RELIGION, POLITICS AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

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Introduction

Why should the student of strategic studies care about the relationship between religion and politics? Certainly some proponents of approaches like rational choice or formal modelling may say that, given the virtues of simplicity in explanation, such considerations represent at their most innocent unnecessary complication. Others would perhaps concede that, whether actors be value maximizers or value satisficers, the issue remains of the source of values themselves, and presumably religion may be seen as one aspect of the culture that conditions values. Other students of strategy may adopt some variation of realism, or even realpolitik but here, as well, issues arise of the source of the ends of foreign policy. Those students of strategic studies adopting an historical approach are more likely to have arrived at some sort of appreciation of the role that cultural factors, and religion specifically have played. The point is that considerations of religion are relevant in at least two ways to the student of strategic studies.

Consideration of religious factors represents less of a departure from classical realism than it may seem. Niebuhr, after all, approached international politics from a position steeped in Augustinian theology. The early realists, like Morgenthau, Wight and Bull, were clearly sensitive to the impact of culture and history on international politics. Later realists were drawn toward a more abstract consideration of politico-strategic relations. While post-modernist and post-structuralist approaches have not been notable for their attention to the influence of religious factors, their attention to cultural factors suggests that they should be capable of accommodating some consideration of religious factors, although there has been an unfortunate tendency to view religious factors as invariably dependent and

not independent variables. Consideration of religion should fit in well with the recent attention to the politics of identity and narrative. In his recent discussion of the nature and evolution of sovereignty in international politics, Philpott suggests that what he identifies as the two revolutions in sovereignty, the origin of the Westphalian system itself and the extension of that system to the entire globe with the end of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, developed ultimately from changes in ideas, rather than structural factors, ideas of liberation in the form of territorial self-determination.[1] Philpott asserts that even those trends that seek to limit sovereignty such as notions of human and minority rights and those arguably reflecting an emerging body of international law justifying humanitarian intervention in cases like Kosovo.

Considering Religion in Understanding and Explaining Foreign Policy

One of these ways may be viewed as cultural or sociological. Religion, as an aspect of a particular society's political culture, exercises an influence on the making of both domestic and foreign policy. It, of course, does not determine either. Foreign policy specifically emerges from the interplay of factors in the international environment, domestic politics and culture, and the policy process itself.

Some years ago, the field of political science witnessed the popularity of works elaborating on the "end of ideology" thesis which asserted that, with economic and technological development, debates over fundamental issues would become decreasingly salient as policy-making became a scene of bureaucratic rationality. Long before the Cold War ended, observers displayed increased skepticism about this thesis. Today, national and international politics is more than ever characterized by debate

over the politics of identity. Religion is one aspect of identity; nation, ethnicity and gender are among the others. Students of political development assumed that, with economic development and technological progress, there would be a trend toward secularization. While there has been a movement in some respects toward secularization, traditional religion has persisted, and in some cases, there have been revivalist movements that reflect not so much the persistence of tradition as they reflect responses to secularism and modernity.

On occasion, the genuine contribution that consideration of the influence of religion can play is discredited by overly crude and facile approaches. In the case of the Middle East, for example, links between religion and nationalism are so obvious that nuances are frequently passed over altogether. In the case of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, one cannot overlook the manner in which Catholicism represents an element of Croatian identity, the Orthodox tradition an element of Serbian identity, and Islam an element of Bosnian identity. Nevertheless, overly simplistic assumptions must be avoided. In both the Middle East and the Balkans, the significance of religion may vary among individuals within a given society. Israel, for example, sees itself as a Jewish homeland but whereas, for some Israelis, this represents a cultural or ethnic identity in the context of a modern and predominantly secular society, it should entail, other Israelis argue, something more fundamentally or substantively religious.

Similarly, within the predominantly Islamic Arab world there are Islamic traditionalists, Islamic liberals and Islamic revivalists (also termed Islamists or Islamic fundamentalists, although some scholars object to the use of the term "Islamic fundamentalists"). Adherents of Islam are also divided among Sunni, Shia and Sufi traditions. While the Sunni tradition represents the majority within the Middle East as a whole, the Shia tradition represents the majority within Iran, for example, and throughout the region

one can find both Sunni and Shia Moslems, as well as followers of the Sufi tradition of mysticism. No religious community is entirely homogeneous.

