

# Palm Sunday: History and Tradition

The time for the followers of Jesus to publicly protest injustices such as wealth inequality is at hand, argues retired Baptist minister Rev. Howard Bess.

By Howard Bess

In about 30 CE, Jesus traveled about 70 miles south of his native Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. This trip is mentioned in Matthew's, Mark's and Luke's Gospels, all of which describe Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as the first event of a tumultuous week that ended with Jesus' crucifixion as an insurrectionist and later with his resurrection from the dead. When scholars interested in studying the historical Jesus look for historical certainties in the gospel writings, they almost unanimously identify this trip to Jerusalem as a matter of history, not just tradition or fiction.

Scholars are not of one mind about the details of these three events. The three gospel writers obviously embellished their stories with fiction. There are things we know with reasonable confidence. We know that Jesus being greeted by multitudes in Jerusalem is not remotely possible. This was probably Jesus' only trip to Jerusalem during the short years of his public ministry in Galilee. 70 miles is a long walk. He might have been known by Jerusalem's Pharisees, but the Pharisees would have ignored him. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was more likely a very small political protest march, more like a form of street theatre.

The details of the story, i.e. children waving palm branches and Jesus riding a donkey in fulfillment of a non-existent Old Testament prediction, are more likely small parts of the process of turning the political nature of the Jesus movement into a new religion that glorifies the political leader. The reality is that Jesus was a religiously devout and practicing Jew, who was killed for his political activities. Those who want to look at the whole process should read Barrie Wilson's book "How Jesus Became Christian." The process of change has left followers of Jesus reciting the Apostles' Creed that deifies Jesus and leaves what he said, taught and lived unsaid. It left Jesus followers asking "what should I believe?" to the exclusion of "what should I be doing?"

On Palm Sunday, 2018, children will once again parade through church sanctuaries waving Palm branches or paper replicas in the celebration of the "triumphal" entry into the city of Jerusalem. It is a tradition that seemingly will not go away. Once again nothing will be said from Christian pulpits about the horror of Roman rule. The Roman rulers were ruthless thieves of land and wealth. They made hard-working laborers into economic slaves. The Roman tyrants in the hinterlands of the Empire shipped stolen wealth back to Rome, where wealthy people had

sumptuous living.

The Romans were masters of the vision of greatness. They called it Pax Romana. In fact the Romans had a vast propaganda program that justified the gap between the wealthy and the poor. It was unimaginable no matter what they called it. Jesus saw through all the ugliness, seeing it as a wholesale denial of justice. His entry into Jerusalem was the beginning of a week of protest.

Today, pastors of churches, who are well trained in high quality seminaries, know the context of the ministry of Jesus from Nazareth. Ministers by the tens of thousands know about the ruthless greed that drove the Romans. They know of the compromises that were being made by the priests of the Jerusalem temple. They know about the rage of Jesus at the injustices of the system. They know about the fraud of a triumphal entry but will say nothing. Instead, tradition will triumph once more and children will wave Palm branches once more.

If there is any time in the year when followers of Jesus should massively protest against the evils in our society, it is during holy week beginning with Palm Sunday.

Jim Wallace, editor of Sojourners magazine has chosen the April 2018 edition to call for a return to aggressive protest by followers of Jesus from Nazareth. He sees the disparities of the Roman Empire being repeated in America under the banner of Make America Great Again. For Wallace the time for the followers of Jesus to publicly protest is at hand. Protest marches against injustice are a part of our Jesus tradition.

In our America, protest marches have been used effectively to bring about change. The American master of the protest march was Martin Luther King Jr. When he led marches, he was using the tool of Jesus, the protest march. Many Christians kept advising King to back off from his protest marches. He kept on marching. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is one of the truly great literary pieces of our history. It was addressed to the clergy of Birmingham. Protest marches are unsettling to the majority. They produce consequences that are not comfortable for the protesters. King was in a jail in Birmingham because of his non-violent protest marching. Jesus was killed because he protested.

Jim Wallace has been arrested and jailed 23 times because of his protests against injustice.

The tradition of celebrating Palm Sunday as a triumphal entry should cease. It needs to be replaced with protest marches against the abuse of power and injustice in all its forms. It is the message of Palm Sunday.

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## Deciphering Trump's Opaque Foreign Policy

President Trump has set loose several competing – and contradictory – strands of foreign policy with the big question now whether he can avoid tripping himself up, writes ex-British diplomat Alastair Crooke.

By Alastair Crooke

It is now a commonplace to note that President Trump is advocating a mercantilist “America First” foreign policy, at odds with the prevailing globalist view of a cosmopolitan, super-culture; that he is intent on dismantling this globalist zeitgeist that he believes imposes moral and cultural norms which have weakened America’s mercantile “animal spirits” and whose embrace of the politics of diversity has sapped the strength from America’s moral and cultural sinews.

In practice, the policy that emerges will not be so black and white, or so easily categorized. “Team Trump,” in fact, embraces three distinct approaches: the “benevolent American hegemon” traditionalists, the Christian warriors pitted against an Islamic “hostile” ethos – and, of course, Trump’s own “America First” mercantilism. Each of these trends distrusts the other, yet must ally with one or the other in order to balance the third or at least avoid having it act as spoiler.

This inter-connectivity makes it especially hard to read the runes – the Trump administration’s marks of mysterious significance – of likely U.S. policy given the jostling and elbowing ahead between three distinct world views. And it is made even harder given President Trump’s and strategic adviser Steve Bannon’s deliberate embrace of a politics of feint and distraction, to throw opponents off-balance.

Trump’s style of mercantilist politics – though novel in our era – is not new. It has occurred before, and in its earlier setting led to profound geo-political consequences. It led then to war and ultimately to the emergence of a new geo-political order.

That is not necessarily to say that the same will occur today, but on Sept. 17, 1656, Oliver Cromwell, a Protestant puritan who had fought a civil war in

England against its Establishment and its élite and who had deposed and then executed the reigning king, addressed his revolutionary parliamentarians in Westminster by posing the question: Who are our enemies? There was, he answered to the gathered parliamentarians, an alignment of “wicked men” in the world led by a powerful state – Catholic Spain with the Pope at its head. The “enmity” that Cromwell’s countrymen faced was, at its root, the evil of a religion – Catholicism – that “refused the Englishman’s desire for simple liberties ... that put men under restraint ... [and] under which there was no freedom.”

Since Cromwell’s day, the mainly English-speaking (Protestant) world has demonized its “enemies” as opponents of “God’s will” through their clinging to the failings of a static and backward religious ethic (as the Puritans characterized Catholicism). And, as for the complaint of “restraint” and “lack of liberty”? At its crux lay English frustration at the impediments faced by its traders and merchants. The Puritans of that time saw in Catholicism an ethos that was not welcoming to individual enterprise, to profit or to trade.

English “hawks” – usually Puritans and merchants – wanted an aggressive anti-Spanish policy that would open new markets to burgeoning English trade. Catholicism was not an ethos, the Cromwellians fervently and dogmatically asserted, in which the nascent capitalism of the time could thrive.

Cromwell’s address to Parliament in 1656 was an early articulation of the Protestant ethic: one that has contributed hugely to shaping American entrepreneurial capitalism, and in taking America to its position of power (Steve Bannon does in fact acknowledge the parallel: “I am Thomas Cromwell in the court of the Tudors,” he once said to a reporter).

## **A Religious War**

Today, for one significant Trump constituency (the Tea Party base), Iran is today’s Spain, and it is Islam (*vice* Catholicism) that is frustrating “God’s will,” by embracing an ethos that hates the Christian “ethic.” And, it is secular globalization that has sapped America’s mercantile animal spirits, imposed restrictions on trade (i.e. NAFTA), and whose cultural and “value” norms are sapping America’s moral and spiritual muscularity.

Why should this Cromwell analogy matter today? In one sense, Trump had little choice. In opposing the (“restrictive”) globalist, foreign policy – with its spinal cord of a U.S.-led global defense sphere – the President needed to stand up some alternative foreign policy to the embedded totem of “America as the gyroscope of the global order.”

Pure mercantilism – in the style of businessman negotiator-ism – is not really,

of itself, a foreign policy. The power of the “benign U.S. hegemon” meme would require something more powerful to be set up, over, and against it, to balance it out. Trump has opted for the “Christianity in peril” narrative. It is one that touches on deeply buried cultural veins of Protestant imagery within the President’s Tea Party constituency.

Retired General Michael Flynn, now Trump’s National Security Advisor, perhaps best represents this religiously based, pro-Christian Republican foreign policy, while retired General James Mattis, now U.S. Defense Secretary, perhaps has a foot in both Republican camps – as Martin Wright from Brookings explains:

“Republican foreign policy since 9/11 has had two basic strands, *which sometimes contradict each other*. The first is that the United States is in an existential fight against radical Islam. The second is that America’s global interests involve the maintenance of U.S. leadership in Europe and East Asia – interests, in other words, that extend far beyond combating radical Islam. The Republican establishment has always toed the line on the first, but it has increasingly focused much more on the second. The global war on terror has, of late, taken second place to balancing China and containing Russia.

“But a group within the Republican tent never made this shift. These are the people who believe the United States is engaged in a war against radical Islam that is equivalent to World War II or the Cold War. They believe it is a struggle rooted in religion to which all else should be subservient – that America’s overwhelming focus must be on radical Islam instead of revisionist powers in Europe or Asia. They also generally favor moving away from a values-based foreign policy to harsh methods to wage a major war.

“For the most part, the leaders of this school of thought have been dismissed as cranks or ideologues. But their views were widely shared in the Republican electorate, who were increasingly alarmed by the Islamic State. And they found an ally in Trump.” (emphasis added)

In short, we should expect the Administration’s policy to oscillate between these two poles of Republican foreign policy, as Trump plays off one against another, in order to insert his own (“non – foreign policy”) of radical mercantilism. The Cromwellian meme of making Iran the “number one” terrorist state and radical Islam the “hostile ethos” does fit well for the U.S. President to embrace the businessman-negotiator *modus operandi* – under the cover of belligerency towards the Islamic “ethos.”

### **A Popular ‘Enemy’**

Belligerency towards Iran is, of course, popular and in this way Trump’s

policy translates well or at least understandably to the mores of the Washington Beltway. This “hostile Islam” meme also provides the rationale (defeating Islamic terror) for détente with Russia. I have suggested earlier that détente with Russia is key to Trump’s dismantling of Washington’s “benign hegemon” global defense sphere. Trump argues that the “blanket” U.S. defense sphere precisely limits the possibilities for the U.S. to negotiate advantageous trade terms with its allies on a case-by-case bilateral basis.

In effect, under the cover of fighting a hostile Islamic “ethos,” Trump can pursue détente with Russia – and then toughly “businessman-negotiate” with allied states (now stripped of the Russian “threat” elevating them to a status as America’s somehow privileged, defense allies). This seems to be Secretary Tillerson’s intended role.

Martin Wright again: “This is why naming Rex Tillerson as secretary of state was so important for Trump. A week before he was named, Trump’s senior aide Kellyanne Conway told the press that Trump was expanding the list of names for secretary of state and that the most important consideration was that the nominee ‘would be to implement and adhere to the president-elect’s America-first foreign policy – if you will, his view of the world.’ The implication was clear: [Mitt] Romney, David Petraeus, and others would not fit the bill, so Trump would have to look elsewhere. He found Tillerson.

