An Uneasy Truce: Religion, Violence and the Pursuit of Peace
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Abstract: The religions of the world all speak of moving from self-centeredness to other-centeredness and of deepening compassion and love toward other beings. How then does religion seem so often to be implicated in violence and war?   And what role has and can religion play not only in averting war but also in creating positive peace? Using contemporary India as an entry point, Professor Nancy Martin will guide us through some of the complex dynamics that make religion such a powerful, yet volatile force, for both despair and hope, in local and global politics today.

We have all heard people say, "Religion is the cause of war"—and not only war but all manner

of other violence. To quote just one contemporary author, Matteo Ricci Professor of Theology

as Georgetown University Leo D. Lefebure, a scholar who has dedicated his academic career to

interreligious understanding and the pursuit of peace:

> "The brutal facts of the history of religions impose the stark realization of the
> intertwining of religion and violence: violence, clothed in religious garb, has
> repeatedly cast a spell over religion and culture, luring countless 'decent'
> people—from unlettered peasants to learned priests, preachers and professors—
> into its destructive dance."[1]

Even from such a dark perspective, does this make religion the "cause" of violence or do

religions get drawn into violence by human beings who are, after all, the practitioners and

leaders of those religious traditions or who may even stand outside them but find them a useful

tool? Are they "using" religion to further their own gains and to cloak what is really going on, as

our author suggests, to rally other "decent" people to support agendas which in fact have nothing

to do with religion at all and run counter to its teachings? But even if the latter is the case, how

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[1] Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 14; quoted by William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 15.

is it that religion and religious people seemingly can so readily be drawn into the arena of terrorism and war, of enslavement and colonialism, of sexual, ethnic, and racial violence and genocidal rage, of cruelty and torture? And how might they, or do they, play a role in the opposite, in averting violence and fostering positive peace?

These are vital questions for our global community and questions we ignore at our own peril. All we have to do is turn on the news and listen to the reports coming out of Mali and Algeria about "Islamic jihadis." But there is much more—extremists within a rising Hindu nationalism in India, militant Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, ultra-conservative factions of fundamentalist Christians looking for and seemingly wanting to hasten Armageddon; and innumerable other ethnic/economic/political conflicts entwined with religious identities in Ireland, Bosnia, Rwanda, Israel, Sudan, China and Iraq, to give only a few examples. Closer to home, murderous hate crimes are perpetrated, like the shooting in the Sikh Gurudwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in August this past year, and systemic violence is being visited on indigenous populations in many parts of the world, including our own country—the taking of their lands and destruction of their sacred sites, the forbidding of their religious ceremonies, the continuing impact of children, now adults, having being removed to residential schools in an attempt to force assimilation and conversion and to erase identity, and ongoing both individual and state sponsored violence in the denial of opportunity, basic necessities of food and shelter, and healthcare as well as assaults, police brutality, and imprisonment. Religion continues to be weaponized and used to motivate and justify horrific acts of unspeakable brutality.

In the face of this, why not just get rid of religion? Wouldn't the world be better off without it? This is the underlying assumption of many who see religion as *the* or at least a principle cause of violence in our world. Assuming this were true, would it be wise or even

possible to get rid of religion? Though many have predicted its demise, religion is still alive and well. But is this an accurate portrayal of the relationship between religion and violence? What is the genealogy of this seemingly common sense assumption?

I will start here with the genealogy of this way of thinking before turning to some of the ways religion becomes entangled in violence and some of the attempts to answer the question of why this can happen and end on what I hope will be a more positive note in looking at the contributions religions, or at least religious people, are making and can make to securing positive peace.

This will be, as I suggested in the title of my talk, an "uneasy truce." Religion is an extremely powerful dimension of human life, speaking of our most comprehensive understandings of the way the world is and the way the world ought to be and anchoring the vast majority of people's identities and lived experience as individuals and members of communities, both locally and globally, in something that encompasses but exceeds the material and social dimensions of existence. As such religion does not exist in the abstract but rather within and among humans, and thus it is subject to both our strengths and our weakness.

Religions call humans to self-transformation, to become the best that we can be, indeed to become consummately human as the Confucians might put it or to be true humans as Native Americans might say. We know that religions in their fundamental teachings do not advocate hatred, greed, exploitation and cruelty but rather loving kindness, acts of selflessness, and compassion (feeling the suffering of other beings and seeking to relieve it). They challenge humans to move beyond a small notion of the self in isolation, offering disciplines that empty out this selfishness so that we might become more and more holy, to use a monotheistic word, or so transparent to the divine (broadly defined) that love and compassion flow through us.

