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Religious Violence and the Peace Mandate of Jesus

> We have just enough religion to make us hate,
> but not enough to make us love one another.
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> —Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)[1]

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND PEACEMAKING: a violence fostered by Church leadership and a violence repudiated by peace advocates of that same Church. Sometimes I describe a bloody massacre by knights assured of a heavenly reward; sometimes I recount the struggle of Christians to live peacefully with believers from different faith communities. In the dramas narrated in this book, the Church is sometimes the villain, recruiting warriors to kill in the name of God. That same Church also inspired a political restraint of sectarian violence. In these two stories from the history of the Church, the peace witness was so interwoven with the outbursts of religious violence that I could not tell the story of the one without the other. In fact, I discovered many of these nonviolent alternatives only by exploring the violent contexts that prompted their creation.

In order to illumine the Church's ambivalence on issues of violence and peace, I will examine a series of European wars from about 1250 to 1650. The conflicts of pre-modern Europe were theologically charged, as they have become again in the twenty-first century. That is why I have chosen this period for a study of the Church's struggle with peace and violence. These conflicts also reflect an alliance of Church and civil gov-

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1. Swift, *Miscellanies,* 1:273. Swift was not only the author of *Gulliver's Travels,* but a priest of the Church of England. He wrote the epigram quoted here while serving as Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, Ireland.

ernment prevalent during the Constantinian era in the West and still characteristic of most non-Western political-religious relations today.[2]

In some cases, these wars were intra-Christian conflicts within Europe: for example, the thirteenth-century Albigensian Crusade and the seventeenth-century Thirty Years' War. In other cases, the enemies were Muslim: not only in the crusades to the Holy Land but also in the wars with Muslims at the western edge of Christendom (Spain) or eastern border (Constantinople). In all these wars, the contending armies were not merely servants of a civil government, but men who saw themselves as servants of God fighting evil. Such a theological definition of war, as a struggle between the servants of God and forces of evil, was not limited to the pre-modern Constantinian era, as is apparent in the war rhetoric of the present century.

Christians were not of one mind in their response to these outbreaks of religious violence. Some persisted in their efforts to effect peaceful resolutions of conflict even in the midst of church-supported violence. The peace mandate of Jesus—his command to love our enemies—was too prominent in his life, death, and teaching to be disavowed by all who became his followers. Later in this chapter, we will encounter Jesus's peace mandate and repudiation of violence in his Sermon on the Mount. In subsequent chapters, we will hear echoes of Jesus's peace mandate even in those historical periods when the church appeared to be joined more closely to a government's violent policies than to Jesus's proclamation of peace.

The primary purpose of this book is to help Christians recognize and claim both the violence of their religious past and the peace mandate of Jesus. Shortly after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the Christian ethicist, Robin Lovin, challenged Christians to remember their own history of violence.

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2. During the first several centuries of the Common Era, the Christian Church was a minority religious movement in the Roman Empire, often subject to persecution. After the conversion of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, the Church was first granted recognition as a legal religion and subsequently became the official religion of the Empire. Other religions, Jewish and pagan, then became the objects of persecution by the government. From the fourth century until the eighteenth century, the Church in the West enjoyed the legal status of an established religion in a changing cast of civil governments from the Holy Roman Empire to the emerging nation-states of Europe. It is this long history of alliances between the Church (in its medieval unity and post-Reformation plurality) and a civil government that is known as the Constantinian era.

> No response to this moment in our history that overlooks the evils in Christian history can be an appropriate Christian response. To treat extremism as if it were only a problem in other people's faiths calls our own honesty into question. . . . If we are unable to admit [our Christian religious intolerance and ethnocentrism] to ourselves and confess it before God and humanity, people of other faiths and of no faith will regard Christian calls to faith as a very dangerous response to the present problem.[3]

In one respect, this book is a response to Lovin's challenge: it provides some details of this violent history for Christians who may perceive killing in the name of God as a practice only of other religions. Remembering this past is not simply for the purpose of correcting an often-idealized history, but as a first step to guard against its repetition.

In another respect, the book highlights the continuing peace witness of Christians. I focus on a group of church leaders and theologians, both clergy and laity, who struggled to establish peaceful relations among diverse religions. They developed nonviolent procedures to resolve religious conflicts while divesting religious differences of their potential for fostering hatred. They were not pacifists, but within the limits of their historical situation, they gave priority to conflict-resolutions that avoided killing.