“Tillerson is a pragmatist and a dealmaker. In many ways, he is a traditionalist. After all, he was endorsed by James Baker, Robert Gates, Hadley, and Condoleezza Rice. However, Trump also sees him, based on his personal relationship with Putin and opposition to sanctions on Russia, *as someone willing to cut deals with strongmen and who sees national security through an economic lens and is thus an embodiment of his own America First views.* Speaking in Wisconsin hours after naming Tillerson, Trump said, ‘Rex is friendly with many of the leaders in the world that we don’t get along with, and some people don’t like that. They don’t want them to be friendly. That’s why I’m doing the deal with Rex, ‘cause I like what this is all about.’” (emphasis added)

Is this – the war with a “hostile Islamic ethos” – then just a ploy, a diversion? Something for Iran to ignore? We suspect that Iran should not assume that Trump’s targeting of Iran and radical Islam is just some harmless diversion. It is not likely that Trump actively seeks war with Iran, but were Iran to be perceived to be deliberately humiliating Trump or America, the President (self-confessedly) is not of a temperament to let any humiliation pass. He likes to repay those who do him harm, ten-fold.

**End of White America**

But additionally, since, as polls show, and a leading American commentator on religion and politics, Robert Jones, has written, the Trump phenomenon is also deeply connected with the end of an American era: *The End of White Christian America* (as his book is entitled). In point of fact, the era has already passed. For, as Jones notes, “1993 was the last year in which America was majority white, and Protestant.”

Jones writes of the “vertigo” felt – even within the insular settings of many Southern and Midwestern towns where white Protestant conservatives continue to dominate society, and politics – at their “loss of place at the center of American culture, democracy and cultural power.”

Salt has been rubbed into this wound by a Democratic Party that has somewhat reveled in the passing of white majority America and exacerbated the sore through rebranding itself as the new “majority” of minorities. Jones remarks that while some in America “might celebrate” its passing, white Christian America did provide some kind of “civic glue,” and he ruminates on how the sense of void and anxiety on “what might serve that purpose [in the future], might well turn destructive.”

This is, Iran might recall, Trump’s core constituency, which he must mollify if he is to remain in office. The destructive impulse of Tea Party-ists, if scratched repeatedly, might seek to let off steam at some convenient target.

But secondly, it seems that Trump shares in some measure, this embrace of Judeo-Christian values. Certainly Steve Bannon does. He has said plainly that American capitalism – if it is to survive – must be reconnected to Judeo-Christian values. But what explains Trump’s paradoxical focus on Iran, which *is* fighting Islamic radicalism, rather than say, Saudi Arabia, which *is not*?

Here, Martin Wright gives us the clue: “In January and February [2016], Trump was under pressure to unveil a foreign-policy team. The Republican foreign-policy establishment overwhelmingly condemned him, largely because of his America First views. It was at this point that retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn started advising him. ... Several weeks after Flynn came on board, Trump rolled out a list of foreign-policy advisors. Most were completely unknown, but the name Walid Phares stood out. Phares has a controversial past as a leading figure in a Lebanese Christian militia, and is known as a hard-liner in the war on terror.”

*Mother Jones*’ investigative report is plain: Phares, a Lebanese Christian Maronite, is a Samir Gagea man, who has a long history, dating back to Lebanon’s civil war of (intellectual) animosity towards Iran and Syria. It seems Trump (and Flynn too?) may have imbibed deeply at the bitter well of Lebanese

prejudice and civil war hatreds?

## **Translating the Runes**

So what do the runes tell us? The occult alphabet of Trump's foreign policy will prove hard to read. The essential tension between, on the one hand, the "America Firsters" and the religious warriors – and all those who adhere to the American "traditionalist" policy position – portends the prospect of policies that might oscillate, from time to time, between these three diverse and conflicting poles.

Let us remind ourselves – "traditionalist" includes "all those officials who support the institutions of American power, and are generally comfortable with the post-World War II bipartisan consensus on U.S. strategy, even though they may seek to change it on the margins."

It is quite likely that some of Trump's team members who are mercantilists (such as Tillerson) or "Christian warriors" (such as Flynn), might be "bi-polar": that is to say will be pulled in both directions on certain policy issues. We perhaps might be advised, therefore, to disregard most leaks, as more likely to constitute self-serving exercises directed towards influencing the internal struggle within "the team" (i.e. kite-flying exercises), rather than as true leaks that describe a genuine consensus reached within the "team."

But the runes will be harder to read precisely because of Trump's tactics of feints and distractions. As one astute chess-coach-turned-analyst has observed, Trump seems to be a pretty accomplished hand at chess:

"Chess is a game where the number of possible positions rises at an astronomical rate. By the 2nd move of the game there are already 400 possible positions, and after each person moves twice, that number rises to 8902. My coach explained to me that I was not trained enough to even begin to keep track of those things and that my only chance of ever winning was to take the initiative and never give it up. 'You must know what your opponent will do next by playing his game for him.' was the advice I received.

"Now, I won't bore you with the particulars but it boiled down to throwing punches, at each and every turn without exception. In other words, if my opponent must always waste his turn responding to what I am doing, then he never gets an opportunity to come at me in the millions of possibilities that reside in the game. Again, if I throw the punch – even one that can be easily blocked, then I only have to worry about one combination and not millions.

"My Russian chess coach next taught me that I should Proudly Announce what exactly I am doing and why I am doing it. He explained to me that bad chess players believe that they can hide their strategy even though all the pieces are



right there in plain sight for anyone to see. A good chess player has no fear of this because they will choose positions that are unassailable so why not announce them? As a coach, I made all of my students tell each other why they were making the moves that they made as well as what they were planning next. It entirely removed luck from the game and quickly made them into superior players.

“My Russian coach next stressed Time as something I should focus on to round out my game. He said that I shouldn’t move the same piece twice in a row and that my ‘wild punches’ should focus on getting my pieces on to the board and into play as quickly as possible. So, if I do everything correctly, I have an opponent that will have a disorganized defense, no offense and few pieces even in play and this will work 9 out of 10 times. The only time it doesn’t work for me is when I go against players that have memorized hundreds of games and have memorized how to get out of these traps. With all that said, let’s see if President Trump is playing chess.

“First, we can all agree that Trump, if nothing else, throws a lot of punches. We really saw this in the primaries where barely a day could go by without some scandal that would supposedly end his presidential bid. His opponents and the press erroneously thought that responding to each and every “outrage” was the correct thing to do without ever taking the time to think whether or not they had just walked into a trap. They would use their turn to block his Twitter attack but he wouldn’t move that [chess] piece again once that was in play but, instead, brought on the next outrage – just like my [Russian chess] coach instructed me to do.

“Second, Trump is very vocal in what he is going to do. Just like I had my students announced to each other their [chess] strategy, Trump has been nothing but transparent about what he intends to do. After all, announcing your plans only works if your position is unassailable. It demoralizes your opponent. You rub their face in it. Another benefit to being vocal is that it encourages your opponent to bring out his favorite piece to deal with said announced plans. This is a big mistake as any good chess player will quickly recognize which piece his opponent favors and then go take them.

“Time has been the one area that our president is having problems. Executive Orders and Twitter Wars have pushed the opposition off balance but he has not been able to use this time to get all of his pieces into play. The Justice Department (his Queen) is still stuck behind a wall of pawns. Furthermore, only 5 of his 15 Cabinet picks have been confirmed as of this writing. Without control over these departments, the president can fight a war of attrition but he really can’t go on the offensive. In chess, I will gladly trade a piece for a piece if it means you have to waste your turn dealing with it. It isn’t a long

term strategy if you do not have all of your pieces ready to go.”

Well, maybe its best just to sit and observe, and stop trying to read the runes?

**Alastair Crooke is a former British diplomat who was a senior figure in British intelligence and in European Union diplomacy. He is the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum.**

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## Christmas and Endless War

There is a profound contradiction for Christians who celebrate the “prince of peace” at Christmas and then return to the business of endless – and expanding – war the rest of the year, as the Rev. Howard Bess observes.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

Christmastime is a good time for a frank discussion about Christianity and war. The great issue of Christmas is not whether or not Jesus was born of a virgin but whether his followers will embrace his message of peace on this earth.

My thinking goes to the tradition of the cross. Crucifixion on a cross was a cruel execution practiced daily by the rulers from Rome. For his executioners, Jesus was simply one more rabble-rouser who was disturbing the peace. Jesus practiced non-resistance to the very end. He looked at his murderers; then he looked to the heavens and spoke the words of reconciliation: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.”

Christian churches (which have often endorsed wars between nations and even wars of conquest) have somehow missed the words of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians: “God...has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” There is no reconciliation in killing or in punishment. War and punishment of any kind are an admission of failure.

In April 2016, a large gathering of devout Roman Catholics gathered at the Vatican to discuss “Nonviolence and Just Peace.” It was not a gathering of only select Bishops and Catholic hierarchy. Ordinary priests and nuns were there as were devout social scientists, theologians, diplomats and other lay persons who see themselves as peacekeepers.

While the search for world peace goes beyond the issue of war, all participants agreed that what is being done is not working. Included in the non-functional approaches is the centuries old teaching of “Just War.” (“Just War” theory

within Christianity dates back to Saint Augustine who defended the necessity of war amid the collapsing Roman Empire. The doctrine was refined by Thomas Aquinas in the Thirteenth Century who laid out principles that justified war as long as it was waged by a properly instituted authority, pursued a good and just purpose, and had the ultimate goal of establishing peace.)

Sister Nazik Matty, an Iraqi nun who was driven from her home in Mosul by ISIS, has become a key spokesperson for the movement for Just Peace, telling the conference: "Which of the wars we have been in is a just war? ... In my country there was no just war. War is the mother of ignorance, isolation, and poverty. Please tell the world there is no such thing as a just war. I say this as a daughter of war."

On behalf of Sister Nazik Matty and all others who have been victims of war, I repeat: There is no just war. There is no reconciliation in punishment of any kind. There is no suggestion in the teachings of Jesus that there is any justice to be found in killing or punishment. This is true whether it is a slap in the face of a child by a parent, a bullet in the heart by a murderer, or the touch of a button in a drone control center.

Though I am a proud graduate of Wheaton College, a centerpiece of Evangelical theology and leadership, I have long been out of step with Wheaton's style of Christian orthodoxy. I am a Baptist and have a deep commitment to a diversity that is not allowed in the Wheaton faculty.

Wheaton College taught me to think and nurtured my devotion to Christ, but there is a blight on the Wheaton campus. The ROTC unit at Wheaton trains very bright, capable persons for service in the United States military. The motto of Wheaton College is "For Christ and His Kingdom." Confronting my beloved alma mater is not easy. The Wheaton College motto is compromised as long as the ROTC unit remains on campus.

### **Alternative Path**

I have always found it difficult to be a critic unless I also point to a better way. "War is not the answer" is a meaningless statement without an alternative path proposal. I offer these proposals as a witness to the non-religious and as a challenge to believers of every kind. I write as a devoted follower of Jesus, the peasant teacher from Nazareth and true son of God.

RID OURSELVES OF JUST WAR TEACHINGS IN OUR CHURCHES, COLLEGES AND SEMINARIES. The thinking of Augustine and Aquinas has been advocated for centuries and has no record of success, only failures. There has never been a just war.

EMBRACE THE MINISTRY AND VOCATION OF RECONCILIATION. EXPLORE ITS MEANING AND

PURSUE ITS PRACTICE. The kingdom of God is not a gated community or a ghetto. It is not about fences or guard posts. It is about love, kindness and justice.

PRACTICE REPENTANCE AND ABOUNDING GRACE. Blame, accusation, and finger pointing are cancers. Remember and proclaim Jesus's words from the cross.

REPAIR WHAT IS BROKEN AND CREATE, BUILD, AND SHARE WHAT IS NEEDED. We are a throwaway society. War has turned human beings into throwaway things, too. Heal people and create for their benefit.

