World Religions & Global Issues

Week 1 Lecture | RELS 332

Professor Chris Crews

Week 1 Readings

- *Global Religions Today* - Thomas Tweed

- *Religious Politics and the New World Order* - Mark Juergensmeyer, Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, Timothy Samuel Shah

- *Orientation - Did Religion Do It?* – Christine Schliesser, S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, Pauline Kollontai

- *Religious Nationalism in a Global World* - Mark Juergensmeyer

The Big Picture

In our readings this week we explore two key issues:

- First, the rise of post-WWII debates about the importance of religion around the world.

- Second, how to make sense of the complicated connections between religion and violence.

As our authors this week argue, for much of the 1960s and 1970s, many scholars felt that the role of religion was shrinking all around the world as support for secularism grew. In fact, some scholars even thought religion itself was going to become irrelevant—the secularism thesis. By the 1980s, it was clear to many scholars that religion was not going away, and in fact it had never been gone. Rather, popular expressions of religiosity were simply changing and evolving due to the new pressures and ideas associated with globalization and a more globally-connected world.

But this renewed religious importance also saw the rise of new forms of religious violence and ethnic and religious nationalism, making many wonder if the resurgence of religion was to blame. As our readings this week argue, the answer is complicated. Religious nationalism and religious violence are clearly connected to globalization, but religion is often a cover for deeper social issues.