Understanding our interrelatedness and becoming transparent to the divine, we then also will necessarily strive for justice and against injustice, unable to do otherwise, for that love and compassion exposes and overwhelms injustice, reaching out to heal the suffering of both the oppressor and the oppressed, the perpetrator of violence and the victim. And this holiness, to which all are called not just saints, sages and bodhisattvas, guards against the subtle and not so subtle intrusions of self and self-righteousness into even our most charitable acts and sets the fight for justice and against injustice within the wider horizon of love and compassion, a setting without which this fight can easily lead to forms of violence.[2]

Religions seek to identify and understand those fundamental aspects of our being that need transformation, characterizing them in somewhat different ways, but optimistically declaring that they can be made right and offering guidance and disciplines to facilitate this transformation. As pathways to spiritual transformation and communities seeking to live out the twin pursuits of holiness and justice, religions continue to offer an extraordinarily resource for creating a more lasting peace in our world. We desperately need this. And yet, like all powerful forces in human life, religions are also equally subject to our weaknesses, our woundedness, our limitations, and our ignorance. Though their origins may be lie in profound realization and/or revelation, humans interpret these and build religions around those interpretations and inhabit them. And we do not create "ex nihilo" but rather with what we have, so that our religions come to mirror our flaws as well as our gifts as individuals and societies. And there are many in our

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[2] For a more extended presentation of this argument, see Nancy M. Martin, "Transforming Love: Holiness and the Vocation of Justice," in *Justice and Mercy will Kiss: Paths to Peace in a World of Many Faiths,* edited by Michael Duffey and Deborah Nash (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 19-40.

world who, whether out of fear, weakness, ignorance or ill-will, do not hesitate to weaponize such a powerful force for their own ends.

Genealogy of Our Ideas

Where does the idea that religion causes violence come from? We can marshal lots of evidence to show that religions are complicit in violence and seemingly have a peculiar ability to exacerbate it, fanning the flames of destruction. So, it is obvious, isn't it? Yes and no. First, what do we mean by "religion"? Professor of political theology and economic ethics at De Paul University, William T. Cavanaugh offers a complex and compelling analysis of what he calls "The Myth of Religious Violence" in his book by this same title. Within it he offers a clear genealogy for both the term "religion" and our contemporary assumptions about religion and violence. [3]

Briefly, the concept of "religion" was developed in the context of the Reformation and the Enlightenment in Europe. It was modeled on Christianity, so much so that conquistadors, colonizers, and representatives of the Church who accompanied them would claim that the native peoples of the Americas had no religion. At one level this is quite understandable—we humans begin with what is familiar and extrapolate out from there, comparing different things to what we know. But it was not innocent, for it was used as license for enslavement and murder and for the destruction of culture and language and worlds. And an emerging developmental view of religion identified some religions as primitive, pre-ethical and pre-scientific, and others as more advanced, culminating in Christianity—a view that was used as one of the key justifications for colonial domination—"for their own good," so to speak.

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[3] William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*. See especially chapters 1 (religion and violence) and 2 (definitions of religion). I draw on his insightful presentation for the following discussion.

This concept of religion was also importantly being defined in the context of emerging nation-states and the so-called wars of religion that attended the Reformation. Notions of religion emerged in relation to a twin category of the "secular"—with religion coming to be considered a kind of personal and optional "add-on." Separation of the secular and the religious was assumed—a person could be religious or not. Allegiance to the nation, on the other hand, was not optional.

This is a very particular way of thinking about this aspect of human individual and communal existence, and corresponding words that would translate to this particular notion of "religion" are not found universally. We sometimes hear people talk about some "other" religions as not really religions but rather as "a way of life"—such a characterization harkens back to this privatized notion of religion. As Cavanaugh puts it:

> Within the West, religion was invented as a transhistorical and transcultural impulse embedded in the human heart, essentially distinct from the public business of government and economic life. To mix religion with public life was said to court fanaticism, sectarianism, and violence. The religious-secular divide thus facilitated the transfer in the modern era of the public loyalty of the citizen from Christendom to the emergent nation-state. Outside the West, the creation of religion and its secular twin accompanied the attempts of colonial powers and indigenous elites to marginalize certain aspects of non-Western cultures and create public space for the smooth functioning of state and market interests.[4]

"Public religion" from such a perspective is viewed as dangerous—violent, fanatical, and sectarian, and any society or religion perceived as not privatizing religion is also therefore deemed dangerous and "bad"—this is a primary charge we still hear made against Islam, along with statements like "Islamic democracy is an oxymoron," etc.—notably such assertions do not generally come from Muslims but from the West. Cavanaugh furthers suggests that

> Specifically, the idea that public religion causes violence authorizes the marginalization of those things called religion from having a divisive influence on

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[4] Ibid., 120-121.

public life, and thereby authorizes the state's monopoly on violence and on public allegiance. Loyalty to one's religion is private in origin and therefore optional; loyalty to the secular nation-state is what unifies us and is not optional.[5]

The seemingly obvious claim that religion causes violence now takes on a different character, set in a particular history of ideas and politics, as a way to condemn public dimensions of religion and cede this public space and public loyalty to the "secular," that is to the nation.

Cavanaugh in not arguing that religions are not involved and complicit in violence in various ways but rather that this condemnation of public religion as inherently violent becomes a justification for further violence.