The last two chapters explore the transition from the religious wars of the Constantinian era to the religious peace of the modern West. The political situation of religion in the American colonies and Europe changed dramatically in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Those of us living in peaceful relations with neighbors of differing faiths should not take that religious situation for granted. The separation of religion from a government's resources for violence is a bold experiment, not a self-evident or universal condition of human life. Chapter 6 will explore the ending of the Constantinian era in the birth of the United States and the changing politics of religion in Europe.

Seeking Peace in the Midst of Violence

The peacemaking purpose of past Christians has often been lost because Christians, like most other believers, chose to ignore the violent episodes of their own history. For example, the theological *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas is not usually understood as offering a peaceful al-

3. Lovin, "Faith, Ethics, and Evil," 155.

ternative to the violent methods of the first Inquisition. When read in relation to the Church's struggle with the Cathar heresy, however, its peaceful purpose becomes obvious.

In the late medieval era the Cathar movement, an alternative form of Christianity, posed a serious threat to the spiritual authority of the Church and the unity of Christendom. As a result, the Church unleashed a variety of aggressive attempts to destroy the Cathars. The papacy first organized a crusade (the Albigensian Crusade) in which French nobles from the north massacred whole populations of towns in what is now southern France. While this crusade broke the capacity of the nobility in the south to defend their Cathar Christians, it did not eliminate the heresy. In a second effort, the papacy mounted the first Inquisition, whose methods included torture and the handing-over of unrepentant Cathars to civil authorities for execution.

Thomas wrote his *Summa theologiae* during the second stage of the Church's program to destroy the Cathars. However we may regard this magisterial work today, when read in the light of Thomas's own religious situation, it becomes apparent that it was written, in good part, for his Dominican brothers in their mission to convert Cathar heretics. Newly-translated Aristotelian texts provided Thomas with rich resources for this task. Aristotle gave Thomas a naturalism to correct the excessive spiritualism of the Cathars. His arguments for a single First Mover exposed the inconsistencies of their metaphysical dualism. The rationality of Aristotelian thought provided an additional means of demonstrating the truth of Catholic faith.

For Thomas, rational persuasion became the nonviolent means of resolving the conflict with the Cathars: not the mass killing of the Albigensian crusade nor the Inquisition's torture and civil execution of individual Cathar believers. We can appreciate this nonviolent legacy of Thomas's work, however, only as we read his texts in relation to his historical context. Thomas was not a detached intellectual historian, rescuing Greek philosophy for academic purposes. Nor was Thomas a theologian of the future, constructing a theology to guide his Church in navigating her way through all future crises. He wrote his "beginning theology" for the readers he knew: his Dominican brothers in their mission to re-convert Cathars back to the Catholic faith. What is true in the case of Thomas is also true for the four other theologians examined in this book.

Ramon Lull (1222/23–1316) was born and self-educated on the island of Majorca, then recently conquered by Christians from Muslim rule. He became a Christian specialist on Islam, mastered the Arabic language, and studied the Qur'an and other basic Islamic texts. While living in a mixed society of Jews, Christians, and Muslims on Majorca, Lull witnessed many instances of Christian animosity against Jews and Muslims.[4] As a result, he wrote a dialogical theology respectful of all three religions, a theology that could support their peaceful co-existence. Lull also opposed a planned crusade to invade Muslim-ruled territories in North Africa. Instead, he risked his own life traveling to these countries to preach and engage in public debate with Muslim scholars. He repeatedly reminded Church authorities that Jesus Christ had not established the Church by violent means but by demonstrating in his life God's love and peace.

Nicholas of Cusa (1401/02–1464), a specialist in Church law entrusted by several popes with the resolution of intra-Church conflicts, was also an imaginative and prolific theologian. In 1453, Muslim Turks captured Christendom's second capital, Constantinople. It was an event accompanied by an orgy of maiming, raping, and killing Christians. While several popes called for a crusade to set right this wrong, Nicholas wrote a treatise, *De pace fidei* (On the Peace of Faith*),* that offered a new theology of religious diversity, neutralizing religious differences as sources of hatred. Nicholas' dialogue included representatives of all religions then known, as well as a cast of heavenly powers including God, angels, Peter, and Paul. For Nicholas, the diversity of religions was part of God's plan of salvation; that diversity was also grounded in the multiple ethnic and linguistic differences of the human species. His fifteenth-century text often reads as if it were a twenty-first century theory of religious pluralism.

Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1582/3–1648) was a Christian layman whose professional and personal life was closely bound up with a series of intra-Christian wars. While he was England's ambassador to France, he sought to restrain French military action against French Calvinists (Huguenots) and to win political support for a newly installed Protestant King of Bohemia. He failed in both these efforts, and a religious war of thirty years duration grew out of the religious-political

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4. For instance, Christians once observed Good Friday by hurling stones from rooftops on Jewish residents below.

struggle born in Bohemia. During the English Civil Wars of the 1640s, fueled in part by theological disputes within the Church of England, his ancestral castle was besieged until he surrendered it. Herbert's political and personal experience of wars, kindled by the mixture of religion and government, led him to propose a new political model of religion, one in which faith and political power were sundered from each other for the sake of peace.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was a founder of the United States, author of the *Declaration of Independence,* and amateur theologian. He sought a political solution to the religious violence of post-Reformation Christendom. He also recognized that thirteen colonies with different established churches could not be peacefully united in a new nation. He devoted much of his political life to the disestablishment of religion, first in his home state of Virginia and then, assisted by James Madison, in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Jefferson thus created a political context for religion, which both allowed and required religious communities to live with each other peacefully. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the politics of disestablishment spread beyond the limits of the United States to provide a model for other nations in the West and Asia.

While Thomas Aquinas constructed the theological concept of religion that provided an intellectual framework for understanding religious diversity, it was Thomas Jefferson who constructed a political system that permitted diverse religions to live peacefully with one another. It is therefore not surprising that in the correspondence of his later life Jefferson repeatedly identified Jesus's command "to love your enemy" as the most valuable guide for sustaining political peace within government and between nations. During his first term as president, Jefferson also assembled his first book of Jesus's moral teaching. It highlighted the universality of neighbor-love in the teachings of Jesus.

All five of these theologians—Thomas, Lull, Nicholas, Herbert, and Jefferson—sought peaceful alternatives in the midst of religious violence. While none were pacifists, all were responsive to the peace mandate of Jesus. They sought first a peaceful resolution to religious conflicts, potential or actual. While I discuss these five theologians individually in their own historical context, they belong to a continuing Christian tradition rooted in Jesus's peace mandate. Nicholas of Cusa copied by hand one-quarter of the writings of Ramon Lull; he also bor-

rowed extensively from the writings of Lull's contemporary, Thomas Aquinas. Lord Herbert's library included works by both Thomas and Nicholas. Jefferson was strongly influenced by two of Lord Herbert's disciples; he was a second generation descendent of Herbert's political theology.[5]

In the Epilogue, I step outside the historical limits of the Constantinian era to examine examples of peacemaking and violence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These examples no longer offer clear cases of religious violence. The Nazi effort to destroy the Jewish people, for example, was no longer religious in its definition of Jews. They were not defined by their beliefs, synagogue membership, or worship habits. Yet, it would be unrealistic to deny the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism that made Nazi ideology appear legitimate and acceptable to so many Europeans. Similarly, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the American invasion of Iraq was perceived by many Middle Eastern Muslims as a war against Islam. Some television preachers offered support for the war that seemed to share this view.[6] The official war rhetoric defined this war as a war against evil, which strongly resembled the rhetoric of religious wars.

While the disestablishment of religion was a major step in neutralizing the role of religions in violence, the end of the Constantinian era has not eliminated the religious dimension of warfare. For those living after the Constantinian era, the role of religion in violent conflicts is still an issue with which we must struggle. This is especially true for those of us who are Christian and find our conscience instructed by Jesus's command to love our religious enemies.

I suspect that many other Christians, clergy and laity, belong to this tradition of peace witnesses.[7] Medieval and early modern Christians were not only occupied with crusades, inquisitions, and religious warfare. They also struggled, directly and indirectly, to claim the promise of the Gospel: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt 5:9).

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5. Charles Blount and Lord Bollingbroke were two of Lord Herbert's followers represented in Jefferson's library and writings.

