertz

Clifford Geertz names the comparative study of religion, as the most serious victim of the “pigeonhole disease,” and its effects are apparent when thinking about religion’s role in conflict. Critics of religion cite the role of religion in conflict resolution as not only futile, but as, in contrast, the cause and root of strife. Therefore, it is implicitly assumed that if religion is abolished, discord will cease. This conclusion is not only implausible, but ignores the positive way in which religion can and has operated in society. Religion has an undeniable and proven ability to promote peace, but because of its presence in violence, it has acquired a divisive and vitriolic reputation. This dichotomy has led me to the research question: Can religion be used to solve the problem it created?

There are many historical examples in which faith has been the catalyst for harmony and kindness. To create a rubric for peace, one can look to religion, but not only
to one tradition. Within many of the world’s religions, there are commentaries on nonviolence expressed differently but thematically similarly, e.g., responding to violence with kindness, the importance of human life regardless of wealth or social class, and the partiality for the sufferer over the aggressor. In chapter two, after examining many faith traditions and reducing them down to these thematic precepts, it becomes clear what religion practically and doctrinally contributes to peace.

However, it is impossible to speak about the capacity for goodness without acknowledging the potential for evil. Chapter three addresses religion’s peaceful elements not always being expressed in action, as there are numerous occasions in which religion has been cited as the impetus for destructive, violent behavior. Religious terrorism, fundamentalism, and inter-religious conflict have all found expression in violence, yet the reasoning and causes differ. Because disgruntled groups have varied concerns, (secularity for fundamentalists and terrorists or a certain religious group within inter-religious conflict) each is addressed specifically with a targeted solution. In one instance, there is a nebulous enemy (secularity) while the other demonizes a specific group. These disparate occurrences command an adaptive methodology that will address and humanize all sides of the conflict.

Chapter four discusses religious peacemakers and practitioners as vehicles for peace and combining the thematic religious ideals (responding to violence with kindness, the importance of human life regardless of wealth or social class, and the partiality for the sufferer over the aggressor) with interfaith dialogue models. In this context, religion is presented generally, so a faith practitioner or secular person can ascribe personal, empirical, or doctrinal meaning. Interfaith dialogue deals primarily with discord between
faiths, but including these general principles will allow for those without religion to be part of the discussion. Because of the oppositional relationship between secularists and fundamentalists/terrorists, the extremely devout and those without tradition also need mutual understanding. It is within this framework that religion’s role in peace, violence, and reconciliation becomes clear: it is central to all three.
CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUS NOTIONS OF PEACE

Conflict has been a global epidemic throughout history and its relevance and consequences remain ever present in modern day. Though not all tension is catalyzed by religion, historically, many disputes have found religion as their source. It is for this reason that the study of peace is, was and will always be crucial. Ironically, much of the study of peace is rooted in and began with religious doctrine and precepts. From both eastern and western traditions, religions contribute to peaceful dialogue and therefore deserve attention and study.

Though peace is a widely represented theme, the means in which it is presented varies. Some religions have peace as their paramount effort: Buddhism, Jainism, and the Quakers, for example. Other traditions do not have peace doctrines or approaches as a main focus, but have commentaries on nonviolence to elucidate their positions, as in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and the non-pacifist movements within Christianity. Religion has also served to inspire leaders in their quest for religious, racial, and political harmony. Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are some famous examples, both religious leaders who used religion as the cornerstone of their nonviolent movements. In the case of Gandhi, he directly interpreted the Bhagavad-Gita to develop a framework for peace not only relevant in his home of India, but throughout the world. His work would go on to influence King in his mission to gain racial equality for African Americans. So while it may appear that religion is responsible for much peril in society,
it can also be credited for efforts of peace either indirectly as subtopics of the so-called major religions and as the inspiration for great religious leaders, or directly through those faiths professing peace as a main tenet.

Judaism’s ideas on peace shine clearly through the Talmud. This book contains clues on how to respond to violence and why it is looked down upon, such as: responding to hate with goodness transforms ill-will into positive interaction, killing is against the commandment, “thou shalt not murder,” and suffering is preferable to violence, as God favors the persecuted over the persecutor.

It seems difficult for human beings to respond to wrongdoing with charity and courtesy, yet there is danger in operating retributively. The transformative power of kindness will prevail when an enemy witnesses seeming unwarranted kindness. A midrash explains:

When your enemy sees that you came and you helped him, he will say to himself, “I thought that he was my enemy, God forbid! If he was my enemy he would not have helped me, but if he is my friend, then I am his enemy in vain, I will go and pacify him.” He went to him and made peace.

Accordingly, it says, “And all her paths are peace.” (Holmes, 21)

The Ten Commandments serve to structure a social world and dictate how people ought to act and react to each other, and no commandment speaks louder or more forthright in the sphere of nonviolence than, “thou shalt not murder.” Simply put, violence begets violence, and the righteous should not punish; therefore killing is not justified, even in the face of evil. The following midrash states simply why Jacob would not resort to violence:
“Then Jacob was greatly afraid.” Did you think that Jacob really feared Esau, that he could not overcome him? It is not so. Rather, why did he fear him? That he would not stumble into the shedding of blood. Jacob thought, “Anyway you want, if I kill him I will transgress [the command] ‘Thou shalt not murder’ (Holmes, 22).

In most nonviolence movements, self-suffering is preferable to inflicting pain, and to endure such suffering, one must trust in God to lead to victory. King and Gandhi both espoused this view. God is on the side of the persecuted, and because God acts in this way, oppression is seen as removing oneself from God. This midrash illustrates this point simply: The Holy one...demands satisfaction for the pursued at the hands of the pursuers (Holmes, 25).

Examining the textual traditions of religion is essential in finding clues to a religion’s stance on peace, but good works, or the positive aspects of lived religion can also contribute to the discussion. In Islam, not only does the Qur’an speak of this harmony, but through Islamic practice, it is evident that kindness is paramount. Islam sees itself as a universal religion and views humanity as family regardless of race, religion or creed. “Whoever kills a human being, except as punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind” (al-Ma’ida [5]:32). This verse clearly puts forth the Islamic view of humanity as sacred and that a killer of one becomes a killer of all. Another verse states, “God commands justice and good-doing…and He forbids indecency, dishonour and insolence (16:90).

Further evidence of Islamic peace notions are contained in the obligatory actions of faith, the five pillars: the statement of faith, prayer, charity or alms giving, fasting, and
the pilgrimage. Underlying the last three pillars is an inherent belief in human equality and that those of privilege have an obligation to help those in need. Islamic charity requires one fortieth of all of a Muslim’s possessions to go directly to helping the poor, recognizing that all members of society are responsible for each other regardless of social position (Smith, 246). This is distinct from tithing in Judaism and Christianity which go primarily to maintenance of religious institutions. Though fasting is personal sacrifice, it is linked to promoting egalitarianism, as through the practice, one identifies with the hunger and suffering of others. The last pillar, the pilgrimage to Mecca, is primarily aimed at heightening the pilgrim’s devotion to God and his/her revealed will, but some facets have an impact on the social good and reorient one’s thinking toward human equality. While making the pilgrimage, one is stripped of all normal clothing, i.e., material possession reflecting social status. The wearing of the *ihram* equalizes all, and unites pilgrims toward one purpose.

One must recognize, however, that Islam is not a pacifist religion and that physical violence is permissible in certain instances through the concept of *jihad* meaning “exertion or struggle.” Though not seen as the highest mode of struggle, aggression is allowed, and because Islam has become synonymous with violence in the west, discussing the ways in which the Qur’an explains war is necessary.

Muslim jurists have detailed four ways jihad is conducted: by heart, by tongue, by the mind, and by the sword. The first deals with the greater jihad and refers to the struggle inside oneself to overcome evil within. The last deals with physical violence, mainly utilized in fighting pagans and polytheists and war waged in the way of God (Mohammad, 389). The notion of jihad in the west, especially post September 11,
considered jihad as solely concerned with physical violence or the lesser jihad, but in fact, the jihad of the heart is viewed in Islam as the greater of the two. Therefore, though it is allowed, the concept is misunderstood, and the struggle within is paramount to the struggle without, contrary to the beliefs of many western individuals.

Because Islam has concepts of just war and it is does not forbid violence, it has been given a violent reputation by much of the west. Though America is not as familiar with Hinduism, it too has ideas of violence contained within its holy text, the Bhagavad Gita, as is set on the backdrop of war. Contained in its pages is a conversation in which Krishna is encouraging Arjuna to battle in war. Hinduism is also credited with creating a caste system that hierarchically ranked some humans above others. This is especially problematic as recognition of the importance of human life regardless of wealth or social status has been advocated as a way to peace. Yet there are elements to be derived from Hinduism that contribute to harmony. Through the Gita, the practice of yoga and the presence of the Atman, Hindu shines as an advocate for peace.

