
The interaction of religion and terrorism

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THE INTERACTION OF RELIGION AND TERRORISM

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Abstract

This article addresses the interfacing of religious ideology and terrorism. It examines religion as a form of political motivational ideology. The author asks if terrorism is caused by lack of economic or political opportunities, a theory often presented by both Western politicians and media or if terrorism is more ideological in nature or a mixture of the mundane with the ideological. The article asks next-world oriented religions may have a higher proclivity toward political violence. The article questions the validity of the use of the term religion for non-Christian and Muslim faiths and compares both eastern and western faith systems.

Key Words: Religion, Terrorism, Tourism, Cosmologies.

Introduction

At the time that I first wrote this essay-review, a terrorist attacked a police officer in France at the city's most important cultural location, the Louvre Museum (January 2017). The terrorist shouted out what has become an all too familiar cry, *Allah Akhbar* and once again set off an academic discussion regarding the relationship between religion and terrorism. The event also forced scholars to question if religious tourism has its own special issues with regard to terrorism. For example, if religion inspires terrorism then are those on pilgrimage more likely to suffer the consequences of an act of terrorism? On the opposite side of the coin, might religious tourists become so ideologically committed to a violence prone religious ideology that they perform acts of terrorism against other tourists? Is religion separate from other forms of ideology, and thus the pilgrim needs extra protection and/or perhaps observation? On the other side of the spectrum, the shootings that took place at a (United States) Republican Party baseball practice (June 14, 2017) have now been called "political terrorism". These shootings resulted in not only the perpetrator's death but also the sever wounding of Senate Republican Whip, Steve Scalise. Numerous commentators noted that the assailant's blind, almost fanatical hatred for

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diverse opinions has taken on a religious milieu, in which the shooter may have seen him as an actor in a new form of “passion play”.

The attack on June 18, 2017, against Muslim worshipers at a London mosque once again underlies the fact that worshippers, be they visitors or locals, are usually unarmed and open to all sorts of acts of violence. Furthermore, the increase of travel has allowed pilgrimages to become a major part of tourism. Such religious travel as the Hajj to Mecca attracts millions of people. This formidable clustering of people means not only an increased potential for violence and acts of terrorism, but also presents huge health risks. For example the British Journal “The Economist” noted in 2013:

Has the advent of affordable high-speed transport made pilgrimage an even more hazardous business (for both the travellers themselves, and others) than ever? Perhaps certain dangers are growing more acute, such as the risk of epidemics spreading not only among pilgrims but in their home countries when they return. The annual Muslim pilgrimage or *haj* to Mecca attracts up to 3m people. In recent years there have been outbreaks of meningitis among the pilgrims, and last year there was a surge of worry after a Saudi national died from the shadowy coronavirus (sic) which can cause deadly pneumonia.²

It then is against the background of terror that this text is written. The present essay is a theoretical analysis of the role of religion and ideology in acts of terrorism. It asks the question: Is terrorism a result of religious ideology? Is religion the statistical independent variable that results in the dependent variable of acts of terror? Finally, the essay examines the questions: what is religion and if there are certain religions that have a higher proclivity to influence acts of violence against those who do not accept its doctrines.

The Interaction of Religion and Terrorism

Ask any Jerusalem police officer and he or she will be able to speak to you of the psychological phenomenon called Jerusalem syndrome. The (London, England) Telegraph wrote about Jerusalem syndrome the following:

An Irish schoolteacher who came to a Jerusalem hospital convinced she was about to give birth to the Baby Jesus when in fact she was not even pregnant.

A Canadian tourist who believed he was the Biblical strongman Sampson and

² The Economist: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2013/07/hazards-religious-travel>: accessed June 19, 2017

tried to tear stone blocks out of the Wailing Wall.

An Austrian man who flew into a rage in his hotel kitchen when staff refused to prepare the the Last Supper for him.

These are just a few examples of what has come to be known as the Jerusalem Syndrome: a well-documented phenomenon where foreign visitors suffer psychotic delusions that they are figures from the Bible or harbingers of the End of Days.

Israel's health ministry records around 50 cases a year where a tourist's delusions are so strong that police or mental health professionals are forced to intervene. Many more incidents go undocumented on the streets of Jerusalem's Old City.³

Psychologists have collected hundreds of examples of the influence of this syndrome on people. At times the reaction can be harmless, at other times the syndrome can lead to tragedy and even death.

Jerusalem syndrome is an example of the power of religion over human behavior and emotions. Depending on how one chooses to define religion, religion has had both a positive and negative influence over human history. Sociologists ever since Max Weber's famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* have pondered the role of religion not only regarding a nation's sociological make-up but also its proclivity to economic failure or success. In a like manner, Karl Marx wrote extensively on the role of religion and its negative influence on the proletariat. Calling religion the opium of the people and Marx noted religion's seductive power.⁴

Religion, however, has also caused great acts to occur, and it has acted as a social control mechanism for millions of people. There is an old rabbinic tale that teaches us that God gave us the "Ten Commandments" not for some great religious or philosophical reason but merely for one reason and one reason alone: we needed them! That is to say, human beings needed a social road map if societies were to exist.