6. For example, the Reverend John Hagee and the Reverend Rod Parsley.

7. There are several obvious and well-known examples that I have not considered in this study: for example, Saint Francis in medieval Europe and the peace churches in the post-Reformation era (Friends, Church of the Brethren, and Mennonites).

In the chapters that follow, we will become better acquainted with these witnesses to the peace of God and the religious violence that prompted their work. In the meantime, I need to examine a cluster of issues surrounding the particular kind of violence that is, in part, the subject of this book: religious violence.

Issues of Religious Violence

Religious Violence as a Controversial Concept

The concept of religious violence plays a central role in the argument of this book. This is not a book about violence in general; its focus is on the type of violence organized, motivated, and/or justified by the leadership, scriptures, and rhetoric of religious communities. First, however, I will examine the very idea of religious violence. Is the concept of religious violence valid? Is the claim that religious communities may foster violent behavior true, or is the very idea of religious violence nothing but a product of confused thinking? While my research, along with the work of others, has convinced me that religions often do provoke and legitimate violence, many reject such a claim. In the next few pages, I will summarize four types of objections to the idea that religions play a role in fostering violence.

Objections of Political Leaders

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair most explicitly denied any role of religion in that attack. After his initial error in identifying the "war on terrorism" as a crusade, President Bush strongly separated the terrorist attack of 9/11 from the religion of Islam.[8] In a speech two weeks later, he insisted that the war on terrorism was not a crusade against Islam, for there was no valid link, he said, between Islam and the terrorists' actions. Religions, Bush claimed, were harbingers of peace, not violence; terrorists were only a marginal group of believers who perverted the teachings of their religion to justify their violent deeds. As the President announced in his speech of September 20, 2001, "the terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that

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8. In a speech to the nation on September 16, 2001, President Bush warned the American people that "this crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while."

has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics, a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam."[9] Because "Muslim scholars" and "the vast majority of Muslim clerics" did not approve of the violence of 9/11, the President located the origins of that violence not in the "peaceful teachings of Islam" but in a fringe movement.[10]

Prime Minister Tony Blair echoed this theme, assuring all people that the 9/11 attacks were "no more an expression of true Islam than the Crusades were an expression of true Christianity."[11] According to the claims of President Bush and Prime Minister Blair, it would appear as if the very concept of religious violence is a self-contradiction, somewhat like the concept of a square circle.

I cannot disagree with the short-term value of separating the taint of violence from Islam immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Government leaders in the West rightly distinguished the religion of Islam from this attack so that their American and English citizens would not be moved to lash out at Muslims in their midst. They also hoped that Muslims in other nations might not perceive the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. This political rhetoric was both wise and necessary in those circumstances, but that rhetoric is dangerously dysfunctional for formulating long-term policies. It has concealed the religious factors that inform much of the terrorism of this century. As a result, the response of religious and political leaders of the West has too often been misguided. They have projected on to the terrorists the identity of a nation-state that could be moved to surrender by a military onslaught and invasion. In fact, they were dealing with an amorphous movement of religious radicals whose defeat required quite different tactics. In order to correct this ignorance, it is now time to acknowledge the connection between

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9. Bush, "Speech Transcript."

10. This political claim concerning the separation of violence from the religion of Islam appears to have derived its intellectual foundations from Mark Juergensmeyer's important study of religion and violence, *Terror in the Mind of God.* Published just the year before the September 2001 attacks, Juergensmeyer made a strong case for the separation of militant violence from Islam. Terrorists might appropriate some of Islam's language of faith, but they did so without the support of duly constituted religious authorities. Juergensmeyer, like President Bush, used the approval of established religious authorities as the criterion for determining whether or not violence was an expression of religion.

11. Blair as quoted by James Carroll, *Boston Globe*, October 9, 2001.

religion and violence, not with reference to one religion alone but regarding the global family of religions.