> The problem with the myth of religious violence [he writes] is not that it condemns certain kinds of violence, but that it diverts moral scrutiny from other kinds of violence. Violence labeled religious is always reprehensible; violence labeled secular is often necessary and sometimes praiseworthy.[6]

He goes on to develop in detail the ways in which this rhetoric has been used in relation particularly to Islam and to terrorism, to demonize an "Other," to justify an unquestioned and generalized violent response to Islam as a "public religion," while leaving our own national use of violence morally unexamined and masking complex causes of conflict that need to be addressed to facilitate lasting peace. He is also not arguing against secularism, but only that we need to understand the genealogy of the terms of this discussion so that we can fruitfully pursue lasting peace and allow for a range of secularism and a range of relations between religion and public life.

This dichotomous definition of religion in relation to its twin "the secular" influences our thinking about religion and its role in violence in varying ways. Clearly this thing we know as religion is not just the wonderful personal disciplines of spiritual transformation we noted above,

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[5] Ibid., 121.
[6] Ibid.

which occasionally get high-jacked into the public realm and need only again be banished to the private to solve the problem. Would that it were that easy or that it was ever so. Whatever religion is, it is certainly more than this, or it would surely not be complicit in violence in the way that it has been and the way that it continues to be. And we know that religions are far more encompassing and are *lived*, not just believed in an abstract sense, and that not just individually but also communally. They are deeply entwined in the identities of individuals and communities, and they shape and express people's understandings and experiences of the way the world *is* and how one should then live.

Wrestling with the Why and How of Religious Violence

But how and why do ostensibly religious people and communities allow themselves to be drawn into violence? Again this is not an idle abstract question but an urgent issue in our time—we can see it all around us, with devastating consequences. My own personal reflections on this question were triggered particularly by my work in India. I was there in 1992 when Hindu nationalists converged on a mosque in the Hindu holy city of Ayodhya as the culmination of a national and highly publicized campaign and destroyed a medieval mosque, with many fearing that the nation would be plunged into a bloody civil war. Despite some violence as neighbor turned on neighbor in fear, India pulled itself back from the brink and affirmed its multi-religious secular identity.

But the more extreme Hindu nationalists were only just getting started. For example, horrific riots broke out in Ahmedabad in 2002, in which Muslims were systematically targeted— more than 2000 were brutally murdered and tens of thousands lost their homes and businesses. The perpetrators have yet to be brought to justice. In 2004 I talked with survivors living in temporary camps, activists who are working to bring reconciliation and prevent such violence in

the future, and others outside of the city whose communities had resisted being caught up in it, as well as scholars and spiritual leaders, among them Father Cedric Prakash, who was inducted into the French Legion of Honor for his work for communal harmony; activist and sociologist Madhu Kishwar; and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.[7]

India has a long history of interreligious harmony. Hinduism in its many forms, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism originated here. Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Bahais found a home here, Judaism arriving perhaps as early as the Babylonian exile and certainly by the second destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Christians trace their presence back to Jesus's disciple Thomas who is credited with first bringing Christianity to South India. Muslim traders also arrived shortly after Muhammad's death, intermarried with the local population and developed distinctly Indian forms of Islam, and Sufi and Ismaili saints and teachers and the Sunni Moghuls also came and did the same. In medieval India, Hindus and Muslims recognized each other as fellow devotees of God and honored each others saints and teachers, many of whom had both Hindu and Muslim disciples. And in villages across India, people have lived together harmoniously, their lives bound together through social, economic, and cultural interrelationships. They sing each other's songs of devotion and attend each other's festivals. So how could such violence happen even here?

When we begin to ask the question why and how, we do well first to acknowledge that each situation in which we see what we might call "religious violence" also has a particular genealogy, a complex set of factors and history that affect the particular situation—they are not

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[7] This is part of an ongoing documentary film project with the working title "Patterns for Peace: India as a Model for Peace in a Multi-Religious Society," initiated when I was the Associate Director of the Global Ethics and Religion Forum. Chapman film students Christopher Baier and Martin DiCicco participated in the project, including traveling to India with me in January of 2004.

all the same and just to label them "religious violence" is to do exactly what Cavanaugh warns us against. In India colonialism, with British policies of divide and conquer and justification of domination through denigration of Indian culture and religion, and the Indian nationalist movement, that formulated an alternative Indian identity that was decidedly Hindu and historicized heroically against Muslim "invaders," together set the stage for the horrific violence that attended the Partition. Indian notions of the secular state (quite different from our own) and its vibrant multi-party democracy also deeply impact the situation today, with the roots of an extreme Hindu nationalism well established long before its rise as a potent political force in the 1990s, its leaders publicly praising Hitler in the 1940s and one of its members assassinating Gandhi.