In fact, we can argue that much of Hebrew Scripture, along with other religiously or socially inspired texts, is exactly that: a social road map that permitted the structuring of society. On the other hand, as Marx emphasized, religion has not always had a positive social effect. Human history has known countless wars based on religious creeds or fought against other

3 The Telegraph, London, England, March 26, 2016: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/26/jerusalem-syndrome-the-madness-that-grips-foreigners-on-the-stre/>

4 See introduction to Marx' essay: A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, published posthumously in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*,

religious beliefs. Religion then has been a motivating factor for both good and evil. For example, in speaking about the role of religion in European wars of conquest, George Friedman noted that “Portuguese exploration was a vast national enterprise. A great deal of money was staked on an unknown prize. The Portuguese were motivated by internal politics, international rivalry, religion, ideology, and the sheer glory of it.”⁵ The table below lists some of the religious inspired conflicts during the twentieth/twenty-first century. It should be noted that not every conflict has a theological basis to it. Often religion is not, as it is understood in the West, merely a set of theological premises, but rather the carrier of cultural, ethnic, and economic, political, and ideological concepts. In this essay these concepts are called: “miranda” and “credenda”.⁶

Table 3.1 – Main religions by Country

Country	Religions involved
Afghanistan	Extreme, radical Fundamentalist Muslim terrorist groups & non-Muslims
Bosnia	Serbian Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholic), Muslims
Côte d'Ivoire	Muslims, Indigenous, Christian
Cyprus	Christians & Muslims
East Timor	Christians & Muslims
India	Animists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims & Sikhs
Indonesia, Maluku Islands	Christians & Muslims
Iraq	Kurds, Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Yazid
Kosovo	Serbian Orthodox Christians & Muslims
Kurdistan	Primarily Alevis, Muslim, with Christian, Jews, Yarsan, and Yazidis
Macedonia	Macedonian Orthodox Christians & Muslims
Gaza	Jews, Muslims, & Christians
Myanmar (formerly Burma)	Buddhist & Muslims
Nigeria	Christians, Animists, & Muslims
Northern Ireland	Protestants, Catholics
Philippines	Christians & Muslims
Somalia	Wahhabi and Sufi Muslims
South Africa	Animists & "Witches"
Sri Lanka	Buddhists & Hindus
Sudan	Animists, Christians & Muslims
Thailand	Buddhists & Muslims
Tibet	Buddhists & Communists
Uganda	Animists, Christians, & Muslims

⁵ Friedman, page 25

⁶ Miranda is defined as the seen manifestation of a political belief. The actual belief is the credenda.

⁷ http://www.religioustolerance.org/curr_war.htm

We should also note that the chart above views communism as a non God-centered religion.

Scholars have long sought to answer if these “religious” battles are truly theological in nature or does religion act as the cover for political, economic, or other factors? We need then to ask the question: does religion act as a root cause (an independent variable) or is it nothing more than a pretext to motivate the masses to fight? Does religion act as a mere cover hiding a conflict’s real roots causes? Is religion an inspiration that creates an ideological underpinning for the warring parties or a way to hide real issues?

Before we can enter into the question of religions influence on acts of terrorism, several other and perhaps deeper questions needs to be asked:

- Is terrorism related to religious ideologies?
- Is there a relationship between economic issues and religion? Are the Marxists correct when they argue that religion deadens the mind and in so doing permitting the political elites to manipulate vast populations?
- What other factors play a part in inspiring acts of terrorism?

In his book on athletics and security, Tarlow has noted that: “terrorism, like any social disease, is not monolithic, but has multiple mutations. These strains of terrorism will have commonalities and also demonstrate differences”⁸ Thus, we cannot answer the above questions until we consider both the religious and non religious reasons that motivate people to sacrifice their lives and the lives of the innocent in acts of terrorism.

Non-religious facts that may function as root causes for terrorism

An even cursory examination of the literature demonstrates that there is wide scholarly disagreement regarding religion as a root cause of terrorism. In fact, both politicians and members of the “chattering” classes such as political pundits, economists and academics either have or tend to blame other phenomenon as root causes of terrorism. For example, in an article published in the Huffington Post (a left of center publication) Steve Mariotti writes: “We blame religion and ignore the economic underpinnings of terrorism at our peril. We can fight back with entrepreneurship education, and initiatives that will encourage a worldwide entrepreneurial eco-

⁸ Tarlow, p. 109, Sports Travel Security

system to take root, instead of poisonous ideologies.”⁹ Ahmed Sheikh Mohammed writing in the Kenyan publication, the *Sahan Journal* goes one step further and notes that terrorism root causes are multiple. He states that: “In short, a mix of ignorance, poverty, oppression, repression, exclusion, marginalization¹⁰ and occupation explain the phenomenon of terrorism.” From his perspective, and he is principally addressing Islamic terrorism, there is no one factor but a combination of factors that lead to frustrations that manifest themselves in acts of terrorism.

Many scholars and political analysts take the position that terrorism is a result of a lack of economic opportunity. For example, Sultan Mehmood demonstrates this belief, and held by many politicians (and therefore promulgated by the media) when he writes in the journal *Dawn* that: “Linking unemployment with crime and explaining optimal punishment designs had won Gary Becker the Nobel Prize in economics. He showed that criminals “rationally” decide to perpetrate crimes given the probability of getting caught and the severity of possible punishment. He further found that high unemployment and poverty rates are related closely to higher crime rates.”