Though the Gita approves of war, it still limits its allowance, only to fulfill ones dharma. The waging of war is dissuaded as Hindus look at war as a manifestation of inner turmoil. This inner turmoil (greed and lust, etc.) is constantly aimed at being disciplined, and to the extent that it is, the tendency to wage war will decrease. The Gita was also re-appropriated by Gandhi in the context of nonviolence, which influenced peacemakers throughout the world.

The practice of yoga is intended to bring the practitioner to a high plane of consciousness, to allow him/her to reach a previously inaccessible part of the mind. Once this state is attained, the person is described as a natural peacemaker, there love flows
outward, alike to all” (Smith, 26). Unfortunately this is a difficult state to reach, yet those who have not attained it still strive for this ultimate goal. Hindus have the sincere intention to emulate this idealized enlightened state, which takes not only the practice of yoga, but important moral preliminary steps. Before a practitioner can participate in yogic exercises, he/she must cleanse the self of moral impurities and cultivate habits of non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, self-control, cleanliness, contentment, and a compelling desire to reach the goal (Smith 29). Every step of the process, therefore, is aimed at peace not only within the person, but also through actions that move the world toward nonviolence.

The final and most lucid Hindu aspect of peace is *Atman*. This is defined as the God within or intrinsic divine nature: “Each human being has the innate divine nature, the *Atman*, to achieve peace within, and project that peace outside in the form of charity, tolerance and fellow feeling” (Harris and Morrison, 42). Each Hindu values human life because each person contains the *Atman*. When someone is acting in opposition to the ideals of tolerance, he/she is acting on behalf of ego, which should be weakened and suppressed.

One last testament to Hinduism’s striving for peace is that it has adopted other religious practices over time, some in relation to peace. Buddhism originally arose from Hinduism, yet Hinduism adopted Buddhism’s ideas of nonviolence. Supplemented by Gandhi’s efforts to use the *Gita* as a primary text for nonviolence, Hinduism has within its tradition and syncretistic efforts, a strong case toward societal harmony.

The amalgamation, re-interpretation and Gandhian supplementation of Hinduism has greatly helped it become a religion of peace. Yet these notions are not wholly unique
to Hinduism; Jesus stresses peaceful elements in the New Testament. There is great concern for the helpless and poor present in the Christian holy text. This is clearly illustrated in the Last Judgment where those who acted on behalf of the less fortunate are welcomed into God’s kingdom and those who did not will face eternal punishment. Jesus stressed the theme of helping the needy because it underlies the belief that God loves all of humanity, and therefore, people should love in that way and let it pass through them toward others (Smith, 327). This love is unconditional and for every person regardless of status or worth. To serve this end, Jesus lived as an example to be followed, “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12). The New Testament is replete with discussion of peace and love in several areas (Barash, 213-214). “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:9-10). “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love our neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But, I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44). “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12: 20-21). “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other” (Matthew 6:38-40).

Jesus stood as an example for others to follow, and his unconditional love for humanity served as inspiration for modern peacemakers; Gandhi is one among them, one of the most effective peace advocates of our time. His teachings and influence not only brought peace to India but also went on to influence subsequent nonviolence movements.
Gandhi was a deeply religious man and used the *Gita* as an allegory for the de-emphasis of self and as the basis for his nonviolence movement (Barash, 203). This de-emphasis of self underscores Gandhi’s belief that it is better to endure suffering than to be the one to inflict violence and to endure this kind of suffering, one must have an unwavering trust in God who will aid in victory. “Truth and nonviolence are not possible without a living belief in God…I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living light” (Holmes, 25).

Though the primary source, the *Gita* was not Gandhi’s only means of religious inspiration; he also used the Bible and Qur’an; however, he drew primarily from the Hindu text and wrote his own interpretation. The *Gita* is presented on a backdrop of warfare, yet Gandhi did not see this as an acceptance or promotion of violence, actually the opposite. It was a representation of the internal struggle. The physical representation was employed merely to make the inward battle more appealing. Gandhi notes that the warriors shed tears of sorrow and regret and that the *Gita*, instead of laying the ground rules for perfect warfare, describes the characteristics of the perfect man and none related to warfare.

Gandhi claims that the main thrust of the text is self-realization and how to achieve it, mainly through the “renunciation of the fruits of action” (Gandhi, 18). In other words, the path to self-realization is to act without thought of reward and to surrender to God and dedicate all actions to him. The endeavor requires devotion to the *Gita*, and this loyalty requires external actions, not merely complete faith.

When Gandhi and the *Gita* speak of work, it is not without recognition that work is binding, yet this dilemma has been resolved by doing one’s work while not reaping the
fruits. Thus, one who is fully engaged in his work is fulfilled by the task not the end result. For Gandhi, there is no priority of means or ends. When the ends are the sole motivation for the means, the action becomes corrupt. Often an “any means necessary” mode of thinking is employed and unscrupulous behavior is warranted for ideal results. Gandhi explains:

He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has disciplined reason. (Gandhi, 19)

Therefore, if an action cannot be done in a detached fashion, it is regarded as taboo. This minor clarification simplifies life in Gandhi’s perspective “from that simpleness springs peace” (Gandhi, 21). To follow the central teaching of the Gita (desirelessness), one is compelled to follow truth and ahimsa [nonviolence]. When there is not longing for possessions, there is not temptation for untruth. Gandhi felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of ahimsa. This idea is central in understanding the difference between the text of the Gita and Gandhi’s interpretation. While the Gita advocates for non-possession and taking pride in action not reward, Gandhi goes further, claiming that achieving this ideal is not feasible without
nonviolence, i.e., renunciation of fruits and *ahimsa* must be observed in tandem to be attained.

Dr. Martin Luther King, though influenced by Gandhi, and therefore the *Gita*, did not have one primary source of inspiration. His intellectual journey to arrive at his nonviolent approach was drawn from a cadre of sources. While in college he read Thoreau’s *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, which was his first contact with the idea of nonviolent resistance. He next read Walter Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* and gained a theological foundation for the concerns engrained in him from his experiences early in life. King felt that this work did a great service for the Christian church by concluding that the Gospel deals with the whole man, not merely his spiritual self but his physical self as well. This led him to the conclusion that any religion that deals with only the soul and not the social and material aspects of man is essentially a dead religion.

Still one step removed from pacifism, King was then exposed to the pacifist position through a lecture by A.J. Muste, but skeptical of its practicality. It is possible that what contributed to this doubt was his reading of Nietzsche during this time. After reading *The Will to Power* and parts of *The Genealogy of Morals*, he also began to doubt the power of love to solve social ills, as Nietzsche glorified power and attacked Hebrew-Christian morality.

Then came an ideological shift: King began reading the works of Gandhi and saw how effective the power of love could be to solve societal problems. Prior to these texts, King maintained that love could only help the individual relationship as in the ethics of Jesus, but the Gandhian philosophy altered this mentality. King found in Gandhi the
answers to his questions on social reform. Gandhi was able to take the love ethic of Jesus and transform it into a workable philosophy for social reform, which gave King an effective and sound method for healing the struggle for oppressed peoples in their quest for freedom. After Gandhi, King read Reinhold Niebuhr, who critiqued the pacifist position, but who led King to see humanity’s potential for good without ignoring its capacity for collective evil, which Niebuhr felt pacifists did (Wink, 68).

From these diverging ideas came one coherent social philosophy. King came to believe that to combat violence with nonviolent resistance was the most powerful tool in achieving social justice. Both King and Gandhi held the belief that to endure suffering without retaliation required a deep belief in God: “My involvement in a difficult struggle has drawn me closer to God… I am convinced that the universe is under control of a loving purpose and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship” (Holmes, 25).

For some great leaders, religion is utilized to draw inspiration for peaceful action, yet there are numerous religious groups that profess peace as main precept. The Quakers, or Society of Friends is such an example. The founder of the Quaker movement, George Fox was in a state of spiritual despair and sought guidance from church leaders, yet failed to get assistance from clergymen. He then heard a voice, which he believed, was the Holy Spirit, and he founded his movement.

Quakers are still aligned with Christianity, but at the heart is the gospel of the inner Christ or the Light Within, which moves, guides, and speaks to human beings. This concept of the Christ within is tied to the study of nonviolence though the Quaker Peace Testimony. The basis found in early Quaker writings states that outward war and strife is
never permissible because “the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons” (Keene, 47).

Though Fox opposed war, he never condemned those who chose to fight in the military, but seemed to have faith that they would come to find peace through their own inner light, as he had done. There is a tradition in which William Penn asked Fox if he should continue to wear his sword, to which Fox replied, “wear it as long as thou canst,” claiming that it should be worn until his conscience shows that violence is not conducive to the Christian way of life. The Quakers kept the love of Christ in their minds and met violence with meekness, humility, and patient suffering, much like Gandhi, though before his time.

The Christian Peace churches are a glowing example of peace in western tradition, yet there are examples of peace promoting churches in the east. One such religion is Jainism, professing non-violence as its highest virtue. This is evident in the Jains five great vows or the principles of morality: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession (Holmes, 12).