DEVELOP PERSONAL LIFESTYLES COMPATIBLE WITH THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS FROM NAZARETH. I return to Matthew, chapters 5-7, for my own benefit and spiritual health. I urge you all to do the same. I pray a blessed new year, full of peace for you all and for all our neighbors in the world.

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## Christianity and the Nagasaki Bomb

Though Christianity began as a religion of peace, it soon became a cloak for genocidal violence, such as the incineration of defenseless civilians in Nagasaki, including many Japanese Christians, 71 years ago, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Seventy-one years ago, on Aug. 9, 1945, an all-Christian bomber crew dropped a plutonium bomb on Nagasaki City, Japan, instantly vaporizing, incinerating, irradiating and otherwise annihilating tens of thousands of innocent civilians, men, women and children. Very few Japanese soldiers were affected.

In a nation whose citizens are historically non-Christian (Shintoism or Buddhism are the major religions), a disproportionately large number of the Nagasaki victims were Christian (see below for the history of that reality). The bomb mortally wounded uncountable thousands of other victims who succumbed to the blast trauma, the heat trauma and/or the radiation trauma.

In 1945, the U.S. was regarded as the most Christian nation in the world. The bomber crew, as were the two Christian military chaplains of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki crews, were products of the type of Christianity that failed to teach what Jesus taught concerning violence (that it was forbidden to his followers) –

which has been the case for the vast majority of Christians, both clergy and laity, for the past 1,700 years. For the first three centuries of its existence, Christianity was a pacifist religion.

Ironically, prior to the bomb exploding directly over the Urakami Cathedral, Nagasaki was the most Christian city in Japan, and the massive cathedral had been the largest Christian church building in the Orient.

Those Christian airmen, following their wartime orders to the letter, did their job, and they accomplished the mission with military pride. Most Christian Americans would have done what they did if they had been in the shoes of the crew.

And, if those Christians had never seen, heard or smelled the suffering humanity that the bomb caused on the ground, most of them would not have experienced any remorse for their participation in the atrocity – especially if they had been blindly treated as heroes in the aftermath.

Some of the crew did admit that they had had some doubts about what they had participated in afterwards. But none of them actually witnessed the horrific suffering of the tens of thousands of victims up close and personal.

“Orders are orders” and must be obeyed, and disobedience in wartime was known to be severely punishable, even by summary execution. So the bomber crew had no alternative but to obey the orders. Even the two chaplains had no doubts before they finally understood what they had participated in.

### **Hard for Japan to Surrender**

It had been only three days since the August 6th bomb had incinerated Hiroshima. The Nagasaki bomb was dropped amidst massive chaos and confusion in Tokyo, where the fascist military command was meeting with the Emperor Hirohito to discuss how to surrender with honor. The military leadership of both nations had known for months that Japan had already lost the war.

The only obstacle to ending the war had been the Allied Powers insistence on unconditional surrender (which meant that Hirohito would have been removed from his figurehead position in Japan and perhaps even subjected to war crime trials). That demand was intolerable for the Japanese, who regarded the Emperor as a deity.

The USSR had declared war against Japan the day before (Aug. 8), hoping to regain territories lost to Japan in the humiliating (for Russia) Russo-Japanese War 40 years earlier, and Stalin’s army was advancing across Manchuria. Russia’s entry into the war had been encouraged by President Harry Truman before he knew

of the success of the atom bomb test in New Mexico on July 16.

But now, Truman and his strategists knew that the bomb could elicit Japan's surrender without Stalin's help. So, not wanting to divide any of the spoils of war with the USSR, and because the U.S. wanted to send an early Cold War message to Russia (that the U.S. was the new planetary superpower), Truman ordered bomber command to proceed with using the atomic bombs against a handful of targets as weather permitted and as atomic bombs became available (although no more fissionable material was actually available to make another bomb after Nagasaki).

### **Decision to Target Nagasaki**

Aug. 1, 1945, was the earliest deployment date for the Japanese atom bombing missions, and the Target Committee in Washington, D.C. had already developed a short list of relatively un-damaged Japanese cities that were to be excluded from the conventional USAAF (US Army Air Force) fire-bombing campaigns (that, during the first half of 1945, had used napalm, augmented by high explosives, to burn to the ground over 60 essentially defenseless Japanese cities).

The list of protected cities included Hiroshima, Niigata, Kokura, Kyoto and Nagasaki. Those five cities were to be off-limits to the terror bombings that the other cities were being subjected to. They were to be preserved as potential targets for the new "gimmick" weapon that had been researched and developed in labs and manufacturing plants all across America over the several years since the Manhattan Project had begun.

Ironically, prior to August 6 and 9, the residents of those five cities had considered themselves lucky for not having been bombed as had the other large cities. Little did the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki know that they were only being temporarily spared for an even worse carnage from a revolutionary experimental weapon that could cause the mass annihilation of entire cities and their human guinea pig inhabitants.

The plutonium bomb that had been field tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico, was identical to the one that was dropped at Nagasaki. It had been blasphemously code-named "Trinity" (a distinctly Christian term) and had been detonated in secrecy three weeks earlier on July 16, 1945. The results were impressive, but the blast had just killed a few hapless coyotes, rabbits, snakes and some other desert varmints.

Trinity had produced large amounts of an entirely new type of rock that was later called "Trinitite." Trinitite was a "man-made" radioactive molten lava rock that had been created from the intense heat that was twice the temperature

of the sun. Samples of it still exist in the desert at Alamogordo.

At 3 a.m. on the morning of Aug. 9, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress bomber (that had been “christened” Bock’s Car) took off from Tinian Island in the South Pacific, with the prayers and blessings of the crew’s two chaplains. Barely making it off the runway just yards before the heavily loaded plane could have gone into the ocean (the bomb weighed 10,000 pounds), it headed north for Kokura, the primary target.

Bock’s Car’s bomb was code-named “Fat Man,” partly because of its shape and partly to honor the rotund Winston Churchill. “Little Boy,” first called “Thin Man” (after President Franklin Roosevelt), was the code name of the uranium bomb that had been dropped on Hiroshima three days earlier.

Japan’s Supreme War Council in Tokyo, scheduled to convene their next meeting at 11 a.m. on Aug. 9, had absolutely no comprehension of what had really happened at Hiroshima. So the members had no heightened sense of urgency. The council was mostly concerned about Russia’s declaration of war.

But it was already too late, because by the time the War Council members were arising and heading to the meeting with the emperor, there was no chance to alter the course of history. Bock’s Car – flying under radio silence – was already approaching the southern islands of Japan, heading for Kokura, the primary target. The crew was hoping to beat an anticipated typhoon and the approaching clouds that would have delayed the mission.

The Bock’s Car crew had instructions to drop the bomb only on visual sighting. But Kokura was clouded over. After making three failed bomb runs over the clouded-over city and then experiencing engine trouble on one of the four engines (using up valuable fuel all the while) the plane headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki.

### **History of Nagasaki Christianity**

Nagasaki is famous in the history of Japanese Christianity. The city had the largest concentration of Christians in all of Japan. St. Mary’s Urakami Cathedral was the megachurch of its time, with 12,000 baptized members.

Nagasaki was the community where the legendary Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier planted a mission church in 1549. The Catholic community at Nagasaki grew and eventually prospered over the next several generations. However it eventually became clear to the Japanese that the (Catholic) Portuguese and Spanish commercial interests were exploiting Japan. It didn’t take very long before all Europeans – and their very foreign religion – were expelled from the country.

From 1600 until 1850, being a Christian in Japan was a capital crime (punishable by death). In the early 1600s, Japanese Christians who refused to recant of their new faith were subject to unspeakable tortures – including crucifixion. After a well-publicized mass crucifixion was orchestrated, the reign of terror stopped, and it appeared to all observers that Japanese Christianity was extinct.

However, 250 years later, after the gunboat diplomacy of U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry forced open an offshore island for American trade purposes, it was discovered that there were thousands of baptized Christians in Nagasaki, living their faith in secret in a catacomb-like existence, completely unknown to the government.

With this revelation, the Japanese government started another purge; but because of international pressure, the persecutions stopped and Nagasaki Christianity came up from the underground. By 1917, with no financial help from the government, the re-vitalized Christian community had built their massive cathedral in the Urakami River district of Nagasaki.

So it was the height of irony that the massive Cathedral – one of only two Nagasaki landmarks that could be positively identified from 31,000 feet up – became Ground Zero. (The other identifiable aiming point landmark was the Mitsubishi armaments factory complex – which had run out of raw materials because of the successful Allied naval blockade.)

At 11:02 a.m., during Thursday morning confessions, an unknown number of Nagasaki Christians were boiled, evaporated, carbonized or otherwise disappeared in a scorching, radioactive fireball that exploded 500 meters above the cathedral.

The “black rain” that soon came down from the mushroom cloud also contained the mingled cellular remains of many Nagasaki Christians as well as many more Shintoists and Buddhists. The theological implications of Nagasaki’s Black Rain surely should boggle the minds of theologians of all denominations.

### **Nagasaki Christian Body Count**

Most Nagasaki Christians did not survive the blast. Six thousand of them died instantly, including all who were at confession that morning. Of the 12,000 church members, 8,500 of them eventually died as a result of the bomb. Many of the others were seriously sickened with a highly lethal entirely new disease: radiation sickness.

Located near the cathedral were three orders of nuns and a Christian girl’s school. They all disappeared into black smoke or became chunks of charcoal. Tens



of thousands of other innocent non-Christian non-combatants also died instantly, and many more were mortally or incurably wounded. Some of the original victims (and their progeny) are still suffering from the trans-generational malignancies and immune deficiencies caused by the deadly plutonium and other radioactive isotopes produced by the bomb.

And here is one of the most important ironies: **What the Japanese Imperial government could not do in 250 years of persecution (i.e., to destroy Japanese Christianity) American Christians did in mere seconds.**

Even after a slow revival of Christianity after WWII, membership in Japanese Christian churches still represents a tiny fraction of 1 percent of the general population, and the average attendance at Christian worship services across the nation is reported to be only 30 per Sunday. The decimation of Nagasaki crippled what at one time was a vibrant church.

Father George Zabelka was the Catholic chaplain for the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group (the 1,500-man USAAF group whose only mission was to deliver atomic bombs to Japanese civilian targets). Zabelka was one of the few World War II clergy leaders who eventually came to recognize the serious contradictions between what his modern church had taught him and what the early pacifist church believed concerning homicidal violence.

Several decades after Zabelka was discharged from the military chaplaincy, he finally concluded that both he and his church had made serious ethical and theological errors in religiously legitimating the organized mass slaughter that is modern war. He eventually came to understand that (as he articulated it) “the enemy of me and the enemy of my nation is not an enemy of God. Rather my enemy and my nation’s enemy are children of God who are loved by God and who therefore are to be loved (and not killed) by me as a follower of that loving God.”

Father Zabelka’s sudden conversion away from the standardized war-tolerant Christianity changed his Detroit, Michigan ministry around 180 degrees. His absolute commitment to the truth of gospel nonviolence – just like Martin Luther King’s commitment – inspired him to devote the remaining decades of his life to speaking out against violence in all its forms, including the violence of militarism, racism and economic exploitation.

Zabelka travelled to Nagasaki on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, tearfully repenting and asking for forgiveness for the part he had played in the crime.

Likewise, the Lutheran chaplain for the 509th, Pastor William Downey (formerly of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota), in his counseling of soldiers who had become troubled by their participation in making

murder for the state, later denounced all killing, whether by a single bullet or by weapons of mass destruction.

### **Wars That Ruined Their Souls?**

In Daniel Hallock's important book, *Hell, Healing and Resistance*, the author described a 1997 Buddhist retreat that was led by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. The retreat involved a number of combat-traumatized Vietnam War veterans who had left the Christianity of their birth.