Mehood then goes on to show how politicians may link terrorism to lack of economic opportunity continuing by saying: “Hence, in a study of terrorism it was natural to study whether a high degree of impoverishment increased terrorism levels. Many world leaders and academics have shared this belief. Thus, former US president George Bush argued: “We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror.”¹¹ Bush was a strong proponent that poverty, lack of education and a lack of hope translated into young men and women becoming terrorists.

In an article published by Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova soon after the September 11 attacks in the *New Republic*, the authors quote Bush as saying: “We fight against poverty,” President George W. Bush has declared, “because hope is an answer to terror.” The authors however disagree and state that: “... a careful review of the evidence provides little reason for optimism that a reduction in poverty or an increase in educational attainment would, by themselves, meaningfully reduce international terrorism. Any connection between poverty, education, and terrorism is indirect, complicated, and probably quite weak. Instead of viewing terrorism as a direct response to low market opportunities or lack of education, we suggest it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of

9 Huffington Post, May 23, 2016: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mariotti/a-root-cause-of-terrorism_b_10063938.html accessed on January 27, 2017.

10 <http://sahanjournal.com/root-causes-terrorism-solutions/#.WltplrGZP1w> Accessed on January 27, 2017

11 Sultan Mehmood: The Roots of Terrorism, May 3, 2016: <http://www.dawn.com/news/796177>. Accessed on January 27, 2017

indignity and frustration (perceived or real) that have little to do with economics.”¹²

We see another example of politicians tying economics to acts of terrorism in the words of Representative Dick Gephardt (United States House of Representatives) who in 2004 was a candidate (unsuccessful) for the Democratic United States presidential nomination. In a news item published by CNN Gephardt criticizes the then President George Bush ('43) economic fight against terrorism. Gephardt does not question the economic component of Bush's strategy but rather its implementation stating: "We must work to prevent them from emerging in the first place," he said. "My vision is one in which America takes the lead in building, strengthening and expanding a community of like-minded nations (and) push to the periphery and eventually eliminate the destructive forces that thrive on instability," he said. "That begins with a stronger, more vibrant United States economy." Gephardt also stressed that he was in favor of "free and fair trade policies that raise standards so that everyone does better."

Although the Obama administration took what at first appeared to be a more nuanced view in regards to the causes of terrorism, a closer examination demonstrates the then president's linkage of poverty (economics) to terrorism. Although it would appear that during the Obama administration, there was an understanding that there was not one singular cause of terrorism, statements such as the following and uttered at the White House's Countering Violent Extremism Summit: "We do have to address the grievances that terrorists exploit, including economic grievance," may lead to the opposite conclusion. On the other hand, President Barack Obama, nevertheless, stated in a televised statement at the Summit. "Poverty alone does not cause a person to become a terrorist, any more than poverty alone causes somebody to become a criminal."¹³ Obama's statement would lead us to believe that his administration saw multiple roots causes, but then the president returned to the theme of economics and terrorism when he stated at the same conference: "Terrorist groups are all too happy to step into a void. They offer salaries to their foot soldiers so they can support their families. Sometimes they offer social services—schools, health clinics—to do what local governments cannot or will not do," Obama added. "So if we're going to prevent people from being susceptible to the false promises of extremism, then the international community has to offer something better."¹⁴

The idea that lack of economic opportunity leads to terrorism is expanded into the concept that an unfair distribution of wealth leads to terrorism. To some extent this is a modern updated version of classical Marxism. For example, the United States television network, CNN, reports

12 Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, in the June 22, 2002 edition of the New Republic: "The economics and education of suicide bombers" <https://newrepublic.com/article/91841/does-poverty-cause-terrorism>, Accessed on January 28, 2017

13 What the Real Root Cause of Terrorism: Poverty or Anger, Feb 19, 2025. <https://thinkprogress.org/whats-the-real-root-cause-of-terrorism-poverty-or-anger-d9d3f53324c5#dxm5t2vc5>, accessed on January 28, 2017

14 Ibid

that: “In a controversial op-ed published recently by French newspaper Le Monde, (Thomas) Piketty argues that terrorism is an extreme version of a peasants' revolt. All the oil money in the Middle East is concentrated in the hands of a few rich people in a few wealthy countries.” Piketty then expands on this argument by stating that: "One thing is obvious: Terrorism thrives on the inequality in the Middle East which is a powder keg we have largely contributed to creating," wrote Piketty, who is best known for his 2013 best selling book chronicling the explosion of inequality in the U.S. and Europe.”¹⁵ That same theoretical perspective is noted by Tarlow and Muehsam when they write about the Marxist perspective on crime (and perhaps terrorism): “Due to society’s misdistribution of wealth, crime is an outgrowth of bourgeois greed and the mimicking of that greed by those in the lower classes...Under such a scenario, it is not the underclass which is committing the crime, but rather due to the class’ suffering from economic exploitation and social frustration crime occurs as an almost “Robin Hood” societal correction factor” ¹⁶ It should be noted that the above quote is not one with which Tarlow agrees. In fact, Tarlow disagrees with this economic theory that poverty produces terrorism and as such he writes: “Terrorism is a form of war. Its goal is to destroy economies through random death and panic. Terrorism rarely occurs because of poverty or even as a result of social frustration. Were poverty and social frustration the causes of terrorism then it would occur wherever these social ills are located”¹⁷