While the Jains are not the first to claim the importance of nonviolence, their methods are approached with great intensity. For Jains, understanding the importance of the relationship between body and soul begins to explain the foundation for their strong aversion to violence. “All souls are like oneself in that they suffer distress, cling to life and do not wish to be destroyed”; consequently, ignoring any notion of superiority of one life form over another (Dundas, 161).

Jainism holds that the soul of the individual responsible for the violent action is affected like the receiver of the hurtful act. This prescribes that Jains should strive to
abstain from killing any organism, yet recognizes the challenge due to humans need for food and drink. Therefore, killing a less developed organism brings fewer negative karmic consequences than a five sensed creature.

A violent act need not be executed to be violent. Jains believe the intention determines cruel behavior. There are examples of violent acts not considered violent in instances of self-defense, or the defending of others, just as there are acts of brutality in non-harmful acts if the intention is oriented toward injury. Therefore, violence is not merely regarded as physical harm and nonviolence a lack thereof. Jainism has three principles that present an all-encompassing definition of nonviolence. The three Guptas state that one must practice mental, verbal, and physical nonviolence.

The Jains take great strides to avoid brutality as a means of promoting peace, while Buddhism is greatly concerned with suffering and the cessation of suffering, as noted in the Four Noble Truths, and the means to that end is laid out in the Eightfold Path: right views, right intent, right speech, right conduct (do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not be unchaste, do not drink intoxicants), right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration (Smith, 105-112). The path is aimed at removing ignorance, desire and, ultimately, suffering and is clearly aligned with peace, but in a general sense. More specifically, the notion of “engaged Buddhism” and the Order of “Interbeing” are designed to apply Buddhism to the social world and seek peace for not only the individual, as in the way of traditional Buddhism, but for all. The precepts of the Order of “Interbeing” are:

- Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones.
• Do not think the knowledge you currently posses is changeless, absolute truth.
• Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education.
• Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering.
• Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry.
• Do not maintain anger or hatred.
• Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature.
• Do not kill.
• Possess nothing that should belong to others. (Barash, 207-209)

From east to west, religions profess peace, and though their methodology for actualization differs, there are some common themes: it is better to endure suffering than to torment; all (human) life is important, and love and compassion will combat evil.

The supremacy of being the recipient of suffering instead of the aggressor is present in Gandhi and King’s philosophies of nonviolent resistance, Gandhi borrows from the Gita and the de-emphasis of self, and King works through the ethic of Jesus that Gandhi was able to apply to the collective, as opposed to the individual. This precept is also implied in the Talmud and New Testament. The Talmud speaks of God favoring the persecuted; therefore, being closer to God requires withstanding injustice and not retaliating with force. The Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament clearly states,” if anyone strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other.” The Quakers, too, profess to meet violence with patient suffering.

The importance of human life regardless of wealth or social class is another widely represented theme. Islam believes itself to be a universal religion that sees all
humanity as family, evident in practice and in the last three of the five pillars: charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. All require Muslims to help and to identify with the poor and to shatter barriers between the different human experiences. Jainism takes this notion even further by positing that not only human life is important, but that all life is equal and that violence to every organism should be avoided if possible. Both Gandhi and King fought tirelessly to ensure that all men are created equal, as Gandhi sought social and religious equality and King aimed for racial harmony. In the New Testament, Jesus lived as an example for all to emulate. He helped the poor, as God loves everyone regardless of rank and served as the model for humankind to follow.

Another shared principle among religious ideas on peace is that to combat evil, one should respond with goodness. The Talmud states in Proverb 3:17 that if you help your enemy and go against the “eye for an eye” mentality, the nature of the relationship can change. If evil is not met with evil, but kindness, one transforms from enemy to friend: “If he was my enemy he would not have helped me, but if he is my friend, then I am his enemy in vain.” The New Testament says that although it may have been stated to love your neighbor and hate those that oppose you, one should strive to, “love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Here again, a call to take the moral high ground is offered. Gandhi claims that to have devotion to the Gita (among other actions) one must, “treat friend and foe alike.” Again, as is seen in Christianity and Judaism, Gandhi calls for treating ones enemy as one’s friend.

Throughout history, religion has been condemned for being the root of many wars and conflicts. While it may have contributed to the world’s strife, it also strives to cure the world’s ills and speak out for peace. The means in which this is accomplished varies,
yet theories of and methods for peace are present in many of the world’s religions. Some 
state peace obviously as their main objective; others discuss peace within the holy texts 
or embody it in various practices, among the other dogmatic principles and some are 
merely inspiration for important religious leaders who use religious means to reach 
peaceful ends.

While religion’s destructive tendencies have been hinted at, they have not been 
delineated, as the aim of this paper is not to condemn religion for the harmful acts carried 
out in its name. Yet, discussing the ways in which religious/cultural principles have been 
used for both positive and negative ends is essential. It is important to note that some 
principles used to bring about humanity’s betterment, have also been used to its 
detriment. To some, a principle may clearly speak out for peace, though others may 
interpret it contrarily. Sawaki Sodo, a well-known Zen master can be credited for such 
acts of aggressive interpretation. When speaking in reference to the Japanese army during 
World War II, he said this of the Lotus Sutra,

“The Lotus Sutra states that “the Three Worlds [of desire, form and 
formlessness] are my existence and all sentient beings therein are my 
children” From this point of view, everything, including friend and foe, 
are my children… Superior Officers are my existence as are their 
subordinates. The same can be said of both Japan and the world. Given 
this, it is just to punish those who disturb the public order. Whether one 
kills or does not kill, the [Buddhist] precept forbidding killing [is 
preserved]. It is the precept forbidding killing that wields the sword. It is 
this precept that throws the bomb.” (Carter, 222)
The Lotus Sutra is 27-28 chapters long, and traditional readings of it aim at communicating the Dharma through parable and example and at discussing the eternal nature of the Buddha. Modern themes include: a path to liberation; the eternal nature of the Buddha; and a practical course for human endeavor represented by the bodhisattva (Trainor, 198). However, because Sodo’s reading of the Lotus Sutra differs from the traditional, it has been criticized for both destroying the meaning of “ethics,” as practicing any precept and its opposite allows for any and all activity to be permissible. It has also been derided for not respecting otherness or individuality and aligning with a type of situational ethics, where killing is seen as compassionate: “In the Buddhist context, the person who is killed by compassion is the one who is saved” (Haar and Tsuruoka, 38). This logic allows for violence and murder and, unfortunately, is not unique when compared to other traditions used to support similar behavior. For example, pro-life activists bomb abortion clinics to save the lives of unborn children while killing doctors and medical staff. These acts of “compassion” have devastating repercussions yet occur in relation to religious principles that have been used for good in other situations.

Thich Nhat Hanh has also discussed the meaning of the Lotus Sutra, but in his understanding, the sutra helps us realize love, the well-being of our family and the world. He believes that in addition to the first two parts of the book, which detail the historicity of the Buddha’s life and his ultimate existence on a different plane, a third part should be added, one of action. To Thich Nhat Hanh, the Lotus Sutra asserts that everyone can become the Buddha, and he believes that by doing this “we are able to become the hands and arms of the Buddha and carry out the work of healing, transformation and reconciliation in the world” (Hanh, 5). Here, dichotomously, is one element of a tradition
perceived and acted out in opposing ways. Though it is hard to imagine a way to see violence in the tenets of Buddhism, Sodo has proven it can be done. Yet just as readily, Thich Nhat Hanh cites the same material, yet reaches cooperative and serene goals.

Another example is Albanian Muslims who saved and housed Jews during the Holocaust based on Islam, particularly the elements contained within the Bektasi movement and a cultural/religious principle, *Besa*. What makes this occurrence unique among other instances of Holocaust rescue is that Albania is said to have saved 100% of Jews during this time; in fact, there were more Jews in Albania after the holocaust than before. Albania is said to have unparalleled religious tolerance, and this is evident given the unprecedented Albanian rescue of Jews during the Holocaust.

*Besa* is defined as a sworn oath, a pledge or one’s word of honor. “The *besa* is made between individuals that they will protect one another…The Albanian would rather die than break his word of honour” (Elsie, 35). For some Albanians, the concept of *besa* is interchangeable with Islam and the Qur’an. They see the two ideas as interlocked. However, there are instances in which dangerous repercussions can and have resulted from *besa*. In the Albanian rescue of Jews, *besa* was used positively, but that may not always be the case.

Strict adherence to your word is noble, yet inflexible. If one cannot adapt action to circumstance, there is likely to be tragedy. In a Turkish-language play *Besa yahud ahde vefa* (*Besa* or the fulfillment of the pledge) one character, an Albanian father, chooses to kill his own son rather than break his *besa*. Though this negative situation presents itself here as merely a work of art and presumed fiction, in Norman Gresham’s book *Besa: Muslims who saved Jews in World War II*, an Albanian interviewed took up this point
stating, “We live with the tradition of Besa. There is a saying: We would sooner have our son killed than break our Besa” (Gershman, 20). Another man recounts a story in which a guide had given his guest a besa to accompany him to the border of a village. When the guest told his guide that he was no longer needed, he replied, “my besa has thus come to an end” and shot his guest.