Nor is any society homogeneous. One tends, for example, to identify the Arab world with Islam but there are religious minorities that are not insignificant. Nor is the existence of such minorities simply a recent development. Egypt has had a significant Coptic Christian population since the early years of Christianity. Zoroastrianism existed in Iran prior to Islam being brought to Iran, and continues to have followers.

In recent years, Samuel Huntington has been responsible for some of the revival of interest in the impact of cultural forces, including religion, on international politics with his "clash of civilizations" theory.[2] While there is much to be said for attention to the influence of cultural factors, Huntington's approach is simplistic, and tends to presume that, in the absence of the discipline imposed by the East-West confrontation of the Cold War, clashes between a liberal secular west and the Islamic world are likely to constitute a 'normal' state of affairs. If it is simply assumed that such clashes are inevitable, then neither Western states nor states in predominantly Islamic societies are likely to make the appropriate efforts at dialogue and confidence-building. Huntington tends to overlook the differences among adherents of traditional Islam which tends not to be strongly political, Islamic liberalism which aims to reconcile the best of the Islamic and liberal traditions, and Islamic revivalism which tends to be more overtly political and militant. Even within the Islamic world, there has been a tendency to overestimate the homogeneity of that world. In World War I, the strategists of the Ottoman Empire sought to rally Moslems throughout the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent to a *jihad*. Mango, in his biography of Ataturk, observes that the strategists' knowledge of the Islamic world outside of the Ottoman Empire was limited. Mango notes that "The mission to Afghanistan was entrusted to Mustafa Kemal's friend, the naval officer Huseyin Rauf (Orbay). 'All I know about Afghanistan is its

name,' objected Huseyin Rauf. 'How does one get there? May I go by way of America?"'[3] This is not, however, to recommend downplaying the influence of religion, either.

There are a number of scholars whose work does reflect impressive and provocative scholarship. This is not to suggest that these scholars are unanimous in their conclusions. Serious consideration of the influence of religious institutions and the cultural attitudes passed on within religious traditions does not invariably produce a single unambiguous set of conclusions any more than one would be likely to find unanimity among those who focus on the influence of economic factors, or those who focus on technological factors. Similarly, in the same way that some students of strategic studies focus on the influence of economics, not because economics explain everything but simply because no one can master everything and a certain division of scholarly labour is appropriate so long as one appreciates ultimately how a particular focus relates to a more comprehensive whole, scholars consider the influence of religion not because they see it as the sole factor but because it represents a particular part of the whole puzzle that intrigues them.

To the reader unfamiliar with the field, among those whose work might be recommended would be Bernard Lewis, John L. Esposito, Fouad Ajami, James Piscatori, and John Voll. In works like *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*,[4] Esposito responds to suggestions such as those of Huntington that forecast a "clash of civilizations" between the West and the Islamic world. In works like *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*,[5] Bernard Lewis examines the interplay of elements such as religion, language, ethnicity and the state in influencing the politics of the Middle East. That most of these scholars have concentrated on the Middle East is a reflection of the fact that, in this particular sub-field, consideration of religious factors has been more prominent than in other sub-fields, although even here there has been a tendency among scholars other than those cited to depict the influence of religion as a matter of irrational fanaticism.

While there has been a persistent tendency to neglect religious factors --- so much so that Johnston and Sampson entitle their book *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*,[6] --- there have been some exceptions. The Johnston and Sampson collection is one. It starts from the premise that while religious differences have been one cause for conflict, the focus of most religions on restraining selfish and bellicose instincts in a spirit of humility, compassion and selflessness has also furthered the goals of conflict resolution and reconciliation. Rubin, in his contribution, observes that policy-makers have "...often misread the importance of religion as a factor in the national politics and international behaviour of some countries and regions. This has sometimes led to incorrect and erroneous policy responses that have proven quite costly."[7] In his contribution, Luttwak laments that

> Policy-makers, diplomats, journalists, and scholars who are ready to overinterpret economic causality, who are apt to dissect social differentiations most finely, and who will minutely categorize political affiliations are still in the habit of disregarding the role of religion, religious institutions, and religious motivations in explaining politics and conflict, and even in reporting their concrete modalities.[8]

In retrospect, consideration of religious factors might have enhanced the capacity of policy-makers to anticipate developments like the collapse of Communism and the end of the Cold War, or the fall of the Shah's regime and the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

In his Introduction to a Special Issue of *Orbis* on "Faith and Statecraft," Walter McDougall observes that "...individuals and religious communities who dare to follow a higher calling may have been responsible for some of the most sublime (as well as most sordid) achievements in history."[9]