James Kirchick underlines this rejection of the theory of victimhood by citing studies conducted on Muslim immigrant assimilation into Great Britain and other European nations. Kirchick states: “When it comes to questions of basic values, there exists a broad divergence in Muslim and non-Muslim European public opinion. A poll conducted ten years after the Mohammed cartoon controversy reported that 91 percent of Danish Muslims still believe that it was wrong to publish the cartoons..” ¹⁸ He further cites a study conducted in Germany that stated: “Also education does not seem to have any effect on the attenuation of their (Muslim identity) and job qualifications as well as living in neighborhoods with low unemployment rate(s) seem to accentuate rather than moderate the identify formation of Muslims” ¹⁹

In October 2015 the White House held a summit on countering terrorism and accepted the: “the lack of economic opportunity” hypothesis as a root cause of terrorism. Despite the rhetoric expressed not every one present agreed with the hypothesis that poverty leads to terrorism. For example, Keith Proctor, the Mercy Corps policy researcher who was also at the White House conference disagreed with the former president and stated: “Contrary to the assumption that idle

15 Piketty, December 3, 2015: <http://money.cnn.com/2015/12/03/news/economy/isis-money-thomas-piketty/>, Accessed on January 27, 2017

16 Tarlow, Muehsam, In *Tourism, Crime, and International Security Issues*, p. 14

17 Tarlow, p.82 in *Tourism in Turbulent Times*

18 Kirchick, p. 116

19 Ibid

youth who aren't able to make a licit living are fodder for these [extremist] groups, what we're finding is that it's really about the social situations that they're facing,"²⁰ Proctor then went on to list a person's having experienced other social phenomenon such as: injustice, discrimination, marginalization, corruption, or physical violence. He also noted that some terrorists had been subjected to police brutality or having seen a close family member murdered. He quoted a young man whom Proctor's group had interviewed and who stated: "I did not join the Taliban because I was poor," a 23-year-old former militant fighter told Mercy Corps researchers. "I joined because I was angry."²¹

Other writers have provided a potpourri of reasons for terrorism. For example, Dr. Amy Zalman sees terrorism first and foremost as a political issue. Zalman writes:

"All terrorist acts are motivated by two things:

- Social and political injustice: People choose terrorism when they are trying to right what they perceive to be a social or political or historical wrong—when they have been stripped of their land or rights, or denied these.
- The belief that violence or its threat will be effective, and usher in change. Another way of saying this is: the belief that violent means justify the ends. Many terrorists in history said sincerely that they chose violence after long deliberation, because they felt they had no choice."²²

For example, the so-called Israeli settlements in areas called by some the "West Bank" and by others by this area's Biblical names of "Judea and Samaria" are often cited as a cause of Palestinian frustration leading to terrorism. Thus, the media reported that Secretary of State John Kerry (during the last years of the Obama administration) stated: A "massive increase in settlements" built by Israel in recent years has led to the "frustration" and "violence" now stoking its decades-old conflict with the Palestinians, US Secretary of State John Kerry said at Harvard University on Tuesday night.²³ Kerry does not explain why the same is not true for other parts of the world. His belief then is that were the Palestinians to receive all of the territory prior to the 1967 war, then terrorism would cease. Kerry does not explain why there was terrorism prior

20 Beenish Ahmed, What's The Real Cause of Terrorism: Poverty or Anger, Feb. 2015:

<https://thinkprogress.org/whats-the-real-root-cause-of-terrorism-poverty-or-anger-d9d3f53324c5#.dxm5t2vc5>,

Accessed on January 28, 2017

21 Ibid

22 Amy Zalman: The Causes of Terrorism: September 30, 2016)

http://terrorism.about.com/od/causes/a/causes_terror.htm, accessed on September 27, 2017

23 Jerusalem Post: "Kerry links Wave of Terrorism in Israel to settlement activity" Oct 14, 2015:

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Kerry-to-visit-Israel-amid-crisis-423892>, accessed on January 27, 2017

to 1967 or why Gaza exports terrorism despite Israel's total withdrawal. Writers such as Jeffrey Goldberg refute Kerry's notion. Writing in the (US journal) *The Atlantic*, Goldberg states: "For those who believe not only in the necessity, but in the practical possibility, of an equitable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and in particular, for those who believe that the post-1967 settlement project is the root cause of the conflict—recent events have been sobering." Goldberg then focusing not on terrorism but on the Israeli-Arab conflict; he continues by stating: "One of the tragedies of the settlement movement is that it obscures what might be the actual root cause of the Middle East conflict: the unwillingness of many Muslim Palestinians to accept the notion that Jews are a people who are indigenous to the land Palestinians believe to be exclusively their own, and that the third-holiest site in Islam is also the holiest site of another religion, one whose adherents reject the notion of Muslim supersessionism."²⁴ Goldberg sees the root cause of terrorism, not land but ideology and so states when he write: "The violence of the past two weeks, encouraged by purveyors of rumors who now have both Israeli and Palestinian blood on their hands, is rooted not in Israeli settlement policy, but in a worldview that dismisses the national and religious rights of Jews."²⁵