Objections of Social Scientists

For many economists and political scientists, religions do not, and cannot, play a significant role as a causal agent of violence. As Oliver McTernan observed in his research on inter-religious violence in Ireland and Sri Lanka,

> The paradigms [of the social and political sciences] reflect the reductionist approach to conflict that prevails in these disciplines. Reductionists always seek the simplest explanation for conflict. As religion is considered to be a redundant factor in life, an epiphenomenon that is incapable of having its own independent impact on the social and political level, it does not merit, therefore, being taken seriously as a real cause . . . To focus on religious motives, many political and social scientists would argue, is to risk masking over the real cause, which they would claim is more likely to be a mix of grievance and political ambition.[12]

In a recent book, the American sociologist, Rodney Stark, notes that American scholars, by and large, doubt the relevance of religion for understanding matters of social, political, and military importance.[13]

Modern Western culture offers several reasons for this assumption. In part, this claim reflects the materialist tradition of nineteenth-century sociology initiated by Karl Marx. For Marx, religion was an epiphenomenon of history, a result of political or economic changes, but not a cause of such change. In part, this premise reflects the secular politics of the modern West in which the claims of any religion were excluded from public life. In this view, religion may play a significant role in the private lives of individuals, but not in the public sphere of politics and economics. It is this assumption that led so many social scientists to dismiss or minimize the role of religion in the public domain.

As a result of this bias, the role of religion in international affairs has been firmly shrouded in ignorance, just as the role of religion in

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12. McTernan, *Violence in God's Name,* 18, 23.

13. Stark, *One True God.* "It is widely assumed in scholarly circles that historical inquiries into matters such as the social consequences of monotheism are long outmoded and quite unsuitable" (1–2).

voting patterns had been until recent decades. As Mark Noll and Lyman Kellstadt noted in their critique of social scientific literature concerning the role of religion in American politics,

> Social scientists studying twentieth century politics have assumed, until quite recently, that religion in America is a private affair of little public influence. From this assumption, the conclusions followed that it was not worth studying religion with the same care that sociologists and political scientists directed to race, income, education, and other important social variables. Scholarship in nineteenth century America should have shaken these assumptions, but it took a surge of the Religious Right to alert academics to the continuing salience of religion in public life.[14]

In addition to "the Religious Right," I would call attention to the actions of religious terrorists as a force awakening social scientists to the role of religion in the public arena.

While I recognize the claim that religion is a relatively unimportant cause of conflict, I cannot accept its validity.[15] It is an assumption that has been proven false by historical evidence and by the public role of religions in contemporary America. Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim believers have denied the boundaries of modern religious privatism, if they were ever so confined. In many cases, congregations have now replaced precinct wards as the context in which people debate the pros and cons of government policies, including decisions of war and peace. The preachers of radio and television communicate their views of government programs and foreign policy as do the bloggers of the internet. Religion has become very much a part of our public space. While this expansion of the boundaries of faith-talk has been most

14. Mark Noll and Lyman Kellstadt, "Religion, Voting for President," 355. See also Swierenga, "Ethnoreligious Political Behavior" in this same book. Swierenga notes that political science studies had recognized religion as a significant factor in voting by the mid-nineteenth century (146–49).

15. The writings of Paul Collier, a World Bank economist, illustrate the assumption that religion does not play a significant role in political conflicts. In his studies of the relative role of "greed" and "grievance" in civil wars between 1900 and 1990, he concluded that greed—the desire of a small group of people to acquire significant short-term gains from the chaos of civil war—is the most important factor in such movements. Grievances concerning sectarian or ethnic issues may play a secondary role in winning public support at home and international patience abroad but they are not causes of the conflict itself (Collier, "Doing Well out of War," 91–92).

dramatic among Christian evangelicals, it is increasingly true for other Christian churches as well.[16]

Objections of Historical Revisionists

Historical revisionists have rejected the application of concepts like "religious war" or "religious violence" to events in post-Reformation Europe usually identified by some such category. In the standard version of European history, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are described as a particularly bloody period of civil and international wars provoked and/or legitimated by the Catholic or one of the Protestant Churches. The historical revisionists, however, object to the description of these multiple wars as "religious wars." In their view, the bloody wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the birth pangs of the modern nation-state and have little, if any, connection with the religious quarrels of this era.

William Cavanaugh, for example, cites the action of Cardinal Richelieu in subsidizing thirty-six thousand Swedish soldiers then on German territory as evidence of an alliance contrary to religious loyalties: "presumably the Catholic Cardinal was not motivated by love of Luther to support the Protestant cause."[17] Presumably he was motivated by the interests of the King of France in whose service he was employed. If Swedish forces helped to establish a strong and secure French monarchy, so be it. The recognition that nationalist interests may sometimes override religious loyalties does not eliminate the religious interests of such wars. The Cardinal did not subsidize a Calvinist army of 36,000.[18] The Calvinist religious minority in France had been a threat to the unity of the state and the monarchy.