In the Indian context, as well as elsewhere, members of religious constituencies are courted as "vote banks," even as our recent presidential elections shows them to be in our own country. World history demonstrates that empires, dynasties, caliphates, and kings often grounded their claims for legitimacy and authority in part in religion and employed religion as a unifying force, whether we are talking about the Holy Roman Empire, the Abbasid Caliphate or the Tang Dynasty. Electoral politics of our day similarly draws authority from religious leaders and appeals to constituents' religious identities. In India we can see this kind of jockeying for power and vote-base in the decades leading up to Independence even as we do today.

We can think of examples of the attempt to establishment political communities that embodied the ethical principles and values of particular religious traditions—Emperor Ashoka in India, for example, sought to establish a kingdom in the 3rd century BCE based on Buddhist ethical principles, one which affirmed religious tolerance and compassion, and much more— though it must be admitted that he did so only after having unified the Indian subcontinent first

by military might, converting to Buddhism in response to the horrors his armies had wreaked in doing so.[8] When people speak of the United States as founded on Christian principles or speak of establishing an Islamic republic, they are often advocating something similar—a society that embodies their highest moral ideals and calls people to be the best human beings they can be as they see it, though this is not always accompanied by the degree of religious tolerance Ashoka decreed in his realm. In any case, it seems more often that politics does not draw on people's higher motivations—ostensibly the aims of the religious life—but appeals to "greed, hatred and delusion" as the Buddhists would put it. How then does religion succumb to this? How do religious identities come to be the ones people associate with most deeply and how do these come to be manipulated to such violent ends?

There is much scholarship on this question, with more emerging everyday, as people struggle to come to terms with what should seemingly be the unlikely but unquestionable connection between religion and violence.[9] Some start with the assumption that religion is by its vary nature linked with violence, tracing religion's origins to the violent sacrifice of another in one's place—to placate, purify, enliven—and argue that this violence is inherent in and promoted by religion. Some argue that it is religion's inclination to make absolutist claims to truth or knowledge that leads to a sense of superiority, easily slipping into the relegation of others to inferior status, that in turn readily crosses over into dehumanization and then to

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[8] For a detailed account of Ashoka's kingdom and its relevance for today, see Bruce Rich, *To Uphold the World: A Call for a New Global Ethic from Ancient India* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010). As the book jacket notes, the author "is a Washington, D.C., attorney who has worked to promote environmental and social standards for international finance," and so he grounds his study of Ashoka in economic analysis.

[9] Cavanaugh explores this extensive literature and the arguments therein in detail in chapter 1 of *The Myth of Religious Violence*, offering an excellent comprehensive analysis dividing them into three basic types of arguments: "Religion is Absolutist," "Religion is Divisive," and "Religion is not Rational." I draw on his work in the following paragraphs.

violence, whether we are talking about the Afrikaners in South Africa or to Buddhist enlightened monks famously reassuring the would-be king of Sri Lanka ~500 CE that he need feel no remorse about killing untold enemies in battle for only a few among them were Buddhists—the others did not warrant his compassion or concern. Indeed of his victims, only one and a half, they said, were human beings—one was a full-fledged Buddhist, having taken the "three refuges" and the other had just taken the first step of vowing to follow the five precepts, and even they died so that Buddhism might flouring across the island nation.[10]

But is this not religion in the service of ethnic community or nationalism—one's group's interests and indeed a perversion of religion? Christian ethicist Martin E. Marty argues that religions by nature lead to such groups:

> Those called to be religious naturally form separate groups, movements, tribes or nations. Responding in good faith to a divine call, believers feel themselves endowed with sacred privilege, a sense of choseness that elevates them above all others. This self-perception then leads groups to draw lines around themselves and to speak negatively of "the others…." The elect denounce "others" worshipping false gods and often act violently toward such unbelievers.[11]

Marty's description draws on Jewish and Christian notions of "chosenness" that might not be as appropriate to other traditions, but in any case, as Cavanaugh points out, Marty seems to be "throw[ing] religion into a stew of ethnic, tribal, and national loyalties."[12] The lines then become muddied. Isn't this violence really then ethnic, tribal or national rather than religious? Mark Juergensmeyer would argue that it is religion's tendency to divide, particularly to divide the

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[10] Rupert Gethin, "Buddhist Monks, Buddhist Kings, Buddhist Violence: On the early Buddhist Attitudes to Violence," in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*, edited by John R. Hinnells and Richard King (New York: Routledge, 2007), 62-63.

[11] Marty E. Marty, with Jonathan Moore, *Politics, Religion and the Common Good* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 25-26; quoted by Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, p. 26. Cavanaugh discusses Marty's work in detail (26-28) along with the work of Mark Juergensmeyer (28-36) and David C. Rapoport (36-41) as examples of people who argue that religions are divisive by nature and thus foster violence.