This short review of some of the literature would indicate that neither political nor academicians are certain as to terrorism's root (or secondary) causes. In fact, we can see "academic fault" lines between those who take a rational economic approach, those who take a rationalized political approach, or social approach and those who see terrorism as a less rational approach to a person's problems but rather the outcome of an ideological approach based on emotions and/or religious beliefs. It should be noted that it is possible but not certain, that it is an error seeing religion (or any ideology) only through the lens of emotions and limiting one's analysis and therefore policies only to a single (or very few) factor. We now leave the economic-political rational models and begin to explore the emotional side of terrorism vis-à-vis religion.

Before we can even begin to analyze religion's role in terrorism it is essential to answer the question: What is religion? Furthermore, we must pose a second question: Is religion a universal phenomenon?

What is Religion? Is it a Universal Concept or a Man-made construct?

Although Westerners often claim that the concept of religion is a universal phenomenon, an analysis of the non-Christian world may lead us to a different conclusion. The

²⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, *The Atlantic: The Paranoid, Supremacist Roots of the Stabbing Intifada*, Oct 16, 2015: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/the-roots-of-the-palestinian-uprising-against-israel/410944/>, accessed on Sept. 27, 2017

²⁵ Ibid

Merriam Webster Dictionary of the English language provides us with the following definitions:

- **1) a:** the state of a religious <a nun in her 20th year of *religion*> **b (1):** the service and worship of God or the supernatural (2): commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance
- 2) a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
- **3) *archaic* :** scrupulous conformity: conscientiousness
- 4) a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith.²⁶

The fact that they are at least four parallel definitions tells us that the term even in a Western Christian-centric language such as English is not precise but rather is open to interpretation. The Spanish language, under Catholic influence, is a bit more precise defining “religion” as: “the concept of religion has its origin in the Latin term “religio” and refers to a creed and the dogmatic knowledge about a Divine being. Religion implies a link (age) between mankind and God or god, according to its (particular) beliefs and its adherents will govern (manage) their behavior according to a certain morality and will abide by determined rituals (such as prayer, processions etc.)”²⁷ In both cases, the term reflects a Christological concept in which a religion reflects very Christian ideas.

Judaism takes another approach. In fact, Jews have rarely called themselves a religion, but rather non-Jews at times have tended to brand Jews as a religion for political or anti-Semitic purposes. For example, Leora Batnitzky of the Tikva Advanced Institute and the chair of the department of religion at Princeton University (USA) states that: “From the eighteenth century onward, modern Jewish thinkers have been concerned with the question of whether or not Judaism can fit into the modern category of *religion*. After all, Judaism has historically been a religion of law, and hence of practice. Adherence to

26 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion> (January 24, 2017)

27 Translation by author: Original Spanish reads: El concepto de religión tiene su origen en el término latino religio y se refiere al credo y a los conocimientos dogmáticos sobre una entidad divina. La religión implica un vínculo entre el hombre y Dios o los dioses; de acuerdo a sus creencias, la persona regirá su comportamiento según una cierta moral e incurrirá en determinados ritos (como el rezo, las procesiones, etc.).

WWW.<http://definicion.de/religion/> (January 24, 2017)

religious law, which is in some measure public in nature, does not seem to fit into the category of faith or belief, which by definition is individual and private.”²⁸

A review of the literature leads one to the conclusion that although late twentieth and early twenty-first century Christians define Jews as a religion, Jews themselves are not as sure, having viewed themselves as a combination of religion, culture and nationalism. Jews then have tended to see Judaism as a national interaction with both a culture and the sense of the divine. Often Jewish writers and intellectuals, when referring to the Jewish experience, employ words such as “tradition” or “community”. Lawrence Grossman perhaps best expresses the quandary when he writes:

There is no end to the conundrums involved in defining what it means to be a Jew. Must a Jew be someone who believes in the Jewish religion, in the way a Christian believes in Christianity or a Muslim in Islam? That can't be the case, since many devoted Jews are atheists. Is a Jew necessarily someone who acknowledges membership in a Jewish ethnic group, people, or nation? That definition would exclude people who believe in Judaism but feel little kinship with other believers, and it would read out Jews who are anti-Zionist. Should "Jewish" be seen as a cultural identity? If so, it would cover people who are stirred to their souls by *Fiddler on the Roof*, live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, enjoy Jewish food, appreciate Jewish humor, and believe—like the woman who once told me she was Jewish because she subscribed to the *New Republic*—that Judaism mandates liberal politics. But there are certainly non-Jews who meet all these criteria and significant numbers of Jews who don't.²⁹

What can be said of the Jewish world may to at least some extent also be said of the Muslim world. For example the website “Political Islam” notes that: “Islam is a cultural, religious and political system. Only the political system is of interest to kafirs (non-Muslims) since it determines how we are defined and treated. The Islamic political system is contained in the Koran, the Hadith (the traditions of Mohammed) and his biography, the Sira.”³⁰

Although there is no doubt that both Judaism and Islam have both faith components and religious

28 <https://tikvahfund.org/advanced-institutes/is-judaism-a-religion/>, January 24, 2017

29 Lawrence Grossman, Jewish Ideas Daily, Nov 29, 2011, <http://www.jewishideasdaily.com/1013/features/is-judaism-a-religion/>

30 <https://www.politicalislam.com/about/> accessed on January 25, 2017

components most people who understand both systems would agree with the fact that these two communities are not merely a religion as understood by the Christian world.