While I note the objection of such revisionists, I do not agree with their claim. Wars are multi-dimensional events in which economic interests, political power struggles, and, in some cases, religious conflicts

16. In a 2004 poll, over one-half of Evangelicals, a third of mainline Protestants, and a quarter of Catholics rated religion as important in their political thinking. Heim, "Voters and Values," 26.

17. Cavanaugh, "A Fire Strong Enough," 397–420. As Geoffrey Parker noted, the destructive role of "confessional politics" in Europe remained a "destabilizing influence" throughout the Thirty Years' War: "the abatement of this major destabilizing influence in European politics was one of the greatest achievements of the Thirty Years' War" (Parker, *The Thirty Years' War,* 219).

18. For a similar argument, see Bell, "State and Civil Society," 425–27.

play a role. To call attention to the nation-building aspect of a war does not eliminate religious, economic, and social aspects of that same war.

Objections of Religious Believers

Religious believers offer a fourth kind of objection to the linkage of religion and violence. When their religion or its founder is accused of violence, they experience it as a deep insult to their own identity. A Danish newspaper cartoon of 2005 depicted Mohammad wearing a bomb with a lighted fuse in place of a turban. The worldwide Muslim riots of 2006 were a typical response of believers to the implied accusation that the founder of their religion was an agent of violence.[19]

In September 2006, Muslim religious and political leaders directed a similar protest against a speech by Pope Benedict XVI. In a lengthy speech on the relationship of faith and reason, the Pope inserted a three-line quotation from the "erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus." According to the Pope, this "erudite emperor" had challenged anyone to "show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.[20] As we will see in chapter two, the Byzantine emperor's critique of Mohammad was not new or original to him, but was a standard stereotype circulating in medieval Christendom.[21]

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19. To be sure, the entire series of Danish cartoons of Mohammad violated the Muslim taboo against any representation of the Prophet, but the cartoon that made him an agent of violence transgressed an even deeper taboo. These riots responding to the cartoons led to the death of hundreds, the destruction of several Scandinavian embassies in the Middle East, and were accompanied by an organized boycott of Danish products and several European Union exports.

20. Benedict XVI, "Pope's Speech." The need of Muslim traders for trustworthy agents at the ends of their trade routes in Asia and Africa is an alternative explanation for the rapid growth of Islam. Traders were predominantly Muslim, whose economic livelihood required trustworthy local counterparts at the ends of their trade routes. Conversion to Islam appears to have been the best resource available to create honest partners in trade. The African or Asian convert also gained by conversion since all Muslim traders were more likely to do business with a co-religionist.

21. For example, Aquinas wrote, "Mohammad said that he was sent in the power of his arms—which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants—[and he used these ignorant believers] to] force others to become his followers by the violence of his arms" (*Summa contra gentiles*, I 2).

Like the global reaction of Muslims in 2006, I have encountered a somewhat similar response in my teaching from some Christian students when I have spoken of the violent history of the Church. That claim was often met with a combination of disbelief and denial. Few believers welcome a discussion of violence in their religion, though they are perfectly happy to recount violent episodes in some other religion. When I heard repeated claims of Christian innocence of violence from my students, I asked them if they had checked that perception of Christianity with any Jewish students or believers from any other tradition. Most often they had not. I shared with them the story of a Muslim father I had interviewed in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. He told me about the terror he had experienced in response to a Christian hymn. One of his Christian neighbors hosted a Bible study in his home and the Christians gathered there began their evening by singing, "Onward Christian Soldiers." The Muslim heard the words of that hymn in his own language and through the prism of his culture's tales of Christian violence. As a result, he became so terrified that he woke his young sons to help him barricade the doors and windows of their home to ward off a Christian invasion.

Martin Marty, pre-eminent among American scholars in the study of fundamentalist religions, has provided a definitive reply to the denial of violence in one's own religion. As he wrote in responding to the attack of 9/11, "the killing dimension of religion is an inter-faith phenomenon. It is not something that 'they' do, something that is only in 'their' scriptures."[22] The denial that there is a problem of violence within religion is itself a major part of the problem.