[12] Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 26.

world and people into good and bad, self and other, that lies at the root of its involvement in and inflaming of violence. And when this is raised to the level of a cosmic battle of the forces of good against the forces of evil, extreme forms of violence are unleashed as acceptable, even laudible, or at least necessary actions for those ostensibly on the side of "good."[13]

Still others will point to religion's inherent irrationalism to explain its tendency to stir up the stew. Indeed professor of Political Philosophy and British expert advisor on multi-culturalism Lord Bhikhu Parekh writes:

> Although religion can make a valuable contribution to political life, …[i]t is often absolutist, self-righteous, arrogant, dogmatic, and impatient of compromise. It arouses powerful and sometimes irrational impulses and can easily destabilize society, cause political havoc, and create a veritable hell on earth. Since it is generally of ancient origin, it is sometimes deeply conservative, hidebound, insensitive to changes in the social climate and to people's moral aspirations, and harbors a deep anti-female bias. It often breeds intolerance of other religions as well as of internal dissent, and has a propensity towards violence.[14]

But why can't religion be reasoned with, if those who follow it are reasonable and "decent" people, as Lefebure contends? When religious institutions are entrenched and invested in the status quo, whether ecclesiastical or socio-political, they may behave in this manner, resisting change. But why are "decent people" drawn in? Why might we be? And why does religious fundamentalism, that indeed sometimes takes these qualities described by Parekh, appear to be on the rise in our time?

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[13] See Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State from Christian Militias to al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Cavanaugh discusses Juergensmeyer's arguments in detail in *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 28-36.

[14] Bhikhu Parekh, "The Voice of Religion in Political Discourse," in *Religoin, Politics, and Peace*, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 72; quoted by Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 42. Cavanaugh discusses Parekh's work in detail (42-44) along with that of R. Scott Appleby (44-50) and Charles Selengut (50-54) as examples of arguments linking violence to the irrationality of religion.

Perhaps it is just, as Jonathan Swift famously said, that "We have just enough religion to make us hate, and not enough to make us love one another." That is, we are not sufficiently steeped in the transformative spiritual dimensions of the religions, but invested in other ways.

In my own attempt to come to terms with this, I have found the work of Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar helpful. Kakar suggests a confluence of factors surrounding individual and communal identity that may illuminate both the specific situation in India and the situations in other contemporary societies.[15] First, in India, with the coming of self-rule, a renegotiation of power relations and hierarchy has ensued that heightened the awareness of differences between communities, a dynamic that also occurs in other societies, post-colonial and otherwise, when radical shifts in power relations are afoot and new alliances are being formed as groups jocky for position.

Second, Kakar suggests that elements of communal identity that are already deeply embedded in the construction of self-identity come to the surface of awareness under situations of "identity threat" that call into question sources of self-esteem and understandings of life as meaningful. He identifies the following as threats to identity currently operative in India and elsewhere:

> modernization and globalization[,]...[f]eelings of loss and helplessness accompany[ing] dislocation and migration from rural areas to the shanty town of urban megalopolises, the disappearance of craft skills which underlay traditional work identities, and humiliation caused by the homogenizing and hegemonizing impact of the modern world which pronounces ancestral cultural ideas and values as outmoded and irrelevant"[16]

These threats lead to a retrenchment and assertion of group identities, Kakar suggests, as

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[15] Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The following discussion of Kakar's work appears in my forthcoming essay "Fluid Boundaries and the Assertion of Difference in Low-caste Religious Identity" in *Lines in the Water: Religious Boundaries in South Asia*, edited by Tazim Kassam and Eliza Kent (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press).

[16] Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, 187.

people turn to groups to counter "feelings of loss and helplessness, and to serve as vehicles for the redress of [perceived] injuries to self-esteem." [17]Under such situations of stress, personal identity becomes deeply entwined with group identity, and threats to group identity are perceived as personal threats. Because religion can offer a comprehensive framework for and add a transcendent or sacred dimension to life's meaning and purpose, threats to religious identity can be perceived as an even greater threat. One's whole world and all that one values can seem to be under attack.

In this state of heightened awareness of difference owing to identity threats, self and other may be oppositionally defined. An essential aspect of this process is the projection of what one fears or dislikes in oneself onto another, to the point of demonizing the other and giving a transcendent dimension to one's own sense of group superiority and moral rectitude over the other. Heightened awareness of group identity fuels the process of projection by highlighting one's relationship to the dominant group or dominant minority group, which then becomes a ready target. Religious notions of chosenness or exclusive access to the truth or righteousness exacerbate this.

Kakar's analysis of the psychosocial dimensions of this process of communal identity formation provides insight into how polarization, hatred, and violence can seemingly be so readily kindled in the name of religion. A key strategy of Hindu nationalism has been first to try to convince people that their most important group identity is Hindu (as other forms of identity are under threat), equating Hindu and "Indian" in a merging of religious and national identity. Further they strive to make Hinduism a singular monolithic tradition (attempting to shut down all alternate voices within it), and characterizing Islam as similarly monolithic and as the enemy

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[17] Ibid.

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"other"—by definition not "Indian" but foreign and the source of all their ills. The solution to this polarization and violence does not lie ultimately in identifying facile commonalities between people, though recognizing our common humanity and seeing that people are not so different after all is important to counter demonization.