The same intellectual challenge for the westerner also exists in Buddhism. For example in a scholarly debate between Charles Prebish, Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, and Joan Sutherland, Prebish argues that Buddhism is a religion, Rinpoche argues that Buddhism is not a religion, at least along western lines of thought, and Sutherland argues for a strong maybe³¹. No matter on which side of the debate one falls, the fact that there is a scholarly debate indicates the differences between a Buddhist view of the religious world and a Christian (Western) view. In a like manner Hindu scholars also debate if Hinduism fits the strict definition of religion or rather is it a way of life with a religious component.

If much of the world does not fit into the Christian definition of religion then there is a need to question both the above chart and the assumption that there is a relationship between religion and acts of terrorism. There are writers and scholars who take a more nuanced view of regarding religious influence on terrorism. For example, Amy Zalman absolutely rejects the idea of a root cause linkage between religion and terrorism stating: “Although many people today believe that that religious fanaticism “causes” terrorism, it isn’t true. It may be true that religious fanaticism creates *conditions* that are favorable for terrorism. But we know that religious zealotry does not ‘cause’ terrorism because there are many religious fanatics who do not choose terrorism or any form of violence. So there must also be other conditions that in combination provoke some people to see terrorism as an effective way of creating change in their world”.³² The political assumption behind terrorism has been used to (mis) interpret so as to (mis)-justify many of the Middle Eastern conflicts. Religion is often given as the reason for such conflicts as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the internal struggles in Iraq, the rise of the Islamic State, the Iraq-Iran divide, the Christian-Muslim problems in Lebanon, and Egypt, and the internal strife in Libya.

Nick Grothaus writing in *Hand of Reason* provides his readers with multiple root causes for acts of terror of which religion is one such cause, including: ethno nationalism, (social) alienation/discrimination, socio economic status, political grievances, and what he calls “accidental guerrilla”.³³

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that these “somewhat” divine oriented ideologies have a powerful hold on their followers. They act as social measurement tools for determining what is correct and incorrect behavior and for determining “the good” from “the bad” or the proper from the

31 <http://www.lionsroar.com/is-buddhism-a-religion-november-2013/> (accessed on January 25, 2017)

32 Amy Zalman: The Causes of Terrorism: September 30, 2016)

http://terrorism.about.com/od/causes/a/causes_terror.htm, accessed on September 27, 2017

33 Nick Grothaus, Causes of Terrorism, <http://handofreason.com/2011/featured/causes-of-terrorism>, accessed January 27, 2017

inappropriate. Thus, if the heretic or non-believer is “bad” then one can question if the good (the believers) have a right to destroy or eliminate the “unbelievers”. This social fault line can be demarcated along several lines. One such social fault time may be those religious philosophies that are next world oriented as opposed to those that are “this world” oriented. The chart below helps to delineate this social fault line.

Table 3.2 - Some major world religions and their this earth versus next world philosophical system

Religion	Meaning of Life	Emphasis on an Afterlife
Baha'i	The soul is eternal and essentially good. Purpose of life is to develop spiritually and draw closer to God.	Yes/heaven and hell are states of being
Buddhism	The person escapes the cycle through re-birth. Become a bodhisattva then help others attain enlightenment	Rebirth or nirvana. Nirvana is seen simply as the cessation of suffering by some and as a heavenly paradise by others
Christian Science	"Life, Truth, and Love understood and demonstrated as supreme over all; sin, sickness and death destroyed.	Heaven is "not a locality, but a divine state of Mind in which all the manifestations of Mind are harmonious and immortal."
Christianity	All have sinned and are thereby separated from God. Salvation is through faith in Christ and, for some, sacraments and good works.	Resurrection of body and soul; eternal heaven or hell (most denominations); temporary purgatory)
Confucianism	To fulfill one's role in society with propriety, honor, and loyalty.	Not addressed: .this world
Hinduism	Humans are in bondage to ignorance and illusion, but are able to escape. Purpose is to gain release from rebirth, or at least a better rebirth.	Reincarnation until gain enlightenment.
Islam	Submit (islam) to the will of God to gain Paradise after death.	eternal Paradise or eternal Hell
Jehovah's Witnesses	Salvation is through faith in Christ and obeying Jehovah's laws. The End of the World is soon.	Heaven for 144,000 chosen Witnesses, eternity on new earth for other Witnesses. All others annihilated. No hell.
Judaism	One is to live by God's commandments, live ethically. Focus is more on this life than	Not emphasized; views vary: no afterlife, shadowy existence, World to Come (similar to

	the next.	heaven), Gehenna (similar to hell), reincarnation
New Ageism	Dawning of a New Age of heightened consciousness and international peace. Individuals can obtain a foretaste of the New Age through spiritual transformation ("Ascension"). More emphasis on the latter now. Evil comes from ignorance.	Reincarnation
Taoism	Inner harmony, peace, and longevity. Achieved by living in accordance with the Tao.	Revert back to state of non-being, which is simply the other side of being.
Unification Church	True love and world peace instead of selfish love. True love and the kingdom of God on earth will be restored by the creation of "true families."	Eternal life in a spiritual world