Global Religions Today
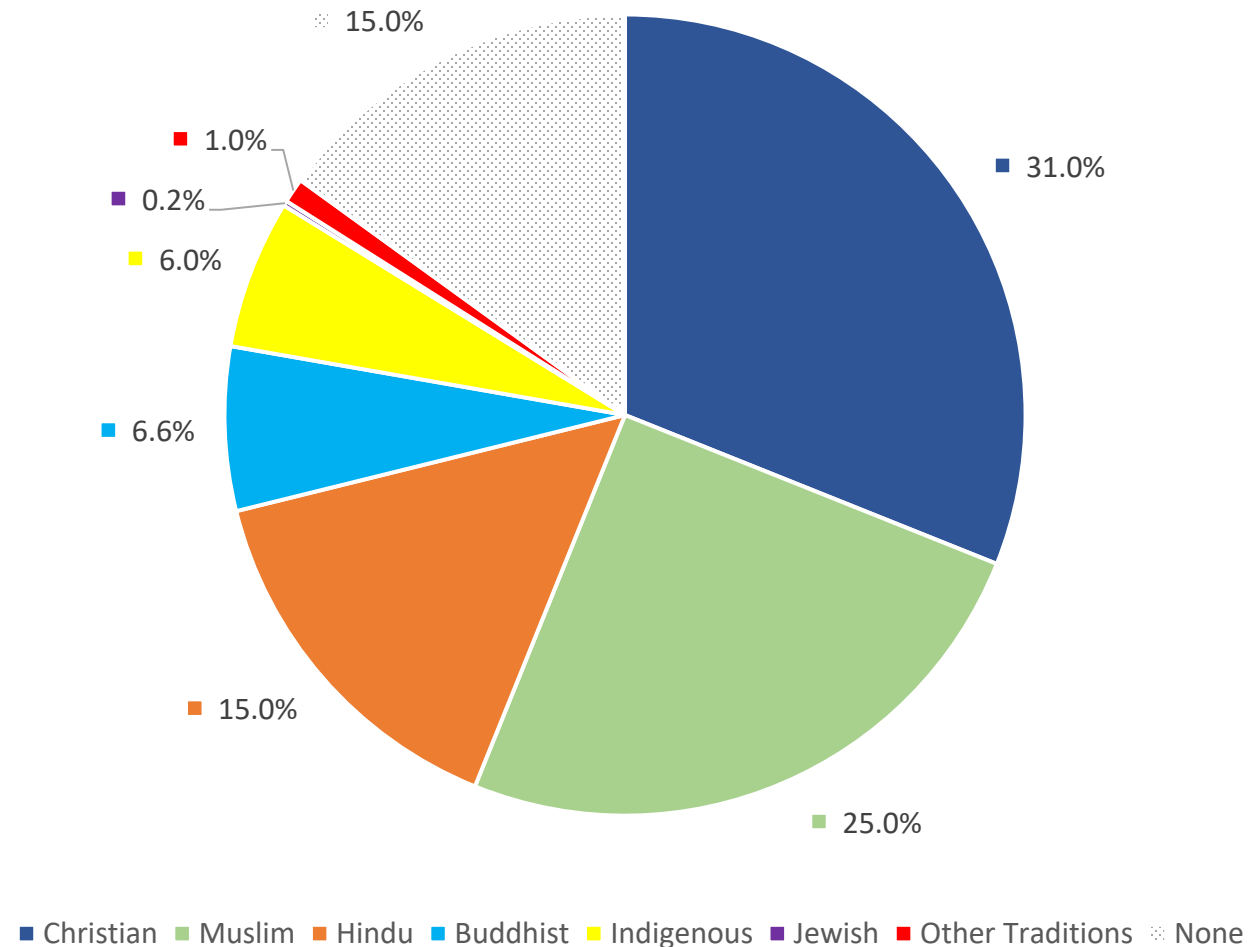
Tweed

Tweed – Global Religion Today

Tweed argues "It was still unclear **after 1945** whether religion—and the nationalist impulses and industrial economies it sometimes sanctioned—was bringing things together or pulling them apart. That question was even harder to answer **after the 1970s**, when politically assertive religion staged a comeback, global flows intensified, and environmental damage accelerated."

Industrial Age → **Information Age**

Tweed argues religious traditions (post-WWII) sometimes helped to bring people together:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948)
- Catholic Liberation Theology
- Feminist theology & Gender equity
- Civil rights & Social justice (B.R. Ambedkar in India, MLK Jr. in the US)
- Ecological awareness (Earth Day 1970).

Religious Believers Globally

- 31.0%
- 25.0%
- 15.0%
- 6.6%
- 6.0%
- 0.2%
- 1.0%
- 15.0%

Legend: ■ Christian ■ Muslim ■ Hindu ■ Buddhist ■ Indigenous ■ Jewish ■ Other Traditions ⬚ None

Beliefs by the Numbers

- 2.3 B Christians (50% Catholic)

- 1.9 B Muslims (87% Sunni)

- 1.1 B Hindus

- 500 M Buddhists

- 400 M Indigenous traditions

- 14 M Jews

- 58 M Bahá'í, Daoism, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Other

- 1.1 B –Atheist/Agnostic/Non-Religious

Tweed argues religious traditions (post-WWII) were drivers of many global conflicts:

- Cold War between "Godless Communists" & "Greedy Capitalists" (Christian)
- European and American colonization & imperialism ("civilizing the savages")
- Communist occupation of Tibet (1959)
- Israeli seizure and occupation of Palestine (1967)
- Catholic-Protestant conflicts in Northern Ireland (1968)

By mid-1960s, many thought that religion was becoming less important in the world as secular political systems enjoyed widespread support.