The more lasting solution lies in the recognition and maintenance of complex identities and affiliations and in the affirmation of difference, in the case of India acknowledging not only the distinctiveness of Hindu and Muslim, but also multiple Hinduisms and multiple Islams. According to Kakar, "a multiculturalism, with majority and minority cultures, rather than the emergence of a composite culture" is needed in India.[18] Octogenarian Muslim scholar and peace activist Maulana Wahiduddin Khan would concur, calling for the management rather than the elimination of difference.[19]

Religious Voices for Positive Peace

OK, but India is far away and what does this have to do with us? What can we do about it anyway? Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of the global religious leaders of our time and an advocate for non-violence even against the horrors of Apartheid, speaks in a similar way of our global situation:

> We live in a universe marked by diversity as the law of its being and our being. We are made to exist in a life that should be marked by cooperation, interdependence, sharing, caring, compassion and complementarity. We should celebrate our diversity; we should exult in our differences as making not for separation and alienation and hostility but for their glorious opposites. The law of our being is to live in solidarity, friendship, helpfulness, unselfishness, interdependence, and complementarity, as sisters and brothers in one family, the

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[18] Ibid., 196.

[19] Yoginder Sikand, trans., *Jihad, Peace and Inter-Community Relations in Islam: Maulana Wahiduddin Khan* (Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2010).

human family, God's family. Anything else, as we have experienced, is disaster.[20]

He goes on to assert:

> Our survival as a species will depend not on unbridled power lacking moral direction, or on eliminating those who are different and seeking only those who think and speak and behave and look like ourselves. That way is stagnation and ultimately death and disintegration. That is the way of people in times, especially of transition, of instability and insecurity, when there is turmoil and social upheaval, poverty and unemployment. Then people seek refuge; in fundamentalisms of all kinds. They look for scapegoats, who are provided by those who are different in appearance, in behavior, in race and in thought. People become impatient with ambivalence. Differences of opinion are not tolerated and simplistic answers are in vogue, whereas the reality is that the issues are complex.[21]

As a religious leader, he is speaking out against this behavior, calling people to resist this impulse, this "way of people." Yet in such times especially, we would rather have things cut and dry, wouldn't we? We are the good guys after all. The people who oppose or threaten us are the bad guys. Right? Or even those who are different from us, who we come to believe have slighted us in some way. Anti-immigrant attitudes often emerge in such times. If something is not right, if I am frustrated, I want to blame someone. Not only do I not want to take responsibility. I also want a simple answer for who is to blame. And anger may begin to consume me, searching for a target.

The Dalai Lama suggests that anger and hatred are the principle obstacles to compassion. And anger he points out flares quickly and immediately lashes out at the first available target. If we engage reason, we will immediately realize that the target has little to do with the cause of our anger. So reason and patience together with the cultivation of compassion may provide an antidote to anger. Religious and political leaders and the communities they lead can, however,

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[20] Desmond Tutu, *God is Not a Christian and Other Provocations* (New York: Harper/Collins, 2011), 50.
[21] Ibid., 51-52.

seek to inflame that anger and channel its destructive energy to consolidate their power and position. But anger, the Dalai Lama notes, has "the ability to overwhelm the mind completely…It can inspire behavior that is terribly destructive and unfortunate. When it is pushed to extreme, anger can make people crazy, to the point where they act to their own and others' detriment."[22] And it is not easily predictable or containable.

The Vietnamese monk and founder of engaged Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh also addresses this powerful emotion and its connection to violence, whether violence that might be termed religious and not. He knows violence all too well from his years of non-violent work in war torn Vietnam, working to stop the bombing and aiding the victims of violence no matter what side they were on, and he has dedicated his life to working for peace at multiple levels, with individuals and with governments and international bodies.   Addressing the latest incarnation of religious violence undertaken and invoked to create fear and demonize others, he writes,

> "Terrorists" are everywhere. They're not only the people who blow up buses and markets. When we are angry, when we behave in a very angry, violent way, then we are not so different from the terrorists we demonize, because we have the same knife of anger in our hearts. When we're not mindful of our words, we say things that can hurt others and cause a lot of pain. That is a kind of intimidation, a kind of terrorism. Many people say hurtful words against children. That knife of hurt may twist in a child's heart every day for the rest of his life. In our family, in our society, on our planet, every day we create more people with knives in their hearts. And because they hold knives in their hearts, their suffering and rage overwhelm their families, their society, the world.[23]

The charge of terrorism is now used not only by our nation but by many others in the same way that "religious violence" has been—carte blanche to use any kind of violence against those so labeled to stop them with the understanding that those so labeled are wholly evil. More often

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[22] Dalai Lama, *My Spiritual Journey: Personal Reflections, Teachings, and Talks* (New York: Harper/Collins, 2009), 21.
[23] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting through the Storm* (New York: Harper/Collins, 2012), 95.

than not the term is associated with Islam. Governments around the world are now using this designation to violently suppress opposition and criticism of many kinds.