Taoism	Inner harmony, peace, and longevity. Achieved by living in accordance with the Tao.	Revert back to state of non-being, which is simply the other side of being.
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Wica	If it harms none, do what you will."	Reincarnation until reach the Summerland <u>afterlife (Wicca)</u>
Communism/	The struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie	None

Available at <http://www.religionfacts.com/big-religion-chart>

It should be noted that two religious communities in particular have an emphasis on the next world in the form of a heaven and more or less specific afterlife. These two religious philosophies are Christianity (in its multiple varieties) and Islam. We can also note that these two religious philosophies historically have been, despite their preaching peace, the most war oriented. This dichotomy between violence and peace found both in Christianity and Islam, and to a lesser extent in some forms of next world oriented Judaism, leads to questions such as: Do next world oriented religions tend to be more violent? Is there a connection between terrorism and religious ideologies? Is violence or terrorism the miranda of the next world oriented credenda?

Although due to the high numbers of statistical variables there might be no empirical methodological way to argue that next world-oriented religions tend to be more violent than this world oriented religions, we can create a theoretical framework that may shed some light on this issue.

To accomplish this determination let us assume that on the macro level, most large political bodies such as a nation-state need an ideology to motivate their citizens not only to maintain a civil society but also to be willing to sacrifice for the state, either on the macro level such as soldiering in a war or on either the mezzo or the micro level by means of acts of terrorism. To understand this concept better let us create a hypothetical body politic that we shall call country X. Country X has, like any other macro society some form of an overt and covert ruling class. This class will have multiple pecuniary and/or territorial needs and just as in the case of any living organism this new corpus will either grow (expand) or eventually die. As in biology, the political body cannot stay stagnant. It is in a continuous state of change. Its ever-changing needs will have to be realized through some political model, the model may be one of economic expansion or purchase, of negotiation, or of violence. No matter what the model is the public (even in a dictatorship) will have to be convinced to support the political action. This marketing effort, called ideology is an essential part of the social glue that holds country X together and motivates its citizens to sacrifice both goods and/or their lives. Although the ideologies may change, the ideologies must have a sufficient strength so as to create a sense of loyalty and perceived benefit for the masses. We can argue that religion is nothing more than a form of ideology and that as an ideology it both acts as a form of social control and as a social motivator. Next world-oriented religions have numerous political advantages as political motivators over this world oriented religions.

Among these advantages are:

- They are not empirically provable, there is no way to prove or disprove their promise,
- Next-world oriented religions promise something that cannot be questioned by those who are part of the ideological system. To question the premise of a next world religion is to put oneself outside of its promise
- They are faith oriented rather than fact oriented. As no one can prove the validity of a heaven or hell these ideologies are not only tautological but also based on ideological acceptance.

- These next-world systems have to divide the world into what statisticians call “dummy variables”. That is a person is either a believer or not; he or she is either within or outside of the specific social system.
- These faiths promise future rewards without needing to justify current realities. In fact the worsening of a current reality may reinforce the ideological bonds of the adherents of such systems.
- These religions may have a heightened control aspect, especially of the poor, who see the system as their economic escape, or hope of escape, from poverty.
- Next world religions are inherently undemocratic. In order to justify their next worldliness, next world-oriented religions must see themselves as the only way to the final goal, the one true faith. To admit alternative models means that the “citizens” of such an ideology may have made a mistake or that another alternative model is either also true or even potential “truer”.

It should be emphasized that not all members of a next-world religious orientation fall into the above categories. There is a great deal of variation as to a person’s religious fervor, but we can also hypothesize that the greater the next world religious conviction the more likely that the believer will fall into the above categories.

On the other hand this world-oriented religions can permit a divergence of opinion. This-world oriented religions must promote facts over beliefs. They must live in the real world and must emphasize the “doing” over the “believing”. As such they stand as a threat to next-world oriented religions that cannot tolerate too great a divergence from core principles. This ideological purity does not mean that all of a next-world’s followers are bound to be intolerant of others. In the modern world, often religion commitment is moderated by both a spectrum of belief and by the fact that there is an interaction between secularism and religion. The historical record, however, speaks to the fact that where next world oriented religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Marxism have held near total control then levels of tolerance for the beliefs or even the lives of the “other” diminished,

Because of the above concepts we can also argue that next world-oriented religions are less democratic. To accept alternative beliefs means that the system may be flawed and to be flawed opens up the possibility that the belief system is not true. This-world oriented faiths, on the other hand, must operate on the principle that actions take precedence over beliefs, and the reward for positive actions is the doing of other positive actions. Both reward and punishment are meted out in the here and now, rather than in

the world to come. This-world oriented religions are also subjected to empirical testing, as life is lived in an eternal present rather than in a hoped for future.