The time has come to abandon the posture of the ostrich. Political and religious leaders, social scientists, historians, and believers share a responsibility for acknowledging religious violence as a significant factor in our world. While we should not exaggerate the threat of such violence, as if our whole civilization were at risk, neither dare we ignore its threat.

The Complexity of Religious Violence

Religious organizations are not self-sufficient agents of violence. Even in medieval Europe, Church resources did not include a standing army

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22. Marty, "Is Religion the Problem?" 19.

or the finances to support a war of any duration. The king of an emerging state, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, or feudal lord was most often the partner of the Church in religious warfare. In the twenty-first century, such support has often been provided by substate groups, ad hoc organizations like Al Qaeda that cannot be identified with any state or religious organization.[23] In the medieval era or the twenty-first century, religions typically rely upon some partner, such as a nation, an empire, or an ad hoc organization, to provide the means for conducting terrorist attacks or warfare.

Similarly, in episodes of religious violence, religious considerations are not the only motive; political, social and economic factors also play a role. The following chapters illustrate the mix of motives in religious violence. For example, in the sack of Constantinople, Mehmed II promised his forces large economic rewards from looting the city; the imam promised them Paradise for destroying the infidels. Similarly, in the Albigensian Crusade, the knights who volunteered were promised a complete indulgence of their sins; the Kingdom of France gained the previously independent territories in what is now the south of France. A militarily successful religious war offered economic and political rewards for this world as well as religious rewards for the other world. As Professor Louise Richardson has observed in her long career of terrorist research, "religion is never the sole cause of terrorism; rather, religious motivations are interwoven with economic and political factors. Yet religion cannot be reduced to social and economic factors. It is a powerful force in itself.[24] Religious violence is never purely religious in its execution or motivation. Sacred texts, the rhetoric of religious leaders, and the support of religious communities are essential to, but not sufficient for, engendering violence. The denial of religion's role in major terrorist attacks or war is often based upon a confused understanding of the nature of religious violence.

Religious Resources for Violence

While religions need allies for the violence they promote, they offer a unique access to the moral judgment and emotional depths of par-

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23. I have borrowed the category "substate groups" from Richardson, *What Terrorists Want,* 5, 50. There are also Jewish and Christian substate groups formed in this century for violent purposes.

24. Ibid., 68–69.

ticipants, giving religion a role of extraordinary power. The transcendent source of religious belief serves a variety of powerful purposes in prompting believers to action. Believers are given divine assurance of the legitimacy of their actions; they kill in the name of God, for the sake of God, however reprehensible their actions might appear to human eyes. The scriptures of the world's major religions provide support for their action: the deity of each of these scriptures commands violent actions of believers and is himself/herself violent.[25] Believers are assured of the eventual triumph of their cause since it is God's cause. Their continued devotion to the cause is not dependent upon short-term victories. In a similar way, religious agents of violence are not constrained by any community of support to limit the casualties of their actions. Religious terrorists find their source of support in God, not any human community; through their eyes of faith, they discern no limits to the casualties they create in the service of the Almighty. For overcoming the doubts and fears that ordinarily inhibit the killing of others, religion offers an invaluable resource.

Religious agents of violence also have several organizational advantages. Religions are trans-national movements. The participants are not confined within the boundaries of one nation-state; they disperse themselves without regard to national boundaries. As a result, it is more difficult to exercise any control over their activities, since restraint of them by one nation only prompts them to move to another. Furthermore, because religions are transnational, religious conflicts within one nation easily spread to its neighbors: The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), for example, engulfed the nations of central Europe and Scandinavia in battles marked by a shared religious conflict and a variety of issues specific to the particular nations involved.

In addition to their transnational characteristic, many religious organizations do not restrict their leadership positions to persons officially licensed by the organization. Self-appointed religious entrepreneurs exercise their leadership solely by their charismatic gifts. They are able to awaken in their followers experiences of humiliation and disrespect to be avenged by killing. This informal leadership model makes any official religious organization immune from counter-attack.

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25. For violence in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures, see Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us?*; for violence in Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh scriptures, see Palmer-Fernandez, *Encyclopedia of Religion and War*.