So, a predication is presented when one idea is interpreted in opposing ways. This is not a new phenomenon within religion. But Albanians who cited besa as the reason for their good works chose to use this principle as a pledge of protection and charity, not misdeed. The potentially dangerous practice of this custom was circumvented, and kindness prevailed.

Decision is the crucial moment in religious/cultural interpretation when a concept can be used for good or evil, violence or kindness, construction or destruction. Religion without practitioners is just historical and textual tradition; the believers enliven it. These adherents can be credited with both the best and worst moments in history. As has been demonstrated, religion has the capacity to be a great force for compassion, whether or not it is used as such. Yet many argue that it also contains a great tendency to provoke violence and misdeed, so what goes wrong? How can one entity used in such positive ways also be used negatively?
CHAPTER 3
WHERE RELIGION GOES “WRONG”

Negative and accusatory views of religion and its role in violence have been gaining popularity. The propensity of violence in the name of religion has caused many people to dissect this issue and try to determine their relationship. Religion is a unique behavioral impetus, as it has both catalyzed peaceful nonviolent movements and acts of terror. So, what happens to transform an entity that most adherents would claim as peaceful to one of discrimination, prejudice, and violence? There are many answers to this question, and many scholars have contributed to the discussion, especially recently, when religious violence and acts of terror have become increasingly prevalent. But there are separate spheres of existence entrenched in religious tension: one between “terrorists” or “fundamentalists” and the secular world and one occurring inter-religiously. This distinction is imperative when addressing the causes and possible solutions for religious strife because while one has a nebulous enemy (modernity) the others have a definitive adversary. Some notable contributions to the discussion surrounding those embattling modernity have come from Mark Juergensmeyer in his work, *Terror in the Mind of God* and Karen Armstrong in her works, *Islam: A Short History* and *The Battle for God*. These works deal specifically with religious terrorism and fundamentalism, while disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and psychology are useful in understanding inter-religious conflicts and their consequences.
Terrorism

At this juncture in history, the study of religious violence is of particular importance. In the last forty years, its occurrence has increased by almost fifty percent. In 1968, the year considered the beginning of modern international terrorism, there was no religious terrorist group operating among the terrorist organizations. By 1996, twenty-five of the fifty-eight terrorist organizations were religiously based (Al-Khattar, 25-26). By 1998, U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright named thirty of the world’s most dangerous groups, and more than half were religious (Juergensmeyer, 6).

But why this time in history? Why acts of religiously motivated violence? One convincing argument is as reactionary to secular society and enlightenment modernity. As we have been propelled into a state of radical individualism and as the religious undertones that once sustained our society have slowly been removed, religious activists have felt their foundations disappear. To them, this comes as an alarming reality that must be dealt with by any means necessary and their coping mechanism manifests as acts of religious terror. Yet, a full examination of the importance and relevance of these acts, must occur in the context of the societal perception, the actor’s view, and the role that the unknowing victims and onlookers play.

Douglas Allen in *Comparative Philosophy and Religion in Times of Terror*, defines terrorism as:

The attempt to achieve (or prevent) political, social, economic, or religious change by the actual or threatened use of violence against other persons or other persons’ property; the violence (or threat thereof) employed therein is aimed partly at destabilizing (or maintaining) an existing political or
social order but mainly at publicizing the goals or causes espoused by the agents or by those on whose behalf the agents act. (Allen, 2)

Through Allen’s definition it becomes clear that terrorism is reacted to and defined by those who are affected by the acts. The “other persons” or “other person’s property” is how Allen chooses to explain this occurrence. Terrorism is intended to terrify, not the perpetrators or their respective communities, but the targets of the acts. It is those victims and onlookers that affix the term terrorist or terrorism to a person or action, not the perpetrators themselves. For it is those that suffer who experience terror; terror is a feeling in response to an action and an actor. Asking religious terrorists how they view their behavior, the word “terrorism” or “terrorist” will be scarcely used. Many view their actions as violence for a purpose, for a greater cause. The world is binary, divided into “us” versus “them,” but a particular vantage point makes all the difference. A terrorist would see his community as the noble purveyors of justice saving the world from religiously antagonistic modernists. In this worldview, it is terrorists as “us” and the secular world as “them.”

Yet mainstream faith practitioners believe that how they interpret tradition is the rational and correct way, so the “us” versus “them” construct is reversed. Each side identifies as the “true” or “real” interpretation of whatever faith is being cited as the root of any particular movement. Those with an extremist point of view, would describe their religion in such a way as to separate it from either secular society or a religion they feel is sympathetic to societal progress. They want “a “hard” religion…an “ancient” one…a response to the soft treachery they observed in the new societies around them” (Juergensmeyer, 223). Yet, more moderate practitioners of faith use similar language
when describing their faith, “those Christians who resist the inclination toward fundamentalism and who truly follow the nature, actions, and words of Jesus Christ…” (Carter, 31). Regardless of the position, each side believes that their interpretation is the correct version of belief. While it is more prevalent to err on the side of the moderate and most followers have, it is a matter of perspective. This is an important distinction between two directly oppositional manifestations of faith, both of which claim that whatever interpretation they espouse is correct and most in line with the true meaning/nature of the tradition.

This is not meant to imply that one should empathize with extremism or be sympathetic to its message, but it is important to note that “terrorist” is not how they self-identify. They are resurrecting a particular set of beliefs that they feel have been lost to modernity. Juergensmeyer delineates some defining characteristics in an attempt to explain how and why these groups commit acts of terror, while most mainstream adherents and congregations do not.

First, they have rejected the compromises with liberal values and secular institutions that were made by most mainstream religious leaders and organizations. Second, they refuse to observe the boundaries that secular society has imposed around religion—keeping it private rather than allowing it to intrude into public spaces. And third, they have replaced what they regard as weak modern substitutes with the more vibrant and demanding forms of religion that they imagine to be part of their traditions beginnings. (Juergensmeyer, 221)
For the extremist, these actions of secularity have caused a breakdown of the perceived purpose of social structures. These social structures are given credence not by their inherent value but the value given by the “‘symbolic capital’ they accrue through the collective trust of many individuals” (Juergensmeyer, 224). When these institutions are seen as failing, this causes an intensely personal problem, and the public sector appears skewed. This domain is now in the realm of evil and must be dealt with, often times violently. They do not see the world being at peace. They feel attacked not just by secularity, but by the institutions it supports. So, the modern secular world they inhabit is a “dangerous, chaotic, and violent sea for which religion was an anchor in a harbor of calm” (Juergensmeyer, 223). Given that they already see the world in a violent context, their acts are self-described as, “defensive actions,” and they believe themselves to be “militants” or “paramilitaries.” The connotation is that their violent behavior is a strategic, necessary act in an already violent world.

These methodical acts of aggression often involve the general populace who play a crucial role. Though not always done to specific people, others are made apart of the drama. Victims of terror create a symbolic statement and are used to make a greater declaration with the spectacle involved not being happenstance. These actors, even indirectly, are hoping to make a dramatic showing to change people’s perceptions of the world—a world that many of these religious actors feel is flawed and increasingly becoming more secular, farther from the idealized spiritually infused environment they desire.

In tandem, drama and religious terror have an essence of performative violence and just as those who view any performance, they become part of the process. Religious
terrorism is no different if filtered through this lens. The victims of terrorism are targeted not because they are threatening to the perpetrators, but because they are “symbols, tools, animals or corrupt beings” that tie into “a special picture of the world, a specific consciousness” that the activist possesses (Juergensmeyer, 125). This type of action is not dissimilar from the ritual embedded and crucial to religion, wherein a link is provided between the sacred and profane worlds. The initiate moves through the process only to come out enlightened and changed for his new role in the everyday.

Beyond the ritual confined to places of worship, public ritual is commonplace within the world’s religious traditions, and Juergensmeyer attributes this to why this type of violence comes naturally to religious activists (125). Ritual has been defined in many ways, “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technical routines, having reference to beliefs in mystical (or non-empirical) beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects” or “Traditional religious rituals open up ordinary life to ultimate reality or some transcendent being or force in order to tap its transformative power” (Bowie, 153).

Van Gennep has described the ritual process in three stages: the first stage is a separation from the previous state, place, time or status; the middle stage is neither one thing nor the other and the last stage is the moment of reintegration (Bowie, 152). And though this template can be used to trace the movement through rite of passage rituals, the steps are applicable to almost all rituals (public or private). He uses two similar templates to explain the process:

Separation > transition > incorporation or reaggregation

Preliminal > liminal > postliminal. (Bowie, 163)
In addition to what Van Gennep posits about the middle or liminal phase, Victor Turner elaborates with the concept of *communitas*. What happens at this stage for Turner is comradeship and egalitarianism. Each person is stripped of his/her ascribed status in the secular social structure. Turner discusses two models for human interrelatedness: the first is the structured and often hierarchical, which separates in terms of “more” or “less” and the second is what occurs in the *limen* – an unstructured *communitas* of “equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of ritual elders.” He discusses the social consequences of entering this liminal space as something of a great equalizer. The sacredness of the space is humbling and those given higher position or status in the secular world are now on an even plane with those of lower positions.