The veterans had responded positively to Nhat Hanh's ministrations. Hallock wrote, "Clearly, Buddhism offers something that cannot be found in institutional Christianity. But then why should veterans embrace a religion that has blessed the wars that ruined their souls? It is no wonder that they turn to a gentle Buddhist monk to hear what are, in large part, the truths of Christ."

Hallock's comment should be a sobering wake-up call to Christian leaders who seem to regard as important both the recruitment of new members and the retention of old ones. The fact that the U.S. is a highly militarized nation makes the truths of gospel nonviolence difficult to teach and preach, especially to military veterans (particularly the homeless, psychologically tormented, spiritually-depleted, malnourished, over-diagnosed, over-medicated, over-vaccinated, homicidal and suicidal ones) who may have lost their faith because of horrors experienced on the battlefield.

I am a retired physician who has dealt with hundreds of psychologically traumatized patients (including combat-traumatized war veterans), and I know that violence, in all its forms, can irretrievably damage the mind, body, brain and spirit. But the fact that the combat-traumatized type is totally preventable – and oftentimes impossible to cure – makes prevention work really important.

An ounce of prevention is indeed worth a pound of cure when it comes to combat-induced PTSD. And where Christian churches should and could be instrumental in the prevention of the soul-destroying combat-type PTSD is by counseling their members to not participate in it (which should be obvious when considering the ethical message of the nonviolent Jesus, a message that guided the pacifist church in the first three centuries of its existence)

Experiencing violence, whether as victimizer or victim, can be deadly, and it can run through families like a contagion. I have seen violence, neglect, abuse and the resultant traumatic psychological and neurological illnesses spread through both military and non-military families – even involving the third and fourth generations after the initial victimizations.

And that has been the experience of the hibakusha (the long-suffering atomic

bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), whose progeny continue to suffer disease – which has likewise been the experience of many of the progeny of the warrior-perpetrators who participated in the act of killing in every war.

Years ago I saw an unpublished Veteran's Administration study that showed that, whereas most Vietnam War-era soldiers were active members of Christian churches before they went off to war, if they came home with PTSD, the percentage returning to their faith community approached zero. Daniel Hallock's sobering message above helps explain why that is so.

Therefore the church – at least by its silence on the critical issues of war and war preparation – seems to be actually promoting (rather than forbidding) homicidal violence, contrary to the ethical teachings of Jesus, by failing to teach what the primitive church understood was one of the core teachings of Jesus, who preached, in effect, that “violence is forbidden for those who wish to follow me.”

Therefore, by refraining from warning their adolescent members about the faith- and soul-destroying realities of war, the church is directly undermining the “retention” strategies in which all churches engage. The hidden history of Nagasaki thus has valuable lessons for American Christianity.

### **Bock's Car Crew and Chain of Command**

The members of the Bock's Car bomber crew, like conscripted or enlisted men in any war, were at the bottom of a long, complex and very anonymous chain of command whose superiors demand unconditional obedience from those below them in the chain.

The Bock's Car crew had been ordered to “pull the trigger” of the lethal weapon that had been conceptualized, designed, funded, manufactured and armed by any number of other entities, none of which would feel morally responsible for doing the dirty deed because they didn't have literal blood on their hands.

As is true in all wars, soldier trigger-pullers are often the ones unjustly singled out and blamed for the killing in the combat zone, and therefore they often have the worst post-war guilt and shame that is often the most lethal part of combat-induced PTSD (other than the suicide and violence-inducing aspects of many psychiatric drugs and the chronic illness-stimulating aspects of the over-vaccination schedules to which all military recruits are subjected).

However, the religious chaplains that are responsible for their spiritual lives of their soldiers, are also at the bottom of the chain of command and may share their guilt feelings. Neither group usually knows the real reasons their commanders are ordering them to kill or participate in the killing operations.

The early church leaders, who knew the teachings and actions of Jesus best, rejected the nationalist, racist and militarist agendas of whatever passed for nationalism 2,000 years ago.

And by following the Sermon on the Mount, true Christians of today similarly reject the homicidal agendas of the national security state, the military-industrial-congressional complex, the war-profiteering corporations, the mesmerizing major media, and the eye-for-an-eye retaliation church doctrines that have, over the past 1,700 years, enabled baptized and confirmed Christians to, if ordered to do so, willingly kill other humans in the name of Christ.

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## The Dangerous Ideology of Religion

Ideology, in the hands of true-believers, tends to reject facts in favor of some grander "truth," an especially dangerous tendency when mixed with religious conviction and certainty, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

Ideologies are pre-set forms of thinking that shape people's worldviews and, supposedly, help to order and simplify reality. While this supposition is always flawed to one extent or another, ideologies can be very seductive. In part this is because they free their adherents from the hard work of critical thinking. Thus, they are often held onto tenaciously.

Because ideologies distort reality, they are particularly unsuited for those aspiring to power as well as their devoted supporters. History is full of examples of politically powerful ideologies that underscore this fact: fascism, communism, various military cults (particularly popular in South America and the Middle East) and even the ideology of democracy as manipulated by corrupt elites, who play the Pied Piper to the masses.

Yet there is still one more ideology out there which, even now, wreaks havoc by either claiming for itself the trappings of secular power or attaching itself in some influential advisory way to the institutions of power. That ideology is religion in its various institutional manifestations.

I want to emphasize that I am not referring to the personal religious convictions of millions by which life is made to appear understandable and meaningful. Whether such convictions are accurate or not, they play an important role at the individual level and, as long as they do not promote harmful intolerance, should be left to benignly function at the local level.

What I am referring to are religious ideologies that are institutionalized in bureaucracies that can project power much as do secular institutions of authority. Religious ideologies so institutionalized see themselves as possessed of God-given truth while playing the game of power amidst human competitors.

### **Religion in Power**

It is often said that we live in an age of religious revival. Whatever this might say for the "spiritual" shortcomings of modernity, this is a state of affairs rife with political danger. A quick look at history can again easily demonstrate why this is so.

,In the Tenth through Fifteenth centuries in Europe, Roman Catholicism was a strong political power centered in the Papacy. Historians often claim it preserved what was left of Greco-Roman civilization. It also brought with it the bloodletting of the Crusades and the tortures of the Inquisition.

,When, briefly, the Protestants tasted political power in the form of Calvin's Geneva, Savonarola's Florence, Cromwell's England, and the early New World establishments of North America, the result was widespread intolerance, civil war, burning flesh at Salem and elsewhere and, of course, no dancing. It does not take great imagination to see the potential for high levels of intolerance occurring if some representative of today's Christian Right, say Ted Cruz, takes power in the U.S.

,Buddhism used to be universally revered as a religion of peace and tolerance. However, put it in power or ally it to those who politically rule, and what once was benign turns malignant. Thus, consider the self-identified Buddhist government of Sri Lanka and its brutal campaign against the Tamils in the north of that country. Likewise, you can find Buddhists allied to the government of Myanmar crying for the blood of the country's Rohingya, a Muslim minority.

,There is a lot of Hindu fanaticism in India, and It remains to be seen if the present government of that country, dominated now by Hindu nationalists, will

again turn loose the religious passion which, in the recent past, has led to sectarian violence and massacres of India's religious minorities (again, notably Muslims).

,Where the Muslims seek or hold state power, the situation is little different. According to Sunni tradition, the ethical standards of behavior set down in the Quran did not dictate state behavior beyond the brief reign of the so-called "rightly guided Caliphs." Shiites often point out that things fell apart almost immediately upon Mohammad's death. Civil war and internecine slaughter followed in both scenarios.

Today, in Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf emirates, one finds Sunni intolerance of Shiite Islam and the exploitation of non-citizen laborers despite their being fellow Muslims. In Shia Iran, authorities seem unsure just how tolerant or intolerant to be toward more moderate interpretations of their own, now politicized, religious tenets.

Then, of course, you have various organizations, claiming to be Sunni Muslim, ranging from ISIS to Al Nusra or some other Al Qaeda variant, all reaching for political power. Where they have tasted success, as in the case of ISIS, the consequences have been particularly bad.

,Since 1948 Judaism has succumbed to the same fate as other world religions entangling themselves in politics. Despite all the rationalizations, propaganda and self-deception, it is clear that institutional Judaism is now firmly melded to the deeply discriminatory and particularly brutal political ideology of Zionism.

I use the word "melded" because what we have here is something more than just an alliance of two separate entities. The Zionists have insisted since 1917, the year of the Balfour Declaration, was proclaimed, that the fate of Judaism and an Israeli "national home" are thoroughly intertwined. Their insistent manipulations have resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The consequences of this melding have been horrific. If you want to know just how horrid things have become, there are numerous Palestinian and Jewish human rights groups that are easily found on the web which will document Israeli behavior in all its dehumanizing detail.

For a more personalized assessment of just what this melding means for Judaism as a religion I recommend the recent book by Marc H. Ellis entitled *The Heartbeat of the Prophetic* (New Diaspora Books, 2015). Ellis is a Jewish theologian who, in the 1970s, was greatly influenced by the work of Roman Catholic priests in Latin America who were promoting "liberation theology."

That “for the good of the people” interpretation of religion was corrosive of the institutionalized Church, and so the movement was ultimately stifled. However, Ellis thought that the same philosophy could be applied to Judaism – an insight that eventually led him to denounce Zionized Judaism in a manner reminiscent of the prophets of the Old Testament.

For Ellis, institutionalized Judaism has been reduced to an adjunct of an expansionist and racist political ideology. He feels that there is no getting around the inherent evil of this situation. No two-state solution or other “progressive” approach can erase it. As long as Judaism persists in identifying itself in terms of the Israeli state and Zionist ideology, the ethical underpinnings of the religion are left behind in the wreckage of an evolving “Jewish empire.”

### **Lessons to Be Learned**

What have all these historical examples to teach those of religious faith? Some fundamentalists would have us believe the lesson is to remain humble and obedient in the face of an unfathomable deity whose mysterious purposes are simply beyond human comprehension. Yet there is nothing incomprehensible about the repetitive death, destruction and intolerance bred by institutionalized ideologies. And, as the historical examples given above tell us, religious ideology is no exception.

A better lesson learned seems to be: if you want to be religious, keep it personal and tolerant, avoid tendencies toward institutionalization beyond the level of local charity and organized good works, and stay clear of political alliances.

It is said that Jesus told his disciples, “where two or three of you are gathered together there I too will be.” Those are just about the right numbers when it comes to keeping religion safe for the believers and non-believers alike. After all, when you have two or three thousand, or two or three million gathered together, for whatever purpose, then something quite different from a helpful and humane spirit is likely to be present.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.**

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# Cruz Threatens to Nuke ISIS Targets

**Exclusive:** Republican presidential campaign rhetoric is red-hot regarding Islamic terrorism, with Sen. Cruz suggesting the use of nuclear weapons to see “if sand can glow in the dark,” a threat even more troubling than Donald Trump’s call to temporarily bar Muslims from entering the U.S., writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Republican presidential candidates lined up to one-up each other about how they would fight Islamic terrorism, many mainstream pundits questioned the hysteria and took particular aim at billionaire Donald Trump for seeking a moratorium on admitting Muslims to the United States, but Trump’s proposal was far from the most outrageous.

Getting much less attention was a statement by Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who is considered by many a more likely GOP nominee than Trump. Cruz suggested that the United States should nuke the territory in Iraq and Syria controlled by Islamic State militants.

“I don’t know if sand can glow in the dark, but we’re going to find out,” Cruz told a Tea Party rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In reference to Cruz’s comment, a New York Times editorial added, “whatever that means.” But the phrase “glow in the dark” popularly refers to the aftermath of a nuclear bomb detonation.