THIRTY-FIVE CENTS   APRIL 8. 1966
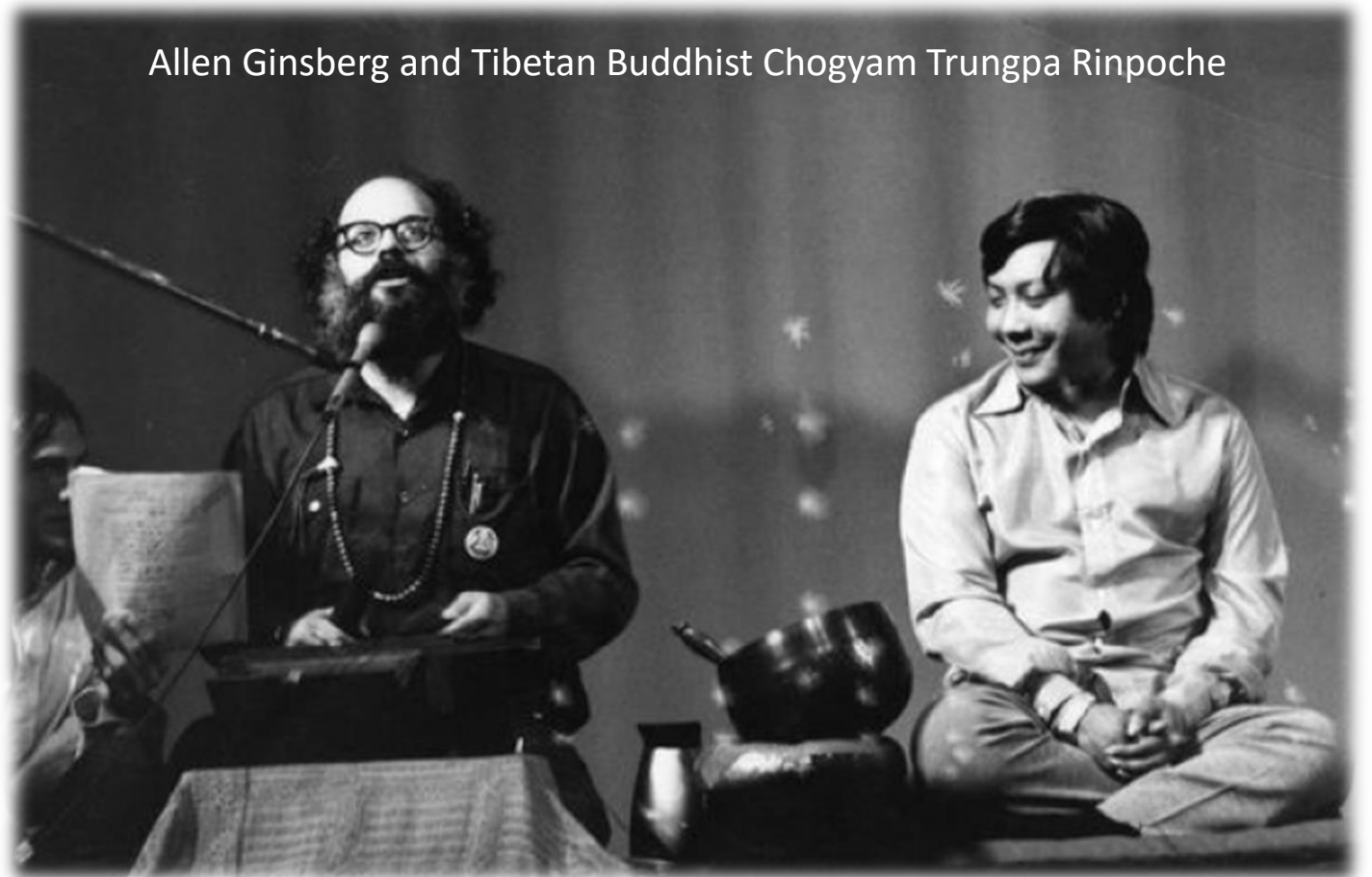
TIME
THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

Is God Dead?

VOL. 87 NO. 14

But as Tweed suggests, religions didn't die, they simply diversified, as seen in the 1960s counterculture and growing interest in the US and Europe with Buddhist and Hindu ideas, as well as Native American beliefs and New Age philosophies.

Allen Ginsberg and Tibetan Buddhist Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Religious Changes (1970s-2000s)

As Tweed argues, the period from 1970 onward saw increasing conflicts shaped by religion:

- Attacks on Buddhism under Pol Pot in Cambodia (1976)
- Attack on Sikh's Golden Temple of Amritsar by Indian gov't (1984)
- Balkan Wars between Christian and Muslim ethnic groups (1991-95)
- Rise of US right-wing Christian "Moral Majority" led by Jerry Falwell (1979)
- Iranian revolution and rise of Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini (1979)
- 9/11 attacks on World Trade Center & Pentagon by Osama Bin Laden (2001)

Tweed also notes other examples where religion played a more constructive role globally:

- 1998 Good Friday Agreement ending Protestant-Catholic hostilities in Northern Ireland
- Involvement of Catholic charity groups after 1994 genocide in Rwanda
- Many religious denominations adopting ecological statements by 1990s

Religion Goes Digital

By the mid-1990s religious groups were experimenting with the Internet and using new forms of digital technology to create & spread their religious ideas.