These models were originated to explain religious rituals, but elements of the theory also apply to ritualized violence, or religiously motivated acts of terror. In these instances, the applicability of these notions applies only to the first two stages of ritual: preliminal and liminal, along with an expanded discussion of *communitas*. The initial stage involves a separation from regulated, secular society, which has been identified in most cases as what terrorists take issue with and cite as the impetus for terroristic behavior. Next, the liminal phase (the place for *communitas*) is of importance because it is in this indeterminate and ambiguous state where people reside in a holy, interstitial position: “It [communitas] is almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy,’ possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency” (Lambek, 372).
Conceptualize the relationship between Van Gannep’s three stages of ritual for the terroristic group as: first, preliminal (those who are part of some societal or religious collective either by circumstance or membership) and second, liminal, (he/she takes issue with the laxity or modern approach of the religious or societal structure and decides to separate to be part of a counter and/or anti-structure). It is in this liminal stage where powers of *communitas* take hold, and an erosion of human compassion and the fostering of symbolic action against a perceived “enemy” usually unknown to the religious activist can be conceived.

This transformative stage is usually viewed in religious ritual to have positive consequences, where at the outcome, a person will be changed or given esoteric knowledge and re-emerge into society with an elevated status or unique perspective. However, Mary Douglas believes liminality to be dangerous. In this state is formlessness; rules of order do not apply, and those relegated to a marginal position do not live by the standards imposed by a lawful, organized structure. Without a specific role in modern society, one is given a marginal status and is treated as a marginal being by the larger collective. Consequently, one is seen as dangerous and as committing dangerous acts, because “to behave anti-socially is the proper expression of [the] marginal condition” (Olson, 310). Douglas’ assessment speaks volumes about the religious terrorist who acts and is treated in this way not only because of his or her status, but because his or her actions are dangerous to the larger populace. So, while this period can be constructive through religious ritual, its lack of order can also lead to marginality and danger especially in regards to terrorism.
The point of departure between the two rituals processes comes at the last stage (or lack thereof). While the traditional ritual will produce an enlightened person uniquely equipped to cope with structured society, the terroristic group will not emit or reintegrate anyone back into society. In fact, the thought is most likely unfathomable. If escapism is the goal, reintegration is not an option. This leads to the question of how to remain in this stage of liminality, or in a constant state of the “holy”? One explanation could be martyrdom and sacrifice: “The term suggests that the very process of destroying is spiritual since the word comes from the Latin, *sacrificium*, ‘to make holy’” (Juergensmeyer, 167). Through acts of violence, the religious activist fulfilling a mission imbued by his community and though his death, is able to stay in a constant state of holiness (liminality), thereby avoiding the postliminal phase.

**Fundamentalism**

The aims and ritual expressions of these religious activists deviate from mainstream, and many believe them to be an aberration of religion or “cultic” or “fundamentalist,” but Juergensmeyer disagrees. He does not see their spirituality as incongruous with mainstream religion; instead, what differ are their worldview and their religious response to social change. The crucial distinction that Juergensmeyer is making here is: terrorists are not an aberration of religion, but offer varied expression in reaction to a changing social and political climate.

Though he is making a viable argument, not recognizing a relationship between terrorism and fundamentalism is problematic. Much of the scholarship on the issue cites a rejection of and an opposition to modernity as intrinsic to groups either labeled as or self-proclaimed “fundamentalists.” “Fundamentalists see the secular state as their primary
enemy” (Kania, 122): “Fundamentalists offer certainty in periods of social crisis, through antimodern means and goals” (Swatos and Kivisto, 197). The problem Juergensmeyer runs into is that he is trying to separate terrorism from fundamentalism. He sees terrorists as not having a distorted version of faith, just an alternate view of and reaction to society, which many scholars cite as a key aspect of fundamentalism. While it is possible to distinguish fundamentalism from terrorism—i.e., not all fundamentalists are terrorists—it is more difficult to make the distinction that terrorists are not fundamentalists.

Though fundamentalism is not necessarily harmful in and of itself, it can be problematic when thinking about religion in peaceful terms. It advocates precepts that go against what many scholars have identified as keys to peaceful dialogue and cooperation. Aside from what Juergensmeyer asserts, it seems terrorism can be traced back to fundamentalism and from there, fundamentalism can be broken down into its beginnings. This approach provides the societal transformations that fundamentalists are reacting to and against as society progresses.

Karen Armstrong in her work, *Islam: A Short History* explains that fundamentalism does not arise immediately when religion is confronted with modernization, it develops after the changes of modernity have been set in place. Initially, a marriage between the two entities is sought, but when it fails, as secular culture has made it clear it wants to lessen the relationship between religion and society, a fundamentalist movement is born. Often, the first steps of separatism occur from within one’s own tradition. Fundamentalists will take issue with members of their faith that are assimilating to or those not opposed to modernity. They will then retreat into an enclave of like-minded believers, detaching from society as much as possible. These believers
sometimes revert to terrorism, but this is not often the case; most try to revive their faith in a more lawful way.

It is important to note that fundamentalism is not monolithic; each movement understands and responds to the perceived problem of modernization in differing ways. Yet, there are some similarities that have been identified by scholars. As we have discussed, the first characteristic is disenchantment with modern ideals, but the second is fear. Fundamentalists feel their beliefs, tradition, and way of life is under attack. They live in fear of the secular world. To the extent that this fear is made more intense as the grips of modernity take hold, the fundamentalist will feel more assaulted, and their reactions will be more severe.

Another way to conceptualize the tension between the fundamentalists and the secular world is through their understanding of *mythos* and *logos*. *Logos* involves the practical aspect of existence, while *mythos* deals with the universal, aimed at making sense of the everyday. In the pre-modern world, the two were used in tandem: one did not interfere with the other because each dealt with specific and unique spheres of existence. *Mythos* dealt with meaning; it was a way of punctuating life’s experiences, predicated on the assumption that if an individual finds no significance in life, he/she may fall into deep despair. Mythological stories were not to be taken literally and came to life through various rituals, which allowed the deeper meaning of myth to manifest. The modern pursuit of verifying the historicity of an event was not important; instead, the focus was on the meaning of the event. Stories were deliberately written to encompass this mythical dimension to give the religious practitioner a sense of greater significance. This was enlivened through ritual. “One could say that unless an historical event is mythologized
in this way, and liberated from the past in an inspiring cult, it cannot be religious” (Armstrong, 4).

Yet *logos* was also important, but not seen in conflict with *mythos*. They were used in different ways for different reasons. Myth was not supposed to be evaluated for truth; it was used to add significance to the daily activities that were part of the *logos*. *Logos*, though becoming increasingly valued as society moves through the postmodern, is not without its inadequacies. It is yet to sufficiently answer the plaguing questions humanity has always had about the divine and the meaning and purpose of life. *Mythos* was not to comprise the basis for practical activity; in fact, doing so was problematic, as the dichotomous fundamentalist/secular quandary of modernity has proven. Yet as scientific methods have become more and more advanced and imbued with heightened authority, many people have turned the myths of their faith into *logos*. Fundamentalists have done the same, eliciting reactionary behavior, as their beliefs contradict the empirical nature of science now taken as valid.

**Inter-religious Conflict**

Terrorism and fundamentalism both identify their primary threat and enemy as secular modern society. Thereby, if violence erupts it can be toward anyone, as any one is a symbol or representative of the larger “problem.” However, the deviation from religion as a peaceful entity goes beyond the backlash of fundamentalists and terrorists toward the secular, it can occur inter-religiously (either between long standing traditions or new religious movements). In this case, the enemy has a face; there is a pointed “other.” For this reason, as in racism, the causes and catalysts for prejudicial and discriminatory behavior can be examined through many disciplines that discuss exclusion, prejudice, or
discrimination. These fields may not directly deal with religious conflict or intolerance, but the theory is still applicable and expository.

Fields such as social psychology, anthropology, and political philosophy help us to understand the problem of “otherness” and how these “others” come to be viewed by the dominant groups. We explored the movement from fundamentalist to terrorist, and noted the link between the two. Similarly social psychology delineates the stages from prejudicial attitudes to acts of discrimination. Here again, the ideological component precedes actions, which in the case of exclusivity and separateness are the beginnings of a potentially violent relationship. Social psychologists have defined prejudice in varying ways, such as: “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization,” “an emotional, rigid attitude…toward a group of people,” “an unreasonable negative attitude towards others because of their membership in a particular group,” and “differential evaluations that are based solely on category membership” (Jones, 3).