Recently, the journal *Millenium* devoted a special issue to the topic of "Religion and International Relations." In it, Hasenclever and Rittberger remark that "Contrary to once widespread expectations that religion would gradually disappear as a political force in modernising societies, religious communities have been getting stronger in most nations over the last two decades or so."[10] In the

same issue, Thomas, as well, remarks on the revival of the role of religion in politics, cautioning that "...to look at the global resurgence of religion and cultural pluralism through such lenses as the 'clash of civilisations', 'fundamentalism' or 'religious extremism' --- as if the global resurgence of religion is an aberration in an otherwise 'modern' world --- might be extremely misleading."[11] The actual situation, Thomas argues, is that

> What is happening is that a truly multicultural international society is being formed for the first time. Therefore, coming to terms with this large-scale religious change --- taking cultural and religious pluralism seriously --- will be an important part of the international politics of the twenty-first century.[12]

It would not seem unreasonable to suggest that it would be difficult to discuss such subjects as Hindu nationalism in India, the emergence of Islamic revivalism, liberation theology in Latin America, violence in Northern Ireland or the role of the Catholic Church in Poland under Communism and in the collapse of Communist rule without considering religion, and it would be fair to suggest that what distinguishes the topics on this list is only a matter of degree in the explicitness of the element of religion. Few would suggest, and certainly it would not be suggested here, that it would be possible or reasonable to discuss even these topics solely in terms of religious factors. The challenge is to avoid both over- or under-stating the impact of religious factors.

Religious factors arguably played some role in situations with less obviously religious elements. In these cases, too, the challenge is to discern the influence of religious factors without either neglecting such factors, on the one hand, or resorting to some sort of religious determinism, on the other. Conventionally it has been assumed that with modernization comes secularization, and that with secularization comes the diminishing of the influence of religion at least in the public or political sphere. While conventional social-science wisdom may not be without some basis in this regard, the case is too often over-stated. Fowler notes that religion frequently provides the sense of community and solidarity that moderates some of the more isolating aspects of liberal individualism.[13] It is not that

persons wish to reject the liberating quality of liberal individualism but that religion can provide the sense of community that complements and mitigates the harsher elements of liberal individualism. The point is that, while it is sometimes assumed that the influence of religion in the public sphere can be found only in the Third World, in fact the influence of religion is not absent from any society, however economically or technologically advanced. It may manifest itself in the form of pressure group activity on the part of explicitly religious institutions, but it may also take the form of religious elements moulding political culture and public opinion. An individual's attitudes toward world politics may be shaped by personal travel and experience or by print and electronic media, but they may also be shaped by informal experience, such as a homily given at a place of worship by a visiting missionary working in a Developing country, or even more fundamentally by such notions as the Golden Rule or the Good Samaritan, or by understandings of the just war, *jihad*, pacifism or some other approach to issues of war and peace. This author recalls a former professor explaining that, when faced with the issue of whether to support the war effort in Canada in World War II or to return to the United States where he had grown up, (prior to the American involvement in the war), he turned to the *Bhagavada gita* for guidance.

To illustrate the need to appreciate the influence of religion, one might consider how, while Islamic revivalism has come to exercise influence throughout the Islamic world, the ultimate impact of the Islamic Revolution that shook Iran and replaced the rule of the Shah with an Islamic republic outside the borders of Iran has turned out to be less than its proponents had hoped for and its critics feared. Among other factors, it is crucial to appreciate that the Shia tradition, while the majority tradition in Iran, is a minority tradition within the Middle East as a whole, and that the Shia tradition, as a consequence of its particular history, "...acquired a strongly messianic character: there were hopes, characteristic of the oppressed, of a leader who would emerge to restore justice."[14] Robin Wright

observes that "...the Shia are the main inheritors of the revolutionary fervor of the age of Mohammed."[15]

The Sunni tradition has a less pronounced messianic element. While the Shia tradition had not sought prior to the Ayatullah Khomeini to take over temporal power, it did traditionally distance itself from worldly powers in order to avoid co-optation and to be able to subject worldly rulers to theological critique. In other words, it had a much less deferential tradition toward earthly rulers than was the case with the Sunni tradition. Among Shias, the nature of the Shia tradition became a matter not only of theological, but political relevance. Ajami notes that

> It is around [Imam] Hussein's martyrdom [in 680] that Shia history revolves, and it was over his legacy that Khomeini and his more liberal critics at home waged a proxy debate about Iran's future, about the balance in the Shia tradition between zeal and solitude on the one hand and routine and social peace on the other.[16]

Without intending to suggest that there were not other factors, nevertheless, consideration of religion in studying such an issue illuminates dimensions that might otherwise be overlooked by a single-minded focus on strategic factors narrowly conceived.