In other words, Cruz was making it clear to his audience that he would be prepared to drop a nuclear bomb on Islamic State targets. While the bombastic senator from Texas was probably engaging in hyperbole as he also vowed to “carpet bomb them into oblivion” the notion of a major candidate for President cavalierly suggesting a nuclear strike would normally be viewed as disqualifying, except perhaps in this election cycle.

While Cruz drew little attention for his “glow in the dark” remark, Trump came under intense criticism for his proposal to block the admission of Muslims into the United States until the nation’s leaders can “figure out what is going on” in the aftermath of the Dec. 2 terror attack by a Muslim husband-and-wife team in San Bernardino, California.

Across mainstream politics and media, Trump’s idea was decried as both “unprecedented” from a top candidate for President and a likely violation of the U.S. Constitution which respects freedom of religion and requires equal protection under the law.

Other Republican candidates, even the more “moderate” ones, also talked tough



about Muslims in what shaped up as a heated competition to outdo one another in appealing to the angry and frightened right-wing “base” of the GOP.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush argued that the threat from Muslims was unique: “The idea that somehow there are radical elements in every religion is ridiculous. There are no radical Christians that are organizing to destroy Western civilization. There are no radical Buddhists that are doing this. This is radical Islamic terrorism.”

Bush’s comment failed to recognize that the institution of Christianity has been at the center of “Western civilization” since the latter days of the Roman Empire and that “Christian” nations have routinely plundered other civilizations all over the planet, including across the Islamic world both in Asia and Africa. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “Why Many Muslims Hate the West” and “Muslim Memories of West’s Imperialism.”]

Though inspired by a pacifist, Christianity has established a record as the most bloodthirsty religion in history, with its adherents conducting massacres and genocides in North America, South America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia every continent except Antarctica, which is largely uninhabited by humans. In many cases, European Christians justified the repression and extermination of non-Christians as the will of God, deeming indigenous people to be “heathens.”

The violence by Western nations against Muslims also is not something confined to history books and the distant past. In 2003, U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair led an unprovoked invasion of Iraq which killed hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed much of Iraq’s national infrastructure.

In other words, in the view of many Middle Easterners, the West continues to wage war against their civilization. However, none of that reality is reflected in the current U.S. political and media debate, even when a major Republican candidate raises the prospect of dropping the Bomb.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in print here or as an e-book (from Amazon and barnesandnoble.com). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, click here.**

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# A New 'War on Christmas' Absurdity

A fairly new and thoroughly obnoxious Christmas tradition is for right-wing American Christian fundamentalists to detect some imagined slight and pronounce it part of the "War on Christmas," with this year's battle lines drawn around the Starbucks' winter-themed cups, as Nat Parry observes.

By Nat Parry

Just as the commercial extravaganza of the Christmas season seems to begin earlier and earlier each year, with displays popping up in some places not long after Labor Day, so too does the annual absurdity known as "the War on Christmas."

This year, we have an early taste of the asinine arguments to come with a contrived controversy over the choice that Starbucks has made for its holiday-themed coffee cup. Eschewing its typical designs incorporating iconic wintry images of reindeer and snowmen, the [2015 cup](#) goes for a minimalist approach of a plain bright red design with the green Starbucks logo in the center.

With no pictures of Baby Jesus or even snowflakes, the red and green cup evidently is not "Christmassy" enough for some Christians, many of whom have taken to the Internet to vent their outrage. In a viral Facebook [post](#) that has received more than 10 million views, Joshua Feuerstein fumed: "Starbucks REMOVED CHRISTMAS from their cups because they hate Jesus."

He posted an accompanying video urging people to go into Starbucks and give their names as "Merry Christmas" so that unsuspecting baristas would be "tricked" into writing "Merry Christmas" on the cups.

Within days, both #RedCups and #MerryChristmasStarbucks were trending on social media sites (although to be fair, many of the posts were ridiculing those who have gotten so bent out of shape). One typical [tweet](#) read, "If you're Christian & upset over Starbucks cups, your priorities are out of whack and you don't have enough to do."

While it is certainly true that in a world rocked by refugee crises, environmental catastrophes, global conflicts, poverty and growing wealth inequality, these Christian anti-Starbucks crusaders would probably do well to get their priorities straight, it should also be said that the very premise of this annual "War on Christmas" and the notion of Christmas as a Christian tradition ought to be fundamentally re-examined.

The Starbucks controversy is particularly bizarre because the icons that

Starbucks has used on their cups in years past, such as snowflakes and ice skates, obviously have no religious significance to begin with, but what people should realize is that neither do most of the typical "Christmas" icons.

The fact is, what we consider traditional celebrations of Christmas actually have very little to do historically with Christianity. Acts, for example, such as bringing evergreen trees into homes and festooning them with decorations are pagan traditions that predate the birth of Christ by hundreds of years.

In actual reality, there has been a midwinter festival of one sort or another in Europe, Scandinavia and the Middle East for millennia, and it wasn't until the Fourth Century, A.D., that the Church claimed this holiday as "Christmas," arbitrarily selecting Dec. 25 as Jesus's birthday.

In other words, religious significance was bestowed on a pre-existing celebration that had no real relation to the Christian faith. For what it's worth, it is almost certain that Jesus was not born on this day, as it was the cold rainy season in Judea and not a time when shepherds generally tended to "watch their flocks by night" as described in scripture.

Rather than being a celebration of the savior's birthday, the roots of the holiday are the pagan traditions of Winter Solstice (also known as Yule, or "Wheel," which is what Christmas is still called in Scandinavia). In the northern countries, where days grow intolerably dark at this time of year, the seasons played a central role in the lives of ancient peoples, who therefore had a special reverence for the sun.

This is why its return was celebrated with such vigor, not only in Scandinavia but also in Britain, where the ancient Druids celebrated by cutting the mistletoe that grew on the oak tree and offering it as a blessing. Also taking place this time of year was the ancient festival of the Romans to celebrate the rebirth of the year, a time of general debauchery known as Saturnalia.

It was because of its known pagan origins that the holiday was banned by the Puritan-led English Parliament in 1647, which denounced it as "a popish festival with no biblical justification." The holiday was also prohibited by the original English settlers of Massachusetts.

As the Puritan Reverend Increase Mather of Boston observed in 1687, "the early Christians who first observed the Nativity on December 25 did not do so thinking that Christ was born in that Month, but because the Heathens' Saturnalia was at that time kept in Rome, and they were willing to have those Pagan Holidays metamorphosed into Christian ones."

For this reason, Christmas was forbidden by the Puritans and its observance was

illegal in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1681. It is ironic, to say the least, that it was the fundamentalist Christians of early America who waged the original “War on Christmas,” declaring the holiday blasphemous and lacking any biblical justification.

If fundamentalist Christians today were truly following their faith, they would not be up in arms over Starbucks’ marketing choices for selling coffee, but instead following in the footsteps of the Puritans shunning this holiday and focusing on any number of causes more closely in line with the teachings of Jesus say, for example, the recurring theme in the Bible to alleviate the suffering the poor.

If, however, modern Christians feel so adamant about the need to celebrate their savior’s birthday, they might consider choosing another day. If we take the word of the Bible at face value (as fundamentalist Christians generally insist that we must), we simply should not be marking the birth of Christ on December 25, as this is almost certainly not his birthday.

While there are few historical clues to go by in determining the actual date of Jesus’s birth, the most widely cited source is the Gospel of Luke’s reference to shepherds grazing their sheep in the fields. This has been widely interpreted to imply a birth during the springtime, summer or early fall.

So, why not declare a day in August to be Jesus’ birthday? This would be far less arbitrary than the Church’s Fourth Century decree designating Dec. 25 as the savior’s birthday, and with most schools in summer recess, it would fit in well with pre-existing holiday schedules. It would also be a day that Christians don’t have to share with anyone else, since there are so many competing traditions around the time of the Winter Solstice.

And most importantly, it would end the annual absurdities that we call the War on Christmas.

Nat Parry is the co-author of *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush.* [This story originally appeared at Essential Opinion, <https://essentialopinion.wordpress.com/2015/11/08/a-modest-proposal-to-end-the-war-on-christmas/>.]

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## Why Many Muslims Hate the West

**Exclusive:** Many Americans and Westerners are baffled by the violent rage expressed by many Muslims, but the reasons for their anger are real, deriving

from a “deep history” of anti-Islamic wars and colonial exploitation of the Middle East, as ex-U.S. diplomat William R. Polk describes.

By William R. Polk

The issue of terrorist attacks on America has been so politically sensitive that most commentators have simply wrapped themselves in the flag and closed their eyes and ears. Yet, even in fairy tales, ostriches were never saved by burying their heads in the sand. It is not a good defensive posture and it wouldn't be wise for real-life Americans to behave like make-believe ostriches.

If we want to be safe rather than sorry in the dangerous world we now inhabit, we need to be clear-headed, logical and informed. Those characteristics do not arise from anger or impulsiveness. They *can* arise only from sober assessment of causes and intelligent evaluation of possible actions. Achieving these qualities has become ever more necessary because we face an uncertain and increasingly complex future.

So in this first of two essays I will put together and consider what motivates terrorists, what they remember and what we have done; in Part 2 I'll look at what we *can* do and what we *cannot* do to achieve what I have called “affordable world security.”

I begin with a simple fact of human nature: human beings, like even puny and ill-armed animals, strike out when they perceive an attack or threat to their psychological, cultural or physical existence. Protecting what Freud called the “ego,” the intrinsic sense of being, is the ultimate form of self-defense. Whether the attack is real or not, intended or accidental, it is *perception* that triggers and shapes the response. The key word is “perceive.”

Legal or moral *justification*, while usually vigorously proclaimed, does not play a key initial role in determination of action. Justification is usually claimed by both sides. It is usually equivocal and can be “proven” only by a selective gathering of events. That selection, naturally, is governed by the mindset of each side.

Moreover, it is time sensitive: yesterday's attack may justify today's response, but what about events that occurred the day before yesterday? The clock starts at different points for each party and the flow of events cannot be “cherry-picked,” except for propaganda purposes.

If we wish to understand not to condone but to understand we need at least temporarily to put aside the issues of guilt and justification. Rather, we need to attempt to see whole patterns including the views of our opponents. This is not a simple procedure and is not undertaken with slogans in a sound bite. So,

how to do it?

My answer is analogous to the procedure of physicians in their attempt to understand an illness taking a case history. That case history, by definition, cannot be just the events of the present or the immediate past. It requires digging into what I have called "deep history." Only if the past is "squeezed" to bring out angers, hopes, fears and perceptions from their origins and through their mutations can a sensible approach be made to designing successful policies to deal with the present and the future.

Otherwise, we are likely to make snap judgments that may exacerbate rather than solve the problem. That, I will argue, is what we are now doing with insurgency, guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

### **Hardest Step: Understanding**

The first step in moving toward understanding may be the hardest. To understand, we need to credit the fact that our opponents believe in the rightness of their cause, just as we believe in ours. It is puerile to ascribe to them trivial or inappropriate motivations.

The second step is to inform ourselves. As the great Chinese strategist Sun Tzu wrote nearly 3,000 years ago, "Know yourself. Know your enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand victories."

Despite his admonition, even such statesmen as Napoleon (in the Spanish guerrilla war against the French) and Churchill (in the Greek guerrilla war against the Germans first and then the British) denigrated their opponents.

As Churchill said of the *Andartes*, they were just "miserable Greek *banditti*." Churchill got away with his blindness because America bailed out Britain's Greek policy with the Truman Doctrine.