- Digital tools to track religious holidays and movement of the sun/moon
- Websites & email for communication
- Virtual worship (Hindu *puja*, Muslim *hajj*)
- Online communities (esp. key for Covid-19)

- Diffusion of technological language into religious spaces: "de-programming", "God's GPS", "friending God", "Jesus phone" (iPhone)
- Gutenberg press (1450) > Internet (1989) both information revolutions that changed religion

Think different.
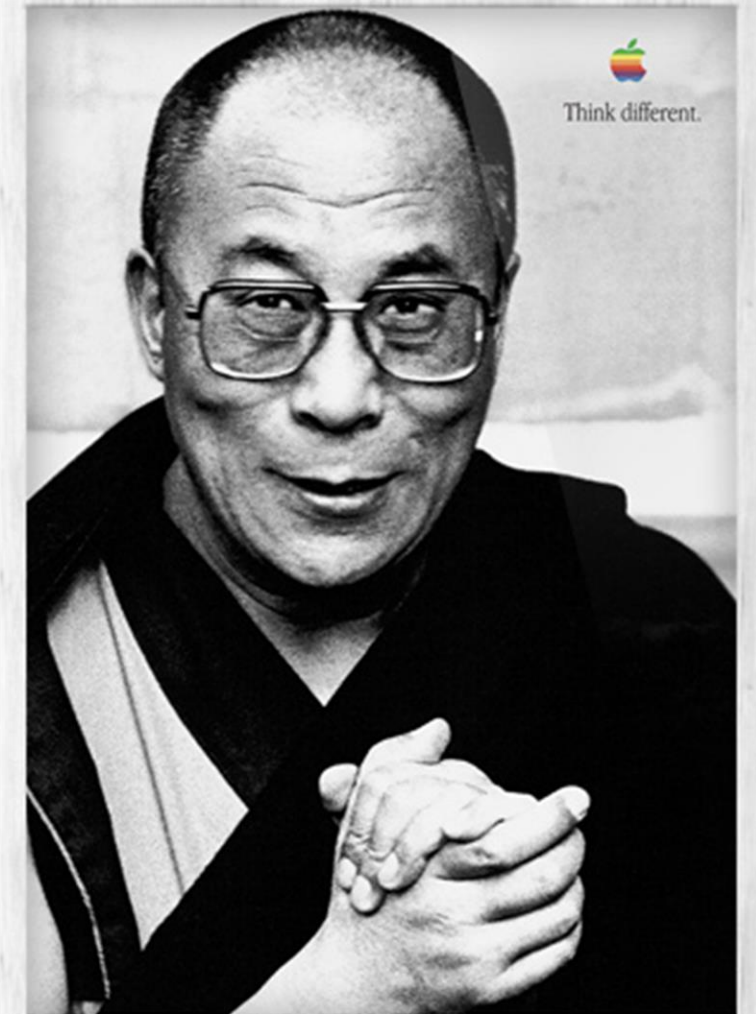
Debating Religion

As Tweed notes, scholars continue to debate the links between religion and conflict in the 21ˢᵗ century, with some seeing religion driving conflict and others seeing it as a unifying force.

"Clash of Civilizations"

Argument by US political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) that opposing cultural identities (Islamic Civilization & Christian Civilization – aka "West") were the source of lasting global conflicts.

"World of Three Cultures"

Argument by Mexican diplomat Miguel E. Basáñez (2016) that world religious traditions can be placed into three distinct groups based on shared cultural traits:

| **Cultures of Honor** Hinduism, Islam, Eastern Orthodox [tradition, hierarchy, agrarian values]	**Cultures of Achievement** Protestantism, Confucianism, Judaism [hard work, future rewards, industrial values]	**Cultures of Joy** Buddhism, Catholicism [family, social interactions, postindustrial values]

The Future of Global Religions

Yet as Tweed notes, none of these are convincing arguments to religious studies scholars since they are based on overly simplistic generalization which don't hold up to scrutiny.