In all definitions, one can see that an underlying attitudinal foundation of prejudice and these attitudes can be based upon three sources. The first is prejudiced attitudes, affective information that describes the dominant presence’s feelings towards members of out-groups. This point elucidates how different groups evoke varied emotions, depending on how the out-group is viewed. As opposed to those who feel the modern world is their enemy, in inter-religious discord, the enemy has been named, and those who show any external manifestation of differing views can be subjected to prejudicial attitudes. Because religion is often tied to symbolic clothing or nationhood, negative attitudes can be targeted more specifically. Though there is still a margin of error and people are wrongfully targeted, this form of prejudice is not an overall disdain
for those representing modernity, but a more focused attack based on specific group membership.

The second source is stereotypes or cognitive information explaining beliefs about the characteristics of people belonging to the out-group. These stereotypes can be broken down even further into individual, cultural, descriptive, and prescriptive, yet in all cases, stereotypes decrease individuality and lend themselves to limiting opportunities. When this process takes hold, it becomes easier to identify any member of a group as part of the overall enemy. Individual differences are of no consequence, and the perceived, stereotypical understanding is the understood reality.

Finally, discrimination is behavioral tendencies or acts that treat members of the out-group differently because of their group membership. These actions may not always come about as acts of violence, though discriminatory acts can be violent. At this stage, the previously group-held negative beliefs about any collective with differing ideas are brought to the fore (Jones, 1-14). Here negative views are manifested into outward expression. The subject of these prejudiced attitudes will now be aware of the prejudiced actor’s views, as they are being acted upon, and the result will limit, suppress, or harm the receiver.

Additionally, a master status can be acquired, in which someone is defined only in terms of one pervasive characteristic and treated accordingly: “People are especially stigmatized when their membership in a category pervades all aspects of their social interactions, such that their category membership essentially assumes a ‘master status’” (Jones, 18). This is an extreme form of deindividuation in which a person no longer has any unique characteristics and in which he/she is defined only in terms of group
belonging. Given that hate crimes and discrimination have been targeted toward individuals based solely on their affiliation with a religious group, logically, it seems to follow that being part of a specific religion can be seen as a master status.

Anthropology also provides insight into the ideas of religious prejudice and discrimination, based on a series of explanations about how cultures deal with anomalous events: “Culture, in the sense of the public, standardized values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals. It provides in advance some basic categories, a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered” (Douglas, 38-39). Religion fits neatly in this category, as it prescribes overarching values and modes of behavior to be followed. To Douglas, cultural classifications cannot easily be revised as they are public matters and must confront the presence of anomalies. In religious terms, competing ideologies and burgeoning faiths can be interpreted as anomalies to the predominant value system. Aside from the conflict that arises between two or more pre-modern metanarratives, there may be a higher instance of anomaly or new religious movements present in modernity.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “in total, almost half of American adults have changed religious affiliation at least once in their lives.” This may lead us to the conclusion that pre-modern, traditional metanarratives may not answer questions facing many modern individuals. Francois Ricard writes, “Modernity…would not be defined in terms of this or that attribute, but rather as an ingrained mistrust of anything stable or inherited and the constant quest for the new” (Roof, 46). The religious landscape, especially in relation to pluralistic societies is changing. As it progresses, religions not only evolve and splinter, but new and hybrid, religious identities are created.
Modernity is comprised of people with complex make-ups and needs that cannot always be addressed by a single, religious tradition. This presents the possibility for an even greater disparity between religious groups and members. Society is transforming into not only a pluralistic marketplace of ideas, but one comprised of families of multiple races, ethnicities, and religious beliefs. This creates an *ethos* of radical individuality and persons holding unique and personalized beliefs. In them, we see individuals unable to fit in the rigid categories of religious membership. This can create tension not only between them and the groups with which they are only partially affiliated or from which they emerged, but also with other, established, long standing religious groups.

These people, as well as those who have been identified as targets of religious intolerance throughout history, can be viewed as anomalies and reactions to their presence may be negative. The potential ways in which anomalous events are dealt with is not exhaustive, yet many public reactions to and actions against religion can be seen to fall into one of the following categories proposed by Douglas:

1) The anomaly can be redefined.
2) Elimination of the anomaly through physical control.
3) Anomalous events or individuals may be labeled dangerous.
4) Anomalies can be elevated through ritual. (Bowie, 50-51)

In terms of redefining anomaly, the processes of de-legitimization or dehumanization essentially reach the same end. A group that does not seem to fit in with dominant culture is redefined in a way that strips them of their humanity. This group is now relegated to a less than human status, and violence can be justified, if/when this
conflict arises the second method of dealing with anomaly (elimination of the anomaly though physical control) comes into play.

When Muslims in Britain began making demands of the state that would allow them to carry out the cultural practices – e.g., burial, education, time/spaces for worship, animal slaughter according to ritual rules – they were denied: “The core values of the nonwhite immigrants are not – so the hegemonic discourse goes – part of British culture, and therefore to live permanently in Britain they must – as political minorities – assimilate into that culture” (Asad, 273). Yet Europeans who went to Asia, Africa and the Americas as settlers or missionaries, did not adopt the cultural values and mores of the current inhabitants; instead, they sought to change them. The response by the state to the Muslim’s demands can be viewed as an attempt to redefine what they perceive as anomaly. While this response did not reach the extreme of complete dehumanization, the byproduct of the denial was illegitimacy to Muslims, as they were allowed to live in Britain, but not as Muslims. Clearly, this implies a hierarchy of belief with European values positioned above those of Muslim ones.

Another way of dealing with anomalies is labeling them dangerous. When something is seen as dangerous, a common human reaction is to remove the threat. Unfortunately, one of the most expeditious ways in which to remove a dangerous entity is murder. Hitler referred to the Jews as an “infection,” like the rats that brought upon plague (Ruscher, 11). In this particular case, the anomalous (the Jews) were deemed to be infectious which allowed for them to be seen as dangerous and, later, as inhuman. As history has proven, this language usage not only assisted Hitler in portraying Jewish
people as a threat, but as less than human and the result was the extermination of six million Jews during the Holocaust.

The last method is unique because it has a place within religion. The idea of elevation through ritual can be seen in conversion, as it ritualizes the practice of bringing an outsider into a faith. What is implied here is that previous belief systems are inadequate or less than the beliefs of the baptizer’s faith. Thereby, baptism ceremonially marks the entrance into the new faith and thus, the anomaly is elevated through ritual. Prejudice is related to ritual in such extreme cases as forced conversion or “conversion by sword.” This phenomenon has been seen in many historical instances, whether it is in the United States with the Native Americans being indoctrinated with Christian values or during the Inquisition where Jews were told to convert or be killed.

It may appear that Douglas is writing about the conflicts in religion, yet the examples given by Douglas operate in less industrialized societies, showing the similar human reactions between societies when faced with anomaly. Her work re-contextualizes religious conflict not as a purely religious or an organized phenomenon, primarily because when those constants are removed, the behavior remains. This presents reactions to anomaly as an instinctual human reaction, instead of one unique to religious members or those from industrial society.

Religiously-motivated prejudice or violence is harmful as is any oppressive or brutal act, regardless of motive. An assumed and implicit solution is to remove oppression and allow everyone to cohabitate peacefully, but the scars of previous cruelty will not dissolve after oppression has been removed. Charles Taylor’s essay, “The Politics of Recognition” does not deal with the issue of how dominant groups act, speak,
or behave towards the “other,” but how out-group identity formation is influenced by the in-group’s perceptions, misrecognitions or lack of acknowledgement.

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (Taylor, 25)

What makes this misrecognition particularly insidious is the presence of self-oppression, in which the out-group then sees themselves in the negative terms of the dominant group. In instances in which the prejudiced, institutional sanctions are removed, the out-group can still harbor the negative impressions held by the dominant group and still act as if they were still in place. Therefore, one of the strongest forces in out-group oppression stems from its own self-defacing personal beliefs. Taylor calls to attention to the importance of due recognition by claiming it is “not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (Taylor, 26).

Therefore, with the problem of religious intolerance and discrimination, it is not enough to stop the ongoing acts of oppression, but perception must be reformulated. Some have posited that to build peace and understanding between religions there must be exposure and dialogue. This is particularly important as the next generations go forth. Posterity can either perpetuate the previously held (often negative) views of the religious “other” or be the new voice of religious toleration and acceptance.
CHAPTER 4

RELIGION AS CURE

Solutions for religious violence and discrimination are almost as complicated as the problem. Various people have addressed violence and discrimination in an attempt to create unity and combat divineness; unfortunately, there is no “magic bullet” in resolving an occurrence that has been in existence almost as long as religion itself. However, while religious conflict has been long standing, what is changing is the enemy and how conflict is manifested. The conflict between certain religious people and modernity is unique to this moment in history. Many solutions from sociology, international relations, and government have been proposed and, occasionally, have been effective, but is it possible that the long-term solution lies in the very thing cited as creating the problem, religion? It can be argued that religious people are more keenly aware of hierophanies, as Mircea Eliade calls them, manifestations of divine power, and when the hierophany is a person, a “personified hierophany,” that person has power to develop strategies that bring peace. Also, methodologically, religious tenets, if taken comparatively and thematically, can create an environment of cooperation and humanization when combined with adapted models for dialogue and good works. Therefore, religion can be helpful in curing the ills it has been accused of creating by re-conceptualizing religious people, faith traditions, and interfaith models.