Conventional realists too often assume that individual states are essentially homogeneous motivated by essentially similar motives and pursuing essentially similar ends. This tends to lead to one or the other results --- either anything anomalous is assumed to be a cover for the sorts of motives the realist can accept, or it is simply assumed that ends are endogenous factors about which nothing analytically significant can be said.

Religion and Ethics

The student of international politics, in order to understand and to explain the behaviour of the various actors in within it, must inquire into, among other considerations, the nature of the influences on the decision-making process undertaken by those actors. In the preceding section, it has been asserted that some of these influences both on individuals , and on societies shaped by particular historical, cultural and ideological traditions, can be identified as religious. The concluding paragraph of the preceding section, however, also serves as a bridge of sorts to the secondary manner in which religion is of relevance to the student of strategic studies. Without intending to impugn the objectivity that scholars aspire to bring to their field of study, it is nonetheless the case that scholars as individuals are as much shaped by religious belief, as they are disbelief or doubt of others as individuals. Typically, this means that most students of strategic studies aspire to contribute through their scholarship to the achievement of such goals as peace, security and justice. Hopefully no student of strategic studies would seriously adopt the attitude facetiously put forward by another former professor of mine who said, "Most people don't like war but I do. It gives me a job." As we have seen, one individual, not yet at the time of World War II a professor of international relations, turned to the *Bhagavad gita* for guidance.

Students of strategic studies are frequently involved in confronting ethical questions for themselves, and in contributing whether within bureaucracies and governments or in the public sphere to discussions of foreign and strategic policy issues. Their own ethical and belief-systems come into play. As well, religious institutions as pressure groups and individuals seeking to act out their beliefs attempt to influence both the attentive public, composed of scholars among others, and the public debate more broadly. A good example would be the efforts of religious organizations to influence the policy debate

with regard to the nuclear arms race in the aftermath of the breakdown of détente that followed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The American Catholic bishops produced the pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*.[17] Similar letters were produced by the bishops of a number of other countries.[18] Bruce Russett of Yale University served as a consultant to the committee that produced a draft letter for the American Catholic bishops. Prominent scholars of international relations like Joseph Nye, Robert W. Tucker and Stanley Hoffmann expressed their opinions of the letter in print.[19] Strobe Talbott wrote (be consistent with tenses) that, when President Reagan consulted the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the merits of the notion of strategic defence,:

> The chief of naval operations, Admiral James Watkins, said that the United States had what he called a 'moral imperative' to keep up the search for something better than mutual assured destruction. At that time, the American Catholic bishops were raising fundamental questions about the morality of deterrence. Watkins himself was a devout Catholic. A Navy White Paper on deterrence, drafted at his behest, asked whether it would not be better to save lives than to avenge them. Reagan said that he, too, had been thinking a lot about the 'immorality' of MAD.[20]

It is fair to say that not all who posed for themselves the questions raised in the American Catholic Bishops' Pastoral necessarily reached the same conclusion but the story is included here to make two points: the first is that Watkins as an individual, a student of strategic affairs and a policy-maker drew on his beliefs, and that, whether or not individual students of strategic studies occupy offices charged with making government policy, they, nevertheless, cannot avoid confronting fundamental ethical questions; the second represents a reminder of what was discussed in the preceding section with regard to understanding the factors that influence policy-making. Consideration of the influence of religion sheds light on the policy-making process in this case.

Each of the major religions has developed a tradition or traditions for confronting issues of when, if ever, resort to military force may be justified, and what limits must be recognized on the extent to which force may be used and by what means. Within the Christian tradition, one may identify both

just-war and pacifist traditions. The just-war tradition entails both jus ad bellum (just cause), and jus in bello (just means) traditions. It would be fair, as well, to say that the latter includes Augustinian and Thomistic strains, each modified over time by such influences as chivalry, and the 'Peace of God' and 'Truce of God' traditions. The Islamic tradition has developed a considerable literature on questions of *jihad* and justifiable war. Within these traditions, one can identify continuing contestation about the precise content of a morally appropriate response to the questions raised by the potential resort to military force. Within the Western liberal secular tradition, in addition to the original explicitly theological forms of just-war theory and pacifism, there have emerged secular forms of both just-war theory and pacifism.