As he argues: "Sadly, **both digital connectivity and ethno-religious cohesion have been among the forces for fragmentation**. Computer technologies, which were inspired by a spiritual vision that was supposed to bring us together, have not only prompted a loss of intimacy but also a loss of privacy, and that has implications for political life...Overall, the evidence suggests that hostility toward people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds is surging around the world."

"Yet, as some analysts fail to note...religious groups have been not just **cohesive**, forming in-group bonds with the spiritually like-minded, but also **adhesive**, forming bonds with those of other faiths to work on shared global problems."

Religious Conflicts

Religious Unity
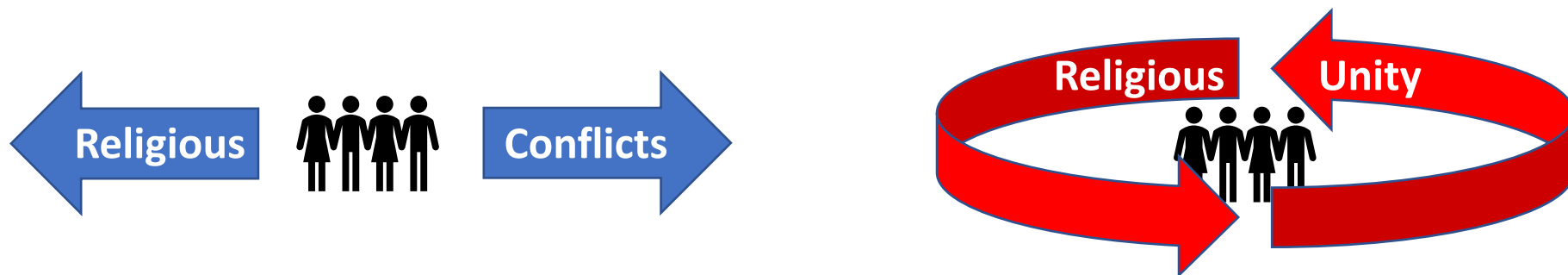
Religious Politics & the New World Order

Juergensmeyer

Juergensmeyer - Religious Politics in a Global Era

"One of the remarkable features of political life in the global era is the **rise of strident new forms of religious politics**…the emergence of a Hindu nationalist party in India, an antigovernment Buddhist movement in Sri Lanka, Christian militias in the United States, xenophobic Christian nationalists in Europe, Jewish extremists in Israel, and Muslim activists in Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, and throughout the Middle East. Everywhere, it seems, in every religious tradition, **new forms of religious activism have been on the rise**."

As Juergensmeyer notes, scholars in the 1990s were still debating the decline of religion, but since then the role of religion globally has grown. Meanwhile, **public support for secularism**, a core value of European Enlightenment thinking and the heart of modern liberal democracy, **has been steadily declining and is under attack globally**.

Alongside these trends has also been an **important global shift as countries become increasingly more diverse** as well as more integrated into increasing global cultural flows, religious practices, and economic systems. These trends have **fostered global diversity but also led to a backlash** from traditionalists and conservatives who oppose these social changes.

National vs Global Religion

As Juergensmeyer suggests, the relationship between religion, globalization and politics is complex. Some groups embrace and promote globalization, while others oppose it in favor of nationalism.

Religious nationalist movements:
- Hindu nationalist groups like Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the RSS in India
- Christian nationalist groups like Tea Party, Proud Boys, and Oath Keepers in US
- Ultra-orthodox Jews Haredi groups United Torah Judaism and Shas in Israel

Religious transnational movements:
- Islamic Hamas movement in Palestine and Lebanon
- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS) across the Middle East and North Africa
- Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity (Asia, Africa, Americas)

Juergensmeyer argues most conflicts are **not about religion**, but rather conflicts "about identity and economics, privilege and power" that have become "**religionized**…with the aura of sacred combat."