Napoleon was not so lucky. He lamented from his exile that the Spanish "little war," *la guerrilla*, "destroyed me. All the circumstances of my disasters are bound up in that fatal knot." Too late, Napoleon began to understand that the Spanish guerrillas were motivated by ideas similar to those that gave his own forces and his own people their unity and power.

Ideas mattered then. Impelled by them, farmers became guerrillas. Similar ideas today are turning tribesmen, farmers, fishermen, religious students, teachers, shopkeepers and even lawyers into guerrillas, terrorists and suicide bombers. So what are the ideas?

The ideas that matter today usually grouped under the headings of nationalism

and religion have long pedigrees. They began to take shape at the dawn of animal life on Earth. How this happened is now a fairly well-known story, but it was not a widely known story at the beginning of my own academic career and still may not be entirely familiar; so at the risk of duplication, allow me to touch on the main points.

To live in what Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century philosophers Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau called "the state of nature," early humans had to secure access to sources of food and water. So little groves of fruit and nut trees and patches of edible roots and legumes around a spring or pond became miniscule "states." Among our remote ancestors, such "states" were no larger than a day's walk across.

Living in them were miniature "nations," usually composed of less than a hundred individuals whose survival depended on their defending, feeding and caring for one another. The tie that bound them together was kinship. But, because kinship erodes as generations pass, clans tended to sunder and move apart. Over about two million years, this process of continuous alienation populated the planet. Alienation is deeply "programmed" in all of us.

Then, about 10,000 years ago, people found ways to intensify their sources of food and to improve their means of collecting it. Doing so enabled them to gather together in unprecedented numbers. Hunters and gatherers became herders and farmers. Having more, they were less able to scatter.

Little bands settled into villages that grew into towns and then into cities. As they settled together and grew more numerous, kinship no longer was immediately evident and no longer provided a satisfactory means of defining their relationship to one another.

We don't know exactly how it happened, but roughly 5,000 years ago, in various parts of the world, peoples independently discovered other sources of affinity. They became aware that even those they no longer recognized as cousins spoke in the same way, dressed in a similar fashion, ate the same foods and did not eat other foods and accepted as suitable shared customs and beliefs.

While they may still have thought of one another as somehow kindred, they began to enlarge that concept into the combination of custom and locality. Thus, they began to think of neighbors as surrogate kinsmen. As they grew closer together, they came to regard themselves as "the people" and to regard aliens as enemies or as virtually "non-people." In fact, many of the words we use as names of primitive societies actually mean "the people" while some of the names of other societies mean "the enemy." Fear of the foreigner is deeply ingrained in us.

As I have argued, perhaps the single most compelling force in the evolution of our social, political, commercial and military institutions has been the tension inherent in having to live contiguous to those who do not share “our” customs: that is, the dilemma of being simultaneously both neighbors and strangers. [See my book *Neighbors and Strangers: The Fundamentals of Foreign Affairs* (2000) for the results of this tension in the origins of all aspects of world affairs.]

“Imprinted,” generation after generation, century after century of warfare, with fear of foreigners, and despite sporadic and feeble attempts to achieve a sense of a common humanity, we still have trouble comprehending those whom we regard as “not us.”

This worldview is obvious in all our foreign relations and in many aspects of our domestic affairs. It is crucial in trying to reach an understanding of what I have called violent politics. [See my book *Violent Politics* (2008)]. So how are we doing in that quest?

### **Affinities and Animosities**

Most of the books and articles I have read and practically all of the discussions I have heard, on insurgency, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and counterinsurgency, skip lightly over *motivation* to portray *events*. Many seem almost to revel in the ugliness of the conflict. This obviously sells books but hardly enlightens us.

While individual reporters are often very good at describing events, they rarely offer much help in guiding us to an understanding of causes. The media does not have much time for analysis. But their reports at least make clear that the situation we face has not improved and in many aspects is getting more dangerous.

What we read in the press is not much improved by the advice offered to governments by “think tanks.” Not surprisingly, the available reportage and advice has led to a dead end. We, the French, the British, the Russians reached that dead end in Afghanistan. The Chinese in Tibet and Central Asia are also approaching it.

That is where the governments of all the major powers now find themselves. Despite huge expenditures of blood and money, the rich “North” has not been successful in subduing conflict in the poor “South.” Nor, do intelligence and security services believe we can prevent attacks from the “South” on our own homeland.

The sequence appears unending: insurgents hit; dominant powers respond; they respond; we respond; they re-respond And warfare becomes not only everlasting



but ever more brutal and ugly.

As the great Nineteenth Century French student of war, Antoine-Henri Jomini, wrote on what he called “wars of opinion,” such wars “enlist the worst passions [of whole populations and] become vindictive, cruel and terrible” Attacks and reprisal without restraint become virtually inevitable. [See: *The Art of War (Précis de l’art de la guerre)*, which was first published in English in 1862 and was used as a textbook at West Point.]

In these circumstances, trying to suppress guerrilla warfare and terrorism by using lethal force has proved to have an effect similar to trying to douse a fire with gasoline. So what are the circumstances? What are Jomini’s “wars of opinion?”

A careful reading of history shows that what Jomini called wars of opinion are actions that whole societies come to believe aim at destroying not only their governments and institutions what is now called “regime change” but also their way of life and beliefs.

Feeling embattled, both sides believe themselves to be the victims; neither side is willing to understand, much less to excuse, the other. “Common ground” is demarcated by fear and hatred. “War” is transmuted from an issue one partly governed by law between governments into a deeper, unbridled, even primordial conflict among peoples.

And, as incident follows horrifying incident, this “opinion” comes to be shared ever more widely by both insurgents and counterinsurgents. Each side, virtually each person, comes to think of his opponent as intrinsically evil and himself as justified in taking any action, adopting any tactic, no matter how brutal or indiscriminate that is judged to be effective.

That cycle of hate, as I will illustrate is where we are today in the clash between “us,” the established nation-states of the “North,” and the Muslim insurgents of the “South.” (Ironically, when Samuel Huntington wrote “The Clash of Civilizations,” it was a gross simplification, but, inspired by it, governments have helped to turn the interpretation into reality.)

This conflict is not solely a matter of contemporary “opinion.” Rather there are deep and still vivid indeed constantly renewed memories that shape actions and beliefs today.

As with the physician’s case history, knowing and understanding them is crucial to our interpretation of our current dilemma and our possible choices of what to do about it. To elucidate them, I will touch on key elements in our past relationship that form the backdrop to the present. I begin where both

insurgents and counterinsurgents begin, with religion.

## **Religious Certainty**

Islam is the third and most recently announced of the great monotheistic religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. Each religion claims a direct and essentially unique relationship to the Divinity, but to a secular historian, the relationships among the three are obvious.

Judaism and Islam are particularly close and share many beliefs and customs. As the Quran defines Islam, it is “the religion of Abraham” from whose “true faith” Muslims believe the Jews strayed; to the contrary, Jews have always regarded Islam as an imperfect attempt to copy Judaism.

Islam and Christianity are less similar. Islam views Jesus as a prophet with a special relationship to God but holds that treating Jesus as “the son of God” or as a god himself is to commit the mortal sin of polytheism (Arabic: *shirk*). As viewed by the Christian Church Muslim denial is sacrilege. Even worse in Christian eyes was Judaism’s total rejection of Jesus.

So, despite or even because of their similarities, the three religions regarded one another as perversions. Each saw the very existence of the others as a sin against the true God-ordained faith which it alone held.

The attitude of each was partly shaped by geography and history. Christian Byzantium (East Rome) was the established world power defending against Islam. As the Islamic Caliphate expanded, conquering much of the Byzantine empire and all of the Sasanian Persian empire, it acquired resident Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish communities. (And, ultimately, it acquired whole societies of Hindus whose polytheism it gradually came to ignore.)

Except in the heat of warfare, Islam incorporated these peoples into its system but left them free to practice their religions, engage in their distinctive diet and dress, enforce their own laws and customs and to govern themselves under their own authorities. This pattern of autonomous “nationhood,” (Arabic/Turkish: *millet*) grew out of the pagan Arab tribal custom of granting hospitality to a “protected stranger,” (Arabic: *jar*).

Both Christians and Jews generally lived securely in communities within Muslim states whereas both Jews and Muslims were always at risk and often persecuted, occasionally driven away or even slaughtered in Christian states.

Over centuries many Christians and Jews converted to Islam. That Islam forcibly converted them is a myth; actually, the Islamic states were keen that the conquered peoples remain non-Muslim because that status required them to pay an

extra tax.

As Persian Zoroastrians converted, they continued to stress their non-Arab identity by a distinctive interpretation of Islam, Shiism. The development of Shiism within Islam, like Protestantism within Christianity, is complex but in part both were determined by ethnicity. The bitter relationships between Sunnism and Shiism today are reminiscent of the religious wars in early modern Europe. (And, as poorer Hindus converted to Islam, they escaped the tyranny of the caste system, exchanging the virtual slavery of being an "untouchable" (*achuta* or *dalit*) for the "brotherhood" (*ikhwaniya*) that is one of the most attractive aspects of Islam.) Historically, Islam has been the most tolerant of the three religions.

Judaism began, as we know from the Old Testament, as a far more militant and ruthless conqueror of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. It offered no means for non-Jews to achieve safety comparable to the status of protected community in Islam: its God, Yahweh, authorized the massacre of all who stood in the way of the Jewish nation.

It was the Roman Empire that pacified the Jewish nation. Breaking out of Israel, Jews became among the most civilized and cosmopolitan of the Romans. They drew back from militarism and, although they continued to convert distant peoples in Africa, Asia and Europe, they became politically passive. For that they have paid a terrible price. It was this tradition of passivity against which Zionists revolted and returned Judaism to militarism.

Christianity has been generally intolerant and violent in its relationship with both Jews and Muslims. Christians forced European Jews into ghettos, made them wear distinctive dress and subjected them to all sorts of indignities and dangers. The Crusades began with attacks on Jews resident in Europe.

Except in what became Spain, which was partly Muslim for about 700 years, and areas of southern Italy and France, Muslims were effectively banned from Europe. Whereas Jews and Christians established trading posts through the Islamic world, Muslims hardly ever dared visit Europe and until the rise of the Ottoman empire in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries none became residents. [One of the great contributions to medieval history is the multivolume portrayal of the Jewish communities in the Mediterranean and particularly in Egypt by S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (1989)]

Wars between Christians and Muslims began during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. This was partly because Islam was founded on the frontier of the great Christian empire of Byzantium. The first Christian-Muslim clash was in 636 AD. Wars have occurred intermittently ever since.

In campaign after campaign, European Christians fought Spanish, North African, Middle Eastern, Balkan and Central Asian Muslims. The campaigns of what we think of as *the* Crusades lasted 176 years from 1096 to 1272. Among the victims were both European Jewish communities (the First Crusade started with an attack on them) and resident Christians in Palestine (who were burned to death in their Jerusalem church by the Crusaders when they finally reached Jerusalem).

Struggle became endemic in more modern times. And the nature of the conflict was partly transfigured from religion to imperialism. The record is both clear and asymmetrical: it was the Christian "North" that attacked the Muslim "South." Here briefly are some of the key events:

### **The Wars on Islam**

Portugal and Spain continued their moves against the "Moors" into Africa and then on to India while Russian tsars beginning with Ivan the Terrible moved south to crush kingdom after Muslim kingdom in Central Asia.

By the end of the Eighteenth Century, the French and the British had gained overwhelming military, commercial and organizational advantage. For them, as for the Russians, Muslim India was the ultimate prize. But the road to India was blocked by Muslim states that had to be subdued.

Relatively speaking these states lagged far behind Europe. Partly blinded by their vision of their past, the Muslim rulers and their medieval armies almost literally did not know what hit them. On the east, Peter the Great and Catherine defeated the horsemen of Asia one after another. The Russians were matched by the French on the west.