Religious traditions have been drawn on, as well, for approaches to issues like redistributive justice, immigration and the rights of refugees, and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

While it would be inappropriate to emphasize religious factors to the neglect of economic, strategic or other factors, an understanding of international politics is likely to be enriched by consideration of religious factors. Religion is one of those elements in life --- family and nation being among the others --- that inspire profound loyalties. When policy-makers and members of the attentive public approach the determination of foreign policy goals and the selection of means for the pursuit of those goals, such deeply-held aspects of identity cannot but influence the process.

Postscript

The events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath would seem to call for some comment. To reflect fully on these events, an entirely new essay may be necessary but, pending such further reflection, a number of points may be made. First, the events of September 11, 2001 and the resulting war in Afghanistan would seem to reinforce the argument of the preceding essay that students of international relations should devote some attention to the influence of religion. Second, in the view of this author, events would also appear to reinforce observations contained in the preceding essay cautioning against crude and simplistic analyses that over-state the homogeneity of religious communities, and that neglect the genuine complexity that characterizes reality. Such simplistic analyses simply perpetuate misleading stereotypes. So-called "Islamic fundamentalists" no more exhaust what is meant by the politics of Islam than the Ku Klux Klan or the belligerents in Northern Ireland exhaust what is encompassed by the influence on politics of the Christian tradition. The study of the influence of religion on international politics is incredibly demanding because doing it properly entails not simply a competence in strategic studies and other aspects of the study of international politics but, as well, a competence not only in one's own but in a number of religious traditions. Third, public opinion demands that the execution of any military strategy attempt in good faith to avoid injury or loss of life among civilians. Whatever the inclinations of strategists or policy-makers, the public will insist that ethical considerations must not be overlooked in military planning. Fourth, in seeking to pursue policy objectives through coalition-building, sensitivity to other traditions may be a vital necessity.

1. See Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993): pages?

3. Andrew Mango, *Ataturk* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook Press, 2000), 140.

4. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, (rev. ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

5. Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 1998).

6. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, (ed.), *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 1994).

7. Barry Rubin, "Religion and International Affairs" in Johnston and Sampson, TITLE? and publication info needed here 20.

8. Edward Luttwak, "The Missing Dimension" in title, 9.

9. Walter A. McDougall, "Introduction", *Orbis*, 42:2 (Spring 1998): 166.

10. Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, "Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict," *Millenium* 29:3 (2000): 641.

11. Scott M. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society", *Millenium* 29:3 (2000):818.

12. Ibid., 818-819.

13. See Robert Booth Fowler, *Unconventional Partners: Religion and Liberal Culture in the United States* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1989).

14. Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (2nd ed.), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 415.

15. Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam*, (New York: Touchstone Books, Simon and Schuster, 1986), 64.

16. Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New

York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1999), 150-151.

17. *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace, May 3, 1983, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Pastoral is available published separately by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C.; and in Jim Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb: Waging Peace in a Nuclear Age*, (Garden City, New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1983); in Philip J. Murnion, (ed.), *Catholics and Nuclear War: A Commentary on The Challenge of Peace The U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983); and in John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M. and Donald Senior, C.P., (ed.), *Biblical and Theological Reflections on The Challenge of Peace*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984).

18. *Out of Justice, Peace*, Joint Pastoral Letter of the West German Bishops, and *Winning the Peace*, Joint Pastoral Letter of the French Bishops, the former translated by Irish Messenger Publications, and the latter by Rev. Michael Wrenn can be found in a single volume edited with an introduction by James V. Schall, S.J., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983). Also included in this volume is "Towards a Nuclear Morality", A Letter by Basil Cardinal Hume, Primate of England. The bishops of Ireland have addressed these issues in *The Storm That Threatens*, Joint statement by the bishops of Ireland on war and peace in the nuclear age, July 1983, (Dublin: Catholic Press and Information Office, 1983).

19. See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Nuclear Ethics*, (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan, and London: Collier Macmillan, 1986); JosephS. Nye, Jr., "Ethics and the nuclear future", *The World Today* 42:8-9 (August-September 1986); Robert W. Tucker, *The Nuclear Debate: Deterrence and the Lapse of Faith* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1985); and Stanley Hoffmann, *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (Boulder, Colorado and London: Westview Press, 1987), 364-369.

20. Strobe Talbott, *The Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace*(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 192.