But Thich Nhat Hanh calls for a different approach than "othering" and "demonization," even if the person with the knife in his or her heart is thinking and speaking in these terms about you. And his words seem to echo those of Jesus in the sermon on the mount in the Gospel of Matthew when he speaks about the devastating violence anger can inflict and Thich Nhat Hahn too advocates going to those who have something against you, a knife in their heart, and first listening, developing trust to open the possibility of true dialogue.

Religious scriptures, like the Sermon on the Mount, provide resources for thinking through the devastating effects of violence and how we might deal with them—Gandhi famously loved this passage. The great Indian epic the *Mahabharata* deals directly with dharmic responsibility, just war and violence, recounting the terrible war between two sets of cousins, ostensibly necessary but nevertheless with an utterly devastating impact on all concerned. I don't have time to go into the details here, but the tale suggests that when we engage in violence, we lose ourselves, and explores the question of, after having done so, how then can we go on to live, how can we come back to ourselves.[24] The answer offered narratively is not a simple embrace of nonviolence (ahimsa), for we have already it seems stepped across that line. Instead we find embedded tales of "non-cruelty" and of loyalty and gratitude shown to one who was one's companion, of not abandoning and staying with the ones who walked with you—of being humane and choosing to honor relationships rather than rules. In one episode a parrot remains in a tree, wasting away even as the tree does after it has been burned in a fire. When asked why he

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[24] Veena Das, "Violence and Nonviolence at the Heart of Hindu Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, edited by Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-40.

does not just fly away, he replies that the tree had fed him and sheltered him all these years and now it would be cruel to abandon it and so he remains by its side. In an essay in the brand new *Oxford Handbook on Religion and Violence*, renowned Indian political scientist and historian Veena Das offers a much more detailed presentation of the import of this text, seeing it as a possible antedote to the cruelty of communal violence, but then she asks whether such scriptures are truly relevant today, particularly whether Hindu extremists would indeed be willing to listen to them.[25] I would argue that as the traces of the spiritual wisdom of our collective human elders, they are important authoritative resources for thinking through these issues, including how to recover the self that is lost in violence, and for imagining a different future, even if extremists might not have ears to hear.

Religious leaders can play a crucial role in interpreting such teachings and in countering fundamentalism and the use of religion to fuel violence. Too often religious leaders do not do so. Mari Fitzduff, writing of the role of religious leaders in Northern Ireland, recalls in the 1980s when Protestants and Catholics came together in a rare instance when a local Protestant doctor, who served them all without regard to religion, lost his two year old son in a tragic drowning.[26] They all came to give their condolences—his office being the only space where the two communities intermingled freely—but when it came to going into the Protestant Church for the funeral service, many of his Catholic patients remained outside fearing it would be considered a sin to enter and participate in such a service. While Catholics had been condemned by Protestants since the Reformation, they spoke of reconciliation in terms of "the return of the

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[25] Ibid., 31.

[26] Mari Fitzduff, "Just Enough to Hate—Not Enough to Love: Religious Leaders in Northern Ireland," in *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict and Peacemaking*, edited by Timothy D. Sisk (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 145-168. The story recounted here appears on pages 149-150.

separated brethren," their church leaders preaching the superiority of Catholicism as "the one true Church." On the other side, the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians includes statements declaring the Pope the Anti-Christ.[27] Thus though this may have been primarily an ethnic political conflict, it was also riddled with what Fitzduff calls theologies of exclusion coming from both sides. I offer this, in part, as a cautionary example against taking the alternate position that "religious violence" is really just "ethnic violence" or political conflict and thus letting religion off the hook. Fitzduff goes on to look at selected religious leaders who did make a profound impact on the peace process in Ireland, though they were the exception rather than the rule—others, like the rest of us, are often afraid to speak up for a variety of reasons. And her essay appear with a series of others in a fascinating volume entitled *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict and Peacemaking* (2011) that examine the role of religious leaders in a number of conflict situations around the world.[28]

There are those who have provided global leadership to turn the tide of immense violence in our time and to do so by nonviolent means—among them those I have just quoted—Archbishop Tutu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama; and Thich Nhat Hanh—and we might also include Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elie Wiesel—all of them deeply religious. I would argue that this is no accident, and speaks to the way religion can contribute to positive peace in our world. Importantly all speak of the profound need to get beyond religious exclusivism and to foster interreligious understanding. Thich Nhat Hanh is the author of the book *Living Buddha, Living Christ* and is constantly building bridges of understanding between

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[27] Ibid., 150.
[28] Timothy D. Sisk, ed., *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict and Peacemaking* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

traditions.[29] His Holiness the Dalai Lama appeals to our common humanity, advocating spirituality rather than religion and an ethic based on compassion and the realization of our profound interrelatedness, in a move to get beyond exclusionary understandings of religion and conflicting metaphysics, dogma, etc. He goes so far as to say, "We can do without religion but not without spirituality."[30] Archbishop Tutu provocatively published a book entitled *God is Not a Christian*, saying "Some of the ghastliest atrocities have happened in the name of religion. It need not be so if we can learn the obvious: that no religion can hope to have a monopoly on God, on goodness and virtue and truth."[31] The absolutism, self-righteousness, and arrogance noted by Parekh and the divisiveness of religion identified by Marty and Juergenmeyer, the othering and demonizing that open the way for violence "need not be so" it seems, and indeed should not.