We see such possibilities in the work of Mark Juergensmeyer, in his solutions for terrorism and in the work of James J. Busuttil who speaks to fundamentalists and
interfaith groups, focusing on building bridges between faiths and assuaging inter-religious conflict.

Possible Solutions for Terrorism

Juergensmeyer offers five possible solutions for curing religious violence, yet within each one are possible shortcomings that have either manifested or are possible when tried in a tense situation. His solutions are:

- Destroy violence
- Terrify terrorists
- Let violence win
- Separate religion from politics, and
- Heal politics with religion.

The first possibility, destroy violence, offers a militaristic and violent option. In this instance, the terrorists are handled with pure aggression or forcibly controlled. For this to work, however, there must be many constants working in tandem. There must be an agreement among secular authorities to wage war against religious terrorism, it must then be waged over many years, the target must be contained in one location and the government must have direct legal authority over the group (230-231).

The second possible measure, terrify terrorists, also involves violence, in which the terrorists are assuaged through fear. The threat of violent consequences or imprisonment creates fear in terrorists so they hesitate to act. The practicality of this being effective is slim as violence is expected as retaliation for acts of aggression. Since they already perceive their world as violent and warring, why would the threat of violence come as a surprise or a deterrent?
The efficacy of these two solutions seems unlikely because solving violence with further violence, specifically in relation to aggressive religious groups, allows the terrorist group to feel justified in their actions. Additionally, responding to violence with violence violates many peaceful principles put forth to combat bloodshed—that to combat evil one should respond with goodness. Though some may find violence necessary and expedient as a long-term solution, it is not optimal. Even if the immediate threat is removed, the evil view of secular society is strengthened, allowing for a new crop of terrorists to rally around the issue and to perpetuate the cycle of violence. The underlying assumption in responding to violence with love is that it can transform the relationship. Ultimately, to combat terrorism, the nature of the relationship between the religious activist and modernity must be altered from one of contention and unyielding rigidity to one of compromise.

The third idea is to let violence win. With this solution, conciliation is reached with those who commit terrorist acts, as their violent actions have catapulted them into a position for negotiation. This is sometimes referred to as a domestication of violence. In this situation, the mainline ruling party legitimizes the group by making them functioning political parties. This will not appease all militant persons who may feel betrayed through the accord, but when the uncompromising members commit acts of violence, both parties can unite and condemn the behavior, defusing its power and its being perceived as terrorism. However, if this terrorist activity is publicly blamed on the newly formed party, it weakens their position (undermining the legitimacy of the accord) resulting in regression rather than progression in regards to thwarting terrorism (234).
Fourth, religion can be separated from politics. This solution is reminiscent of what we examined in Karen Armstrong’s discussion concerning pre-modern society, in which *mythos* and *logos* occupied separate, not touching spheres. Juergensmeyer discusses this as removing religion from politics and relegating it to spiritual and metaphysical planes. Yet many religious activists are not willing to allow this, in fact, this is exactly what they are railing against. Fundamentalists and terrorists both cite their primary complaint as a weakening of religion’s role in society. Its formal removal from public space would not assuage this fear, but exacerbate it. Terrorist’s reactions are correlated to society’s actions. When secularity makes strides toward a progressive nonreligious agenda, a counter from terrorist groups can be expected. Though Armstrong views the pre-modern as a time when *logos* and *mythos* were separate and independently operating, they are now too entangled to separate. It does not seem feasible to un-know what is now known, to reverse centuries of societal progress, and to let go of modern ideals now so intrinsic to society’s functioning.

The last solution, to heal politics with religion, holds Juergensmeyer’s concluding remarks on solving religious conflicts. It is more ideological than methodological, as he advocates for secular authorities embracing moral values, including those associated with religion (238). Enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinkers have gone to great lengths to de-legitimize religion and to render it futile and fantastic. In this respect, it is understandable that terrorists feel a sense of effrontery, albeit their coping methods are extreme and often counterproductive. Therefore, Juergensmeyer ends with these thoughts:
Religious violence cannot end until some accommodation can be forged between the two—some assertion of moderation in religion’s passion, and some acknowledgement of religion in elevating the spiritual and moral values of public life. In a curious way, then, the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself. (243)

Not only is Juergensmeyer also positing that reexamining religion may be the key to healing conflict, but this concluding point is an important mode of reconciliation. Though not a formalized methodology or roadmap to peace, he recognizes that religion and secularity seem pitted against each other and there needs to be concession on both sides. This proposition assumes a cause and effect relationship. Given that the actions of one side create reactions from the other, the moderation of one faction may cause the moderation of the other. If secularity recognize and validate religion’s role in public life, then a moderation of religious zeal may result.

**Possible Solutions for Fundamentalism**

Another way to reach this same end may be to work backwards. As fundamentalism has often been identified as a precursory attitude to terrorism, if fundamentalism is addressed, terrorism and religious violence may be stopped. To address fundamentalism, several tactics can alleviate or prevent groups from progressing from extreme ideology to action. The analysis offered by James J. Busuttil in “Policy Responses to Fundamentalism,” provides some insight into how to validate and transform fundamentalist beliefs by listening to the concerns of fundamentalist groups and exposing them to other views. This, simultaneously will ease feelings of isolation (which fuels
many fundamentalists) and expand their worldview – transforming an identity of “otherness” to one of commonality.

The first step in keeping fundamentalists behavior from perpetuating and spreading is to address their concerns. It is important for policy actors to explore, early on, what each group’s complaints are and what they purpose to do about them. The benefits of this approach are two-fold: first, their concerns are tended to early and possible solutions can be formulated, and, second, they will not feel isolated and neglected; therefore, they will have less complaints of abandonment. This does not mean that these groups are given a spot at the political table, but they will not be ignored or ridiculed because of their fringe status. They will not be given the power they desire, but they will not be removed from the discussion, and their grievances will be heard.

The next way for fundamentalists to be attended to is thorough exposure to other ideologies or entities within the secular, modern matrix, possibly through higher education. Without this exposure, two types of mind-sets are produced: first, feelings that their struggles are unique only to them and, second, that the modern world is evil and should be avoided. The life of fundamentalists intentionally is lived separated from secularity and other, conflicting viewpoints. Therefore, many of them are reared in an environment with an invisible enemy—taught to hate something they have never experienced. If modernity is heavily demonized, these believers may feel they are being spared form the trials and tribulations of modern individuals. Yet if they are exposed to some secular institutions and people representing modernity, they may see the benefits of being integrated into society and realize the fallacy of their previous views. Busuttil
recognizes this attempt could reinforce previously held beliefs, yet, in any case, he asserts that it is preferable to have better informed leadership (236).

Possible Solutions for Inter-religious Conflict

This approach, humanizing the “other,” is echoed in organizations taking up inter-religious dialogue believing contact will ease tensions between religious groups. Though these methodologies vary, the underlying premise remains that humanizing the “other” through collective efforts or dialogue leads to toleration. There are approximately eighteen different types of interfaith organizations, but we will examine three to see how they, used in tandem, might create a seemingly more ideal platform for mutual understanding and reconciliation.

The three are: resources agencies, social issue(s), and action groups, and student/youth groups. The first are organizations that serve as resources for the general public regarding the world’s religions. They “host dialogue events and other programs to educate the general public, promote religious discussion, and correct religious misconceptions” (Heckman, 225). The second make a call to action of various religious groups around a social issue. The last is student groups who address interfaith concerns.

The Interfaith Youth Core’s model, borrowing from all three groups, seems most effective at building interfaith relationships. Eboo Patel, the group’s founder, lays out three components in his methodology for interfaith dialogue: shared values, storytelling, and service learning.

Each mutually reinforcing area is illustrated as three sides of a triangle aimed at moving participants toward pluralism. Speaking about the first point, Patel believes that even though religious traditions share values, expressing them in a universal form seems
to lack impact. What livens them is their re-telling through a specific tradition: “It means something for someone to say she believes in compassion as an ideal, but it expresses a great deal more for her to say that she strives to live up to the example of Jesus and the compassion he showed everyone he met” (Patel, 124). Certain groups, especially those entrenched in discord, often have difficulty speaking of similarities and are indoctrinated to recount rote divisive language. Through Patel’s methodology, they are encouraged to speak of shared values, imbued with personal relevance. Each person is showing how she or her community lives out a shared value, whether it is compassion, justice or good works, for example.