In one of the most colorful battles of all time, the gloriously dressed and splendidly mounted Mamluk horsemen of Egypt charged Napoleon's artillery. They were not only slaughtered but humiliated. That was to be the fate of the Muslims in the centuries to follow.

In India, Britain first conquered Bengal and then set about destroying the great Mughal Empire. Already intent on blocking Russian expansion, the British then pushed toward Central Asia and the Middle East. They fought Afghan Muslims along the "Northwest Frontier" for generations; took over and ruled Egypt; defeated the Muslim revivalist movement, the *Mahdiah*, in the Sudan; established hegemony in the Persian Gulf; dominated Iran; and ultimately acquired control over what became Iraq, Jordan and Palestine.

Some of these conquests were particularly violent: in Afghanistan, the British killed hundreds of thousands of Afghans (but lost a whole army in one of its three wars), and in Iraq, the British wiped out Arab tribesmen with poison gas.

Only on the "Northwest Frontier" was warfare still at least partly a Great Game.

For the Italians, war was no game; in Libya it became genocide. They tried to wipe out not only the Islamic revival movement, the *Sanusiyah*, but also the entire tribal population. Everywhere, the colonial campaigns were ugly.

"Subduing the natives," as the Dutch did in their wars in Indonesia were brutal affairs. They reached the nadir in Congo where the Belgians killed between 10 and 15 million Africans about twice the number of Jews killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust engaged in systematic rape, cut off the hands or feet of unproductive natives and stripped Congo of its raw materials.

[While these horrible crimes were not attributable to Americans, natives both there and throughout the colonial world tended to group Americans with Europeans as "whites" so we have been damned by association. On the Congo see Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (1997). A summary was published by Andrew Osborn, "Belgium confronts its colonial demons," *The Guardian*, July 18, 2002. Osborn points out that the scale of massacre was almost double that of the Holocaust yet Belgium has made neither apology nor restitution.]

Meanwhile, the French conquered North, West and Central Africa, killing hundreds of thousands of Muslims and destroying their social and religious organizations. The French invaded and brutally suppressed the people of Algeria, stealing their lands.

Having invaded Syria, they twice bombarded Damascus when the Syrians tried to prove that Europeans were wrong that they were "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world"

The Covenant of the League of Nations proclaimed a more polite version of "the White Man's burden," the "sacred trust of civilization." France espoused the words but violated them in deeds.

The European thrusts into the "Muslim world" were combinations of religious, nationalist, colonial and imperialist ventures. They were often brutal, frequently nearly continuous and uniformly destructive of civic and religious institutions.

Except for the Philippines, these were not American wars, but the American role in the slave trade that bought millions of Africans to America is now being reevaluated. No one knows much about the enslaved peoples of Africa, but certainly a large portion of them were Muslims.

In short, Muslim experience mainly with Europeans but also to a lesser extent with Americans has been a key element in their attitude toward the white,

Christian "North."

Even if we, the Northerners, choose to ignore the history of our relationship, the descendants of the victims will not. Muslims, like Jews, increasingly probe into and publicize their holocaust. The memory of the "deep past" already plays a significant role in the growth of Muslim sentiment toward the Christian North. It will play an important role in international affairs far into the future. [Further, as Graham Fuller pointed out, "there are a dozen good reasons why there is bad blood between the West and the Middle East today, without any reference to Islam or to religion."]

Memory of the "deep past" is a cause in the growth of Muslim hostility today in such movements as the Taliban, Al Qaeda, various movements of *Salafiyah* and more recently, the Islamic State. [*Salafiyah* is a complex doctrine and has been generally misunderstood: It is roughly comparable to the Puritan movement in Protestant Christianity. That is, it sought to gain strength and purity, and so to advance, by returning to the "pure" religion at its origin. I have discussed it in detail in my 2013 essay.]

But, one may object, that is all so far in the past that it surely can be put aside. To consider that opinion, look briefly at the more recent past. What has been the recent relationship of the Christian "North" and the Muslim "South."

### **The Modern Era of Warfare**

Dividing history into periods is useful for analysis, but it is a simplification. For the vast majority of the "Southern" people there was no new era; they continued to live as their parents and grandparents had lived. More rapidly and more nimbly, their rulers often tried to copy the drill, the uniforms and the weapons of the European invaders. This military modernization was particularly marked in Egypt under Mehmet Ali Pasha and in the Ottoman Empire under Sultans Selim III and Mahmud II. They thought that if they looked modern, they would be strong.

Deeply disturbed by change but growing aware of their weakness, some religious leaders tried to gain strength by going back to draw on their heritage. None of these activities slowed Western penetration.

The Industrial Revolution had given the West irresistible power. Handicraft industries collapsed before cheap imported goods. Governments became enmeshed in debt they hardly understood. Food crops were replaced by cotton for export. Intermediaries proliferated. Traditional patterns of land ownership were overturned by changes that converted Indian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Egyptian farmers into serfs.

Even styles in dress changed so the turban gave way to the Fez. Local authorities from Morocco to Indonesia were replaced or became puppets of the new, European-imposed order.

Among the small elite, nationalism was espoused as it had been in Italy, Greece, Poland, Germany and France as the guide to liberty and dignity. It was thought to be the "secret" of Western power. For many younger Arabs, Caucasians and Indian Muslims, the "Young Turks" became role models.

Then, encouraged by the proclamations of the First and Second World Wars, nationalist movements gained momentum. Those were heady days of manifestos, marches and the first real political parties. A new day seemed to have dawned. And, step by step, nationalism itself was refined toward its apex, secular Baathism.

But, along the way many of those who protested, marched and organized would become willing agents of the European rulers or their native agents. After what were often sharp lessons of the danger of speaking truth to power, most leaders quickly traded youthful exuberance for adult calculation. This transition was made easy and financially attractive by the Western-installed or Western-tolerated monarchs of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Libya and Morocco.

For both reformers and opportunists the issue of preservation of the cultural values of what had come to seem an archaic society became irrelevant. Soon it was overshadowed by the great new challenge of Communism, the dangers of resurgent Israel and the heady opportunities of the Cold War.

It was the Cold War that brought the United States into the Middle East. Taking over from Britain first in Greece and then generally throughout Africa and Asia, America assumed Britain's role but played it with far more vigor and money and far less subtlety and skill.

Using the "façade rulers" whom the British had cultivated or creating new proxy rulers through subversion, bribery and threat became the strategy of the Dwight Eisenhower-John Foster Dulles-Allen Dulles period. Coups were organized and carried out in Iran, Iraq and Syria and help was given to prevent them in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Morocco. Seeing these events, many of the next generation redirected their anger from Britain and France to America.

The best known action of America was the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh, an action proposed by the British to enable them to regain control of Iranian oil. Followed by the cooption of the Shah, the coup may be taken as the starting point for the Muslim reaction against America.

But already four years before in 1949, the CIA had engineered a coup d'état in

Syria. In testimony in the U.S. Senate, it was shown to have tried to murder various Middle Eastern leaders including Prime Minister Qasim of Iraq and President Nasser of Egypt. A few years later in 1980, it helped to make a military coup in Turkey.

In the following years, America has intervened overtly or threatened invasion almost everywhere in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Additionally, it has imposed "crippling sanctions" that have impoverished and infuriated large numbers of people.

Arab, Pakistani, Kashmiri, Somali, Berber and other Muslim people, often led by secular rulers, have themselves engaged in a remarkable series of ugly violations of civil liberties, blunders and wars during this period. One after another, rulers have adopted the security state model: militarism without compensating civic institutions.

Generally speaking except for the oil-rich states, they have kept their people quiet by giving them little bread but many circuses. As a group the leaders and their cronies are known for their greed, corruption and brutality. Their records of torture and imprisonment are among the worst in the world. To the "man in the street," there is little to distinguish the local tyrant from the foreign ruler.

In two crucial aspects, the Muslim states still suffer from the aftermath of imperialism: first, most of the governments have not grown from their own social "soil" but from foreign transplants. Consequently, civic institutions have rarely taken root.

Parliaments, law courts and the media remain, as they were under imperialism, tools in the hands of rulers. Military and security forces, the key legacy of foreign rule and the result more recently of subsidy and training, are the most often the only efficient, mobile and powerful organizations. They form autonomous states within nominal states.

A second heritage of the imperial period is disunity. Domestically, the older tradition of brotherhood (*ikhwaniyah*) and mutual responsibility has been largely replaced by individualism and selfishness. Those who can take, take; few any longer honor the Islamic obligation of tithe (Arabic: *zakat*). Enrichment by any means is avidly sought: "the Devil take the hindmost."

As among individuals so among societies, there is little or no sense of unity. While rulers join interstate organizations and loudly proclaim their unity, they often bitterly and covertly work against what they publicly identify as common causes. Rulers connive in the overthrow of their peers and quietly make deals behind their backs.



This also is largely a heritage of imperialism. Each European state pulled its colonial elite into its own educational system. I observed this when, in 1953, the Rockefeller Foundation convened a meeting of the outstanding Arab intellectuals.

So “embedded” were they in the cultures of their former masters that some were comfortable only in French, others in English, one in Italian while none was able to express himself satisfactorily in standard Arabic. What was evident in language spilled over into law, politics, economics and bureaucratic organization.

The lack of unity has, of course, been heightened by subversion, espionage and foreign manipulation. Individuals have learned not to trust one another. And this sense of wariness has been heightened by the almost continuous wars with Israel and by the common belief that rulers and whole governments covertly collude with Israel. (In wars and other forms of conflict the more recent include 1948-1949, 1956, 1967, 1969-1970, 1973, 1982, 1982 1996, 2008, 2012 and 2014.)

Israeli intelligence operatives have been able to profit from this lack of cohesion. For instance, in 1970, I was asked by the chief of the office of the Israeli Prime Minister to negotiate a cease-fire on the Suez Canal with President Nasser of Egypt. To reassure me, the Israeli official casually mentioned that the Israelis knew Nasser’s opinion of me. There and elsewhere, Israeli intelligence had an often astonishing access to intimate information.

### **Failing the People**

The bottom line is that a significant portion of Muslims and particularly of Arab Muslims believes that their governments have failed their peoples; they have not created institutions that are regarded as constructive, representative and honest; they have not created a sense of dignity which was their repeatedly proclaimed quest; they are generally believed to be corrupt, brutal and tyrannical.

Many believe that the governments we see today are only slightly veiled continuations of imperialism, installed either or both to protect such Western interests as oil, to underwrite American policy toward Israel or to bring about the complete subjugation of Islam. Many also would say that the few local rulers who tried to carry out an independent policy were deposed by force.

Nasser, Saddam and Gaddafi dictators as they certainly were were engaged in efforts to create a modern, progressive and self-sufficient society and to uplift their peoples. However unsavory they were politically, they did bring

education, better health and security. We didn't like them. We tried to kill Nasser and did kill Saddam and Gaddafi.

Nationalism and what was called "Arab Socialism" failed. All that was left was religion. To the forces now operating in the name of Islam, I will turn in the next essay.

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## Gay Marriage and Western Muslims

The evolution of thought on gay marriage shows how religions can adapt to humanistic trends of society, but religious fundamentalists refuse to budge from ancient prejudices, a challenge confronting not only Judaism and Christianity but Islam, as ex-CIA officer Graham E. Fuller describes.

By Graham E. Fuller

Human sexuality has always been a deeply controversial social issue in all societies. So is religion. Put them together and you have a powerful emotional brew.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruling last week legalizing gay marriage poses a new challenge to Islamic communities in the U.S. The same goes for Christian and Jewish communities as well, at least to their most conservative elements.