Revisiting Religion

Juergensmeyer also points out that "An abundant number of new studies argue...that **religious conflict *is* a by-product of the global age**. In the global era, religion helps to legitimize movements of rebellion with symbolic empowerment and enables the rebels to respond with traditional cultural credibility to the challenges of globalization."

In their discussion of the 21st century as "God's Century," Toft, Philpott and Shah review the earlier scholarly idea from the 1960s and 70s thought religion was rapidly becoming less important, citing the rise of secular leaders like Fidel Castro in Cuba, David Ben-Gurion in Israel, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, and the Shah of Iran as evidence.

This idea came to be known as the "**secularization thesis**."

Emerging from European Enlightenment philosophers, it found wide public support from key thinkers like Thomas Jefferson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Max Weber.

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed Him."

Friedrich Nietzsche
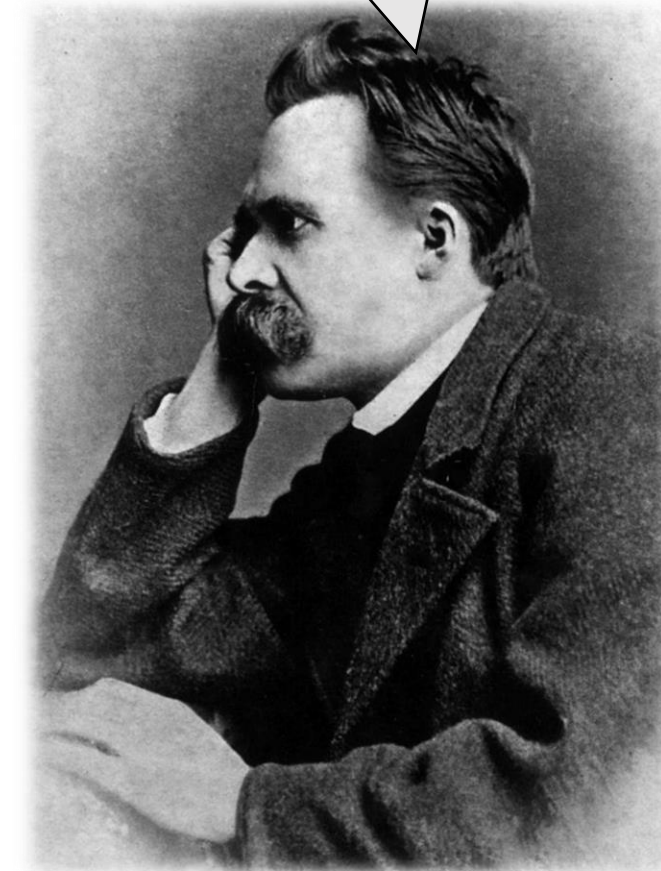
Decline of Secularism & the Neo-Atheists

But as Toft, Philpott and Shah point out, despite the secularization thesis, by the turn of the century religion had not gone away. In fact, it had become more important, with growing majorities in formerly secular countries embracing resurgent religious ideals that challenged secularism.

"In India, for example, the number of people who "completely" agree on the separation of faith and government **dropped from 78 percent to 50 percent in just five years**, from 2002 to 2007. Thus, over the past four decades, **religion's influence on politics has reversed its decline and become more powerful on every continent and across every major world religion**."

Despite the growing importance of religion, a new generation of writers known as the "**neo-atheists**" (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett) revived the secularization thesis. These neo-atheists not only defended secularization but also argued, in the words of Hitches, that "religion is always and everywhere hard-wired to be irrational, violent, and repressive."

Yet as the authors argue, the neo-atheists overstated their case and ignored the ways that religious globalization has contributed to peace and social stability, and not only violent conflicts. Therefore, **understanding how religion shapes politics** is becoming increasing important.

Secular Nationalism & New World Order

Juergensmeyer argues radical religious ideologies are behind many rebellions against authority, "Yet religion gives more than a voice for the dispossessed. **It provides a basis for a fundamental critique of the modern nation-state**. In doing so, **it challenges the legitimacy of secular institutions and national identity**...Religious ideologies have emerged in the twenty-first century as **new bases for political legitimacy and national identity** at a time when the nation-state is vulnerable."