We cannot just depend on religious leaders, however, to address this by themselves. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is clear on this, calling for universal responsibility and for a spiritual and ethical revolution, "born from within, motivated by the profound desire to transform oneself in order to become a better human being."[32] He even says,

> I don't believe in the creation of mass movements or in ideologies. And I do not appreciate the fashion of creating an organization in order to promote one idea or another, which implies that one small group is solely responsible for carrying out a given project, to the exclusion of everyone else. In present circumstances, no one should assume that someone else will solve his [or her] problems. Everyone must assume his [or her] share of universal responsibility. That way, as the number of concerned, responsible individuals increases—first dozens, then hundreds, then thousands and even hundreds of thousands—the general atmosphere will be improved.[33]

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[29] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead, 1997). See also Hanh, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers* (New York: Riverhead, 1999).
[30] Dalai Lama, *My Spiritual Journey*, 105.
[31] Tutu, *God is Not a Christian*, 50.
[32] Dalai Lama, *My Spiritual Journey*, 106.
[33] Ibid., 117.

And we cannot just stand back, for not to act is also to act. I give my students an essay to read in my introductory class, written by an Indian sociologist Irawate Karve.[34] She is thinking about the phrase from the Upanishads "That art Thou," which teaches that we are all part of the One Reality, our own deepest and truest self one with the selves of all other beings. Most of us can easily relate to that wonderful feeling that washes over us sometimes when we are with people we love or in an utterly beautiful place in the wilderness when we feel at one with everything, and Karve recounts such an experience equating it with "That art Thou. But then she finds herself reading about the Holocaust and recoils from the thought that if this teaching is true, then she is also in some sense one with Hitler and Eichmann and the death camp guards as well as the prisoners. Her mind will not let her off the hook or allow her to "other" and demonize the perpetrators, reminding her of the complicity of the nations that knew what was happening and initially said nothing. Are we as citizens of these nations not also complicit? She must admit, yes. Then her inner interrogator brings it closer to home. Did you know people who engaged in hate speech at the time of the Partition? Did you speak up? And as I talk with my students we bring it home for us—are we in some way responsible for the torture carried out at Abu Ghraib, for example, or the genocide in Rwanda? Angrily she asks her mind, "What should I do, then? Commit suicide or become a wandering ascetic?" But her mind reminds her that these too are forms of actions for which we are responsible—non-action is also action. The gist of the essay is that we are all involved in life and as such none of us is wholly blameless, nor anyone else wholly evil—we are all responsible for what we choose to do or not to do, and we can choose to make the world a better place and to be better humans with each action we take—or not.

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[34] Irawate Karve, "'All That is You': An Essay," in *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*, edited by Eleanor Zelliot and Maxine Berntsen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 213-222.

Religions must not be left to those who would use them to fuel the fires of hate. Ordinary people like you and I can contribute to promoting positive peace: by exposing and resisting the weaponization of religion and by seeking out interreligious understanding and working for reconciliation. The Dalai Lama calls us to step up to this universal responsibility in whatever way we can.

I am also reminded of another great spiritual leader of our time, Elie Wiesel, who challenged President Clinton, and also us when he was here last year, with an admonition from the Torah: "Do not stand idly by."

I will end with words of Archbishop Tutu, who indeed embodies and models the contribution that religions can make to more positive peace, even as His Holiness, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Elie Wiesel do. Famously during the crusades, there were times when the armies on both sides of the battles were praying to God to protect them and to deliver them from their enemies. It was the same God that they were both praying to for victory. Yet Archbishop Tutu reminds us, God loves all humans impartially. Even so he claims God does take sides and so must we:

> This God did not just talk…He showed himself to be a doing God. Perhaps we might add another point about God—he takes sides. He is not a neutral God. He took the side of the slaves, the oppressed, the victims. He is still the same even today; He sides with the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, and the victims of injustice.[35]

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Elie Wiesel's challenge to not stand idly by, the Dalai Lama's call to universal responsibility and to spiritual and ethical revolution, Thich Nhat Hanh's invitation to resist othering and demonization and practice mindfulness and compassion, and Archbishop Tutu's championing of

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[35] Desmond Tutu quoted in Allister Sparks and Mpho Tutu, *Tutu Authorized* (New York: Harper/Collins, 2011), 77.

diversity and acting on the side of victims of violence of every kind—these are representative of the contributions religions can make toward achieving a positive and lasting peace, needed so desperately in our time. And my hope is that having begun to explore the question of religious violence, we may think about the news a bit differently, with a more compassionate heart and a more critical mind.