Yet even this-world oriented religions may slide into absolutes. As David A. Kunin has written:

“Religion is dangerous because, too often, its adherents make claims of absolute truth. "We," they claim, "have the right and only answer about the nature of the divine, and everyone else is wrong. We alone know what the divine wants for and from humanity." This truth claim often becomes an excuse to kill, as it forms the basis for relations between those who follow the 'true and only revelation,' and those who do not. It becomes the excuse for war as people use 'divine promises' as the basis for claims about land rights and national sovereignty.”³⁴

In his article, *Western Religions and Terrorism, Do they interconnect?* Tarlow reinforces this idea when he writes:

Atheists and agnostics often accuse religion as being the founding stone for wars and human suffering. On some level there is plenty of evidence to support this hypothesis. Both monotheistic and polytheistic religions have engaged in war. Both Christians and Muslims have historically murdered for the sake of God. The Crusades and Jihad Wars are examples of people willing to kill or murder for the sake of a religious ideology. Even the Hebrew Bible speaks of the multiple religious wars waged by the kings of Israel. Within the Hebrew Bible, Christian Bibles, and the Koran, intolerant passages can be found and activated in order to stir the masses. For example, in the Christian New Testament the Book of Mathew 5:9 states the often popular quote: "Blessed are the peacemakers" not far from this quote however we find a less publicized verse: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth, but a sword." (Mathew: 10:34). In a like manner Harris (117-119) notes that the Koran teaches "Do not destroy yourselves" (4:29) but also teaches: "We shall let them live awhile and then shall drag them to the scourge of the Fire, Evil shall be their fate" (2:126)”³⁵

34https://books.google.com/books?id=w5SlnZilfMMC&pg=PA208&lpg=PA208&dq=%22Judaism+and+terrorism:+crisis+and+response%22&source=bl&ots=Zh-6Cv_1XM&sig=2PQp7agjMupb-Q_43QzV9wWRGZM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjfxciExuDRAhUKiFQKHcdtAwAQ6AEIGJAA#v=onepage&q=%22Judaism%20and%20terrorism%3A%20crisis%20and%20response%22&f=false accessed on January 26,2017
35 Chapter 16 of *The Ethics of Terrorism*, Edite b Gilly et al, Charles. C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois. Dec. 2009.

Conclusions

Throughout academia there has been a constant debate centered on the question of religion and wars. Stuart Pirie in his work, *Does Religion Cause War* notes: “Ignoring The Crusades, and more specifically the First Crusade, it is difficult to confidently state that there have been other wars which have undeniable religious causes”³⁶ . A perusal of the data shows that it is impossible to state that religion causes or does not cause war.

This study demonstrates that often there is a mixture. Thus, Germany fought two wars for economic and political reasons but also fought WWII as Goldhagen notes for pure genocidal reasons. Scholars such as Goldhagen then propose that Germany fought two parallel wars at the same time, one of conquest and one for religious –genocidal reasons. Goldhagen notes: Christians conceived of their religion as superseding Judaism. Therefore, Jews as Jews ought to disappear from the earth”³⁷

Terrorism is a form of war and as such it has both a secular and religious component. Does religion then lead to acts of terrorism? The answer is both a yes and a no. If we understand religion as nothing more than ideology, then next world ideologies, be they deity-oriented or secular oriented, tend to show high levels of intolerance that may lead to violence. The actions of left wing students refusing to allow freedom of speech on university campuses around the world or speech control in the form of political correctness are no different than the religious wars of both Christianity and Islam. In all cases, the refusal to allow the other his or her viewpoint, the need to dominate a person’s mind leads eventually to forms of violence on both the left and on the right.

Terrorism is a social virus that gnaws at the social fabric of a society and of human dignity. If religion is seriously a celebration of life over death, then religious leader dare not allow their ideology to be co-opted into ideological excuses for the creation of violence. When this has occurred in the past (or occurs in the present) then religion ceases to be a moral guideline and becomes nothing more than an ideological excuse for political murder. When religion inspires terrorism then it ceases to be religion. On the other hand, religious leaders must face the fact that there have been multiple uses of religion for purposes of war. From songs such as *Onward Christian Soldiers* to bellicose forms of jihad, religious leaders who permit religion to inspire death have made a major leap backwards into the medieval period. Few people are prepared to support governments for economic reasons, but millions will die for ideological reasons. Religion is merely a subset of ideology. If religion becomes functions as a break on ideological accesses then religion in the end will become not only a force for good, but also rather a major

36 <https://www.booksie.com/posting/stuart-pirie/does-religion-cause-war-265074>, May 20, 2017

37 Goldhagen, pp 48-49

political force. If, on the other hand, religious leaders permit themselves and their ideologies to become servants of war, then in the end, religion will become merely one more ideological relic of the past. To a great extent this trend is noted in post war Europe, a continent often described as post-Christian

The issue then is not one of religion, but of the misuse of ideologies and the refusal to permit alternative thought processes. Violence and terrorism have many causes and surely one of them is the certainty that one side or ideology has a monopoly on truth.

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