Completing another side of the triangle is “storytelling,” in which each person is not speaking in broad theological terms but in personal, experiential, and, potentially, less threatening language. Each person discusses faith and the role it plays in his/her life, allowing for connections to be made over the challenges that person has in common with others in the group, i.e., modesty, diet, observance of holidays. “Personal storytelling,” Patel argues, “moves the encounter from competitive notions of truth to varied human experiences of life“ (Patel, 126).

Lastly, service learning brings together religious people together to fulfill the call to action for good works proposed by most traditions. These people are not necessarily coming together for interfaith dialogue, but for service to their community.

This model is workable and is flourishing on college campuses across the country. It is aimed at building relationships between members of varied religious groups, but if it recruited and represented members of more secular society, those either without a faith tradition or involved in one open to modern progress, it may be more effective at
humanizing those targeted by fundamentalist views. There is not only tension between religious groups, but between religious groups and those with secular views of the world. This would open up the process to a greater variety of worldviews.

**Adapted Dialogue Model—Religiously Thematic**

Another mode to enhancing the scope and breadth of the model would be to address not merely specific shared values and story-telling (which should still be included) but to add the thematic similarities of many faiths—e.g., responding to violence with kindness, the importance of human life regardless of wealth or social class, and partiality for the sufferer not the aggressor. This is a nonpartisan understanding of precepts that speak out for peace—themes that together make up a wide range of religious principles without a specific religious context. Here, the religious person can see how his/her faith embodies a specific theme, while the secular person is exposed to religion without being pushed into a specific tradition. He/she may also see his or her own reasoning in the principles. In this way, Patel’s triangle analogy would be represented as a square including his previous methods, plus a forth side for peaceful thematic components.

These additions give form to Busuttil’s cure for fundamentalism. Participants are exposed not only to people of other faiths, but allowed to express and build understanding with those committed to humanism or another aspect of modernity. Also, they are coming together for projects of a non-religious nature. Though any person can justify her actions with personal religious precepts, projects remain on secular, common ground. This way, people with fundamentalist leanings, mainline believers, and those without a faith tradition can begin to see common ground.
This methodology also speaks to Juergensmeyer’s call for a moderation of religious passion and a renewed appreciation for religion itself. Each person voices his/her beliefs in a guided context about personal faith and common experiences, and then discusses religiously derived peaceful themes, not explicitly religious themes. The appreciation of these principles does not take religious partisanship, but builds an appreciation of moral examples from many of the world’s traditions. If from understanding springs peace, this model not only cultivates understanding between faiths, but also highlights what religion contributes to the concept of peace.

In general, if society took on a more inclusive approach, recognizing what religion has done right and what it provides to peaceful living, the contention between fundamentalists and secularity and between religions could lessen. Karen Armstrong stressed the lack of tension between *mythos* and *logos* in a pre-modern context, but such a dramatic reversal in thought is unlikely. However, there can be a return, but to the general, peaceful themes from traditions. At this point in history, we are too far removed from the operational default of a separated *mythos* and *logos*, but if we can remain ideologically open-minded and realize that most traditions not only advocate for peace, they delineate how to achieve it, understanding may come.

The diagram below illustrates this point visually, differentiating between the general and specific pre-modern metanarrative. The specific pre-modern metanarrative concerns the *mythos* and particularities of a given faith tradition. These are the elements that distinguish traditions from one another. While the general category contains the common elements that many religions share, especially in relation to peace.
The direction of religious progression is depicted as going from specific pre-modern metanarratives to a diversified pluralistic society. Yet, in relation to peace, if we move to a general, pre-modern metanarrative, encompassing overarching peaceful principles, we can accommodate for both traditional and progressive positions.

Figure 3.1 (General Pre-Modern Metanarrative Model)

*The Religious Peacemaker as Personified Hierophany*

The inclusiveness of this model provides a religious foundation for peace, but it is not the only one. Widespread peace movements have often been centered on a charismatic individual, many led by a religious leader. This phenomenon is especially manifested in groups who want to be a part of this charisma. The feeling that this individual brings about in each person motivates him or her to be close to and involved in
his group. This can be seen in both positive and negative agendas. However, when this charisma is used for the betterment of society, dramatic change is possible.

It is illustrated in the life and example Mohandas Gandhi. The Indian spiritual leader fought tyranny with nonviolence and encouraged his followers to do the same. He promoted religious tolerance drawing from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a cultural epic, for the foundations to his nonviolent movement. For this service, he was referred to as “Mahatma,” meaning “great soul.” This term usually refers to those who are able to aid in spiritual growth and the building of civilizations, yet he was unsure about being given such a name, as his intentions were not for fame or notoriety, but to seek truth.

Looking at his life and example through an Eliaden lens, Gandhi is positioned as a hierophany personified. He is the medium through which his followers could operate in sacred space. This sacred space is central to religious rituals and of special importance to terrorists who make violence a public ritual and seek martyrdom to remain in the holy. The accessibility of the sacred and the means of operating within its boundaries are of crucial importance. Because some see no other way of entering the sacred aside from destructive means, understanding that it is accessible through constructive measures is essential.

In times of duress, national unrest or loosening of religion’s societal influence, it is common to feel like one is living in chaos and that no order is possible. This is the primary mode of existence for terrorists/fundamentalists who claim that they live in a violent and uneasy world. Mircea Eliade states, “properly speaking, there is no longer any world, there are only fragments of a shattered universe, an amorphous mass consisting of an infinite number of more or less neutral places in which man moves” (Olson, 163). It is
only through a hierophany that people can begin to orient themselves to a fixed point and begin to found the world.

Gandhi served as this fixed point, this center, and allowed people to enter this sacred space and bring about order and change. The hierophany is a material thing and not to be worshipped, just as Gandhi did not want to be, yet it allows us to pass though it and enter a point of clarity and order, i.e., the sacred. Gandhi’s practice of *ahimsa* is an alternate route to the sacred and manifested as the opposite of aggression: nonviolence. This ordered humane model of inter-relational and peaceful coexistence could bring people to the same end as martyrdom, yet through positive expression. The varieties of modes of interpreting religion allow it to be used for positive or negative ends. Whether we are thinking of the Albanians and *besa* or the varying uses of the Lotus Sutra, one can draw on multiple interpretations to decide how to express his/her faith.

The hierophany seems to be more readily accessible to religious rather than modern, secular persons, as is evidenced by the many religious leaders who appropriated Gandhi’s nonviolent ideals for other peace movements. People conditioned to practice religion in its many forms are predisposed to see this opportunity for the sacred: “Modern human beings tend to see natural objects where our ancestors saw hierophanies” (Allen, 77). Here “ancestors” is being used to allude to the pre-modern, those closer to tradition and myth, or followers of a faith tradition. This allows greater access and availability to the religious person to see this hierophany and act accordingly, for example, in the way of peace. Therefore, even extremists, infamously known for using religion to achieve negative ends, have (if channeled correctly) a heightened capacity for peace because of their general religiosity.
This does not assert, however, that in order to attain peace, there must be a personified hierophany who has influence for a short time until things revert back to profanity or chaos. What these people leave behind is the narration of their hierophanies, in storytelling or myth. Miriam Webster defines myth as: a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone, especially one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society. Eliade describes myth as the narration of the hierophany. The function is to preserve the models that we are supposed to imitate. From here, it is natural to see how Gandhi fits into this paradigm. His life, ideologies and practices have been documented and enlivened though peacemakers from his lifetime onward. His methods were not only relevant and effective in his time, but also paved the way for peace-making, as we know it today. Many of the milestones that have been achieved in the area of social justice can be directly tied to Gandhi and those who chose to follow and apply his teachings in modern day. This provides not only the theory, but also the methodology for nonviolence.

Table 3.2 (Comparative Analysis: Gandhi and Eliade)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ELIADE</th>
<th>GANDHI</th>
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| **Hierophany:**  
Through a hierophany, people can begin to orient themselves to a fixed point and begin to found the world. | Gandhi served as this fixed point and allowed people to enter this sacred space and begins to bring about order and change. |
| The material thing is not to be worshipped. | Gandhi did not want to be worshipped, yet the hierophany allows us to pass or see though it and enter a point of clarity and order, i.e., the sacred. |
| **Myth:**  
A popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially one embodying the ideals and | We see the fascination with Gandhi and the impact of his story in non-violent movements and in how he is portrayed in |
Throughout history, religion has been condemned for being the root of many wars and conflicts. While it may have contributed to the world’s strife, it also strives to cure the world’s ills and to speak out for peace. The desire to be right in one’s views seems to takes precedence over understanding and tolerance of cultural, social, political, and religious differences. Because there are various spheres of life expressed in various ways by various people and groups, there will always be great diversity that we will have to negotiate.

This pluralism has contributed to society in many positive ways and provided numerous modes of expression, but has also led to disharmony and cruelty. Peace is only possible when understanding of all sides is achieved and maintained. Yet this seemingly simple solution poses difficult obstacles for the future. While it is hard to imagine a day when “world peace” will be actualized in the midst of global peril, the tiniest possibility justifies the effort.
REFERENCES