Religions throughout human history are the historical source of most morality and ethics, not easily overturned. Hostility to homosexuality, for example, is embedded in the Old Testament, was inherited into Christianity, and later into Islam by much the same process; all three essentially viewed it as an "abomination," even though the practice is as old as mankind. In reality of course there is little that is "unnatural" in almost any aspect of human behavior, even when it is not mainstream.

With human evolution, however, humans have slowly come to perceive religion and the nature of the sacred in an evolving light; this is brilliantly discussed in

Karen Armstrong's study, *A History of God*, how thinking about the very nature of God has slowly changed.

And so religions over time have split on questions of the meaning of religion in society and the range of what should be prohibited. Such debates are still underway (even if often in secular guise) on issues of the degree of sanctity of marriage, divorce, abortion, minimal age of sexual permission, alcohol, drugs, incest and "out-of-wedlock" children. Every religion has both conservative and liberal wings interpreting these issues.

The public sphere and the private sphere can differ. Publicly, religion establishes norms (evolving later into more "secular" laws) that it imposes upon societies. Privately, there can be latitude for what one does behind closed doors. Homosexuality in private is thus usually ignored in reality, even when "illegal."

Even a decade ago the U.S. military followed a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. But the issue could not be any further ignored when gay couples sought, justifiably in my view, the right to marry. Yet that call moved the issue of homosexuality out of the private and into the public and legal sphere. Not surprisingly this raised serious concerns in many conservative circles.

The evolution of public opinion in North America on gay marriage has moved rapidly over the past few decades. (Canada legalized it ten years ago, in 2005. So did Spain.) It would seem that such change in thinking came about not so much from theological and moral debate, but much more from a human source: people's growing exposure to gay people, as friends, co-workers, and indeed, their own children. Acknowledgment of the existence of homosexuality is, of course, one thing an element of human sexuality since time immemorial; but acceptance of gay marriage a legal step is another.

But what brings about a shift on the *theological* level, where many religious communities have come to concur? A shift towards more liberal *theological* interpretations of homosexuality within Christian or Jewish communities over the past few decades has usually emerged from some kind of process of prioritizing "higher values" within the faith that transcend earlier prohibitions, often perceived as historically based.

In simplest form, in open multicultural societies liberal religious thinkers have come to lay greater emphasis on tolerance within society, the need to love, honor, respect and embrace all members of society rather than to seek out, condemn, reject or even punish minoritarian beliefs and practices.

The ultimate moment of truth comes of course when one's own children declare

themselves gay. (Note even arch-conservative Dick Cheney's change when his daughter declared herself lesbian.) It is extremely difficult for most of us to accept our children in any way as "evil" (although there are many heartbreaking tales of some parents actually making that call.)

And so we come to perceive sexual orientation as the product of biological and psychological forces, not willful moral choices of non-standard behavior. Society then begins to realize that the gay portion of the human sexual spectrum is broader than it had earlier believed and must be addressed. And it becomes ever harder to judge the private behavior of consenting adults around us if it does no harm to others.

Nor does homophobia derive strictly from religious grounds. There are many quite unreligious homophobes who, in their social and psychological insecurity, fear, condemn and harass all differences in color, race and life-style while aggressively asserting their own macho "values."

Hollywood too, of course, has played a significant role in bringing awareness of gay life into the mainstream, hastening public acceptance of the phenomenon. The passage of time is also a factor in this evolution. Thus the Supreme Court decision this week might not have been thinkable in the U.S. ten years ago (although it obviously was in Canada.)

What about Muslims in the West? As in other areas of life, Muslims may find it a slower process in squaring acceptance of gay-life style and, even more, same-sex marriage with their own religious tradition. The situation is not dissimilar for Orthodox Jews, for whom the Torah explicitly condemns homosexuality (and Jewish law technically requires the death penalty for its practice.) Nonetheless, *liberal* Judaism has risen above these theological strictures and reinterpreted them in new contexts of higher human values.

Western Jews have immensely influenced that evolution of thinking in Judaism overall. I suspect this will be the case with western Muslims as well. But Muslims have a vastly shorter history of life in the West where they struggle for acceptance on many levels. As in the history of most minorities experiencing some discrimination in the West, it's not just about religion: Muslims naturally strive to preserve some *socio-cultural solidarity* to preserve and protect the community.

Islam is not just a religion, but an identity. Starting to think critically about their own religion, a controversial act in any religion, is not an easy task for Muslims under these circumstances; critical questioning impacts on that solidarity.

But Muslims living and socialized in the West are inevitably pushed to accept the reality of gay life around them, among their co-workers, communities, and even where their children may eventually come out. Predictably most of their religious leaders, however, will largely uphold traditional Islamic theology on these issues, at least for a time, until the socialization process catches up, and we see more native-born American imams.

So just as the liberalization process has worked its way through liberal elements of both Christian and Jewish religious communities with time, so that moment will come among western Muslims as well.

As in many other ways as well, western Muslims are at the forefront of social, intellectual and even moral thinking within the Muslim world. This is the product of relative freedom of thought and life in the West. It is also the product of life in stable societies, not possible today in war-torn chaotic Middle Eastern countries clashing over questions of identity and authenticity.

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## The Dangers of Religious Primitivism

By stirring up the Middle East from Western exploitation of oil to Zionist expulsion of Palestinians Christians and Jews set in motion today's "clash of civilizations" with Islam and launched all three religions on a path toward dangerous primitivism, a threat to humanity's future, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Prior to the Eighteenth Century – that is prior to the Enlightenment – if you had asked a literate Westerner when he or she thought the most ideal of human societies did or would exist, most of them would have located that society in the past.

The religious majority might have placed it in the biblical age of Solomon or the early Christian communities of the First Century after Christ. Both would have been considered divinely inspired times.

Now, come forward a hundred years, say to the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, and ask the same question. You would notice that the answer was

beginning to change. Having passed through the Enlightenment and with the Industrial Revolution in process, the concept of continual progress had been invented, and with it some (but by no means all) people started to place that hypothetically ideal society in the future. For the futurists the question of divine guidance no longer mattered.

Today, many folks worldwide believe in progress and assume that tomorrow not only will be different from today, but will in some scientific-technological way be better. The question here is not whether they are correct, but why there isn't a unanimous consensus in favor of progress – for clearly there is not.

The truth is that there are millions of people – Muslims, Jews, Christians and others – who not only still idealize a religiously imagined past, but want, in one way or another, to import that past into the present, and not only their present but everyone else's as well. Whatever one might think of the teachings of the Bible and Quran, this is a highly problematic desire. In fact, it is downright dangerous. The following examples will prove this point:

### **The Muslim Version**

The *Guardian* newspaper recently carried a shocking article entitled “Isis Slave Markets Sell Girls .” As the story goes, ISIS, or the self-proclaimed “Islamic State,” has set up slave markets where young girls are sold. Most of the girls seem to be war booty acquired during raids on areas populated by minorities, such as the Yazidis, who are not considered Muslim.

According to the Zainab Bangura, the United Nations envoy investigating the issue of sexual violence stemming from the wars in Syria and Iraq, the abduction of young girls is a ploy to attract male recruits.

“The foreign fighters are the backbone of the fighting,” Bangura says, and “this is how they attract youngmen: we have women waiting for you, virgins you can marry.”

The UN envoy then adds that ISIS seems determined “to build a society that reflects the 13th century.” Actually, she is off by some 500 years. The time frame ISIS leadership is aiming for is the Seventh Century CE. That was the time of the first Islamic community, and from the ISIS point of view it was a divinely appointed one.

Therefore its cultural and social practices, allegedly sanctioned by the Quran, are as legitimate today as they were in the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. So, first and foremost, the slave trade is sanctioned as a revival of a divine past. If it lures new male recruits, that is no doubt seen as a bonus.

From the point of view of modern secularized society, this is pretty crazy stuff. However, it is not unique to ISIS.

### **The Jewish Version**

There is a sect of religious Jews who are equally determined to import into the present an aspect of an ancient, supposedly divine, past. Their aim is to resurrect Solomon's temple, an artifact of the Sixth Century BCE.

Rebuilding the original temple (which would then be called the "third temple" because the first two were destroyed by the Babylonians and Romans, respectively) would, according to the advocacy organization the Temple Institute, "usher in a new era of universal harmony and peace."

Given that this divine import would have to be built on the site now occupied by the al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest place in the Islamic world, it is hard to see how peace can be the outcome. Nonetheless, according to its advocates, the Jews "have a biblical obligation to rebuild it."

And, it would seem, some 43 percent of religious Israelis agree with this assertion. That means in the eyes of these particular people, the recreation of Solomon's temple is as divinely legitimate as the slave markets run by ISIS. The major difference between the Temple Institute and ISIS is that, as of yet, the institute does not have the power to move from theory to practice.

### **The Christian Version**

It is bad enough to reestablish slavery in the name of religion, as some fanatical Muslims have done. It is not much better to advocate rebuilding Solomon's Temple on stolen land in the name of religion, as some fanatical Jews now want to do.

Yet it is quite another thing to conspire to bring about global war in the name of religion. This seems to be the special providence of fanatical Christians.

According to journalist Bill Moyers, Christian fundamentalist organizations with millions of members financially support Israel in order to encourage expansionism, ethnic cleansing and preemptive war against Iran, and ultimately to trigger a third world war.

What is the point of this allegedly divinely inspired mayhem? According to such Christian fundamentalist sages as John C. Hagee, all of this is necessary to pave the way for the Second Coming of Christ. Hagee knows this is so because he read it in the apocalyptic writings of the New Testament.

And just who might have sympathy with such dangerous efforts to transform the

present on the basis of dubious past prophecy? How about Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Tony Blair, along with growing numbers of voters and legislators both in the U.S. and the UK?

How is it possible, in our scientific age, that millions, including powerful political leaders, hold to such dangerous beliefs? Obviously the Enlightenment and its humanistic teachings did not work for everyone, and even the Industrial Revolution, in its capitalist manifestation, has proved persistently unsettling.

That is, unsettling to community based on age-old – and allegedly divine – principles. After all, seemingly divine teachings were the basis for Western societies, as well as those in the Middle East, for over a thousand years. Counting from the Enlightenment, competing modernity has only been around for 300 or so years.

In other words, our material world might be thoroughly grounded in applied electrical engineering and computer science, but for a surprising number of us, the emotional world seems to still be grounded in the imagined words of God. No wonder religion in all its various forms makes periodic comebacks.

As part of this phenomenon, some of us select a part of the “divine past” as our ideal time. Some of us even convince ourselves that the world would be so much better if we could reconstruct the present along the lines of that imagined past.

Of course, most of those who think this way never get enough power and influence to actually move from theory to practice. Occasionally, however, someone, or some group, does. In the case of the Islamic world, the leaders of ISIS seem to have achieved this status, and so what do we get? Slave markets.

In Israel the Knesset is full of folks who yearn for the some variation on biblical Israel, so what do we get? Well, if not yet the rebuilding of Solomon’s Temple, we get all that illegal expansion into “Judea and Samaria.”

And, in the case of the Christians like George W. Bush and Tony Blair, both of whom seem to have used their worldly power to kill and maim millions in the name of prophecy, we get one war after another.

This suggests that the socio-religious outlook of Solomon, Mohammed and Jesus Christ are simply not translatable into the modern world. Oh sure we have the Ten Commandments and all that. However, adherence to these rules should no longer be enforced as the word of God.

In the West at least, they are – in a selective, updated fashion – part of the promulgated laws of multi-cultural communities, no more and no less, and it is



best to keep it that way.

So let's show some appreciation of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America. When they separated religion and government, they had a strong and accurate sense of history. It was a good move, even if not a divinely inspired one. It was also the implementation of a fine Enlightenment principle – a good match for modern society.

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