While secular nationalism was the reigning ideology globally until the 1950s, following WWII and the rise of third world liberation struggles, the start of the Cold War, and critiques of Westernization, the global **appeal of secularism began to wane** during the 1990s in the face of new pressures.

At the same time, an opposite trends was also emerging, with multicultural societies emerging due to these same globalization dynamics. This **growing diversity was seen as a threat by some to their imagined national identity**. "In Europe, the presence of large immigrant populations from the Middle East **ignited new forms of racism and new fears of the erosion of national values**. In the United States, the Christian militia organizations were animated by **fears of a massive global conspiracy** involving liberal American politicians and the United Nations." (e.g., QAnon)

Ethno-Nationalism & Religion

These new ethno-nationalist movements not only challenge the authority of the secular nation state, but they also **provide an alternative source of identity and belonging** that can be used to redefine who and what the central ideologies are of a given society during periods of crisis. As historian Benedict Anderson would argue, such strategies help create an **imagined community**.

"In the contemporary political climate, therefore, **religious nationalism provides a solution** to the problem of Western-style secular politics in a non-Western and multicultural world."

As Juergensmeyer notes, "Although the members of many radical religious and ethnic groups may appear to fear globalization, what they **distrust most are the secular aspects of globalization. They are afraid that global economic forces and cultural values will undercut the legitimacy of their own bases of identity and power**." Nationalist groups often embrace select aspects of globalization, such as the internet and social media, because they help spread their nationalist goals.

One particularly troubling type of religious nationalism is seen in the **apocalyptic groups who frame their struggles in the language of cosmic wars or holy war**, often including calls to violence to bring about an imagined "end times" prophecy (e.g., Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, Messianic Jews).

Religion and the Future

As Juergensmeyer suggests, these diverse global religious movements do not have a single approach to globalization, but rather, many pick and choose which aspects to embrace or reject depending on what is perceived as a threat or aid to their core beliefs and practices.

"**The crucial problems in an era of globalization are identity and control**…For these reasons, the assertion of **traditional forms of religious and ethnic identities are linked to attempts to reclaim personal and cultural power…**Until there is a surer sense of citizenship in a global order, therefore, religious visions of moral order will continue to appear as attractive though often disruptive solutions to the problems of identity and belonging in a global world."

We have seen these dynamics on display over the past year in the US and Europe where a **growing culture war is being waged between competing political interests**—religious nationalists who are seeking to turn back the clock on social change, and secular advocate who seek to consolidate and expand global social and political gains made in recent decades. These struggles are playing out on everything from abortion rights and voting reforms to racial justice and citizenship rights.

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Did Religion Do It?

Schliesser, Kadayifci-Orellana, Kollontai

Schliesser, Kadayifci-Orellana, Kollontai – Did Religion Do It?

As Schliesser et al. argue, in line with Juergensmeyer's claims, "When we look at human history, both past and present, **religion and violence appear to be best friends**…According to a recent report by the Pew Research Center, more than one-quarter of the world's countries experience high or very high levels of social hostilities involving religion, compared to one-fifth in 2007."

But we need to be cautious when talking about "**religious violence**" for at least two reasons:
- It can make us see religion as the primary or sole cause of violence, ignoring other causes.
- It paints religious violence as irrational and fanatical, as opposed to "rational" secular violence.

As we have seen, **religion is ambiguous**, and can promote violence or peace. It often makes more sense to talk about **violence with religious dimensions**. Three ways we can think about this include:

- The nature and role of religion in society (time & context).
- The relevance of different dimensions of religion in a specific conflict.
- The individual understanding of religion by scholars.

Religion and Violence

When we talk about religion and violence, there are **3 different types of interconnected violence** that it is helpful to think about here, in addition to identifying the root cause(s) of violence:

- Direct Violence (physical)
- Structural Violence (institutional)
- Cultural Violence (ideological)

Cultural

Direct   **Structural**

Johan Galtung's "violence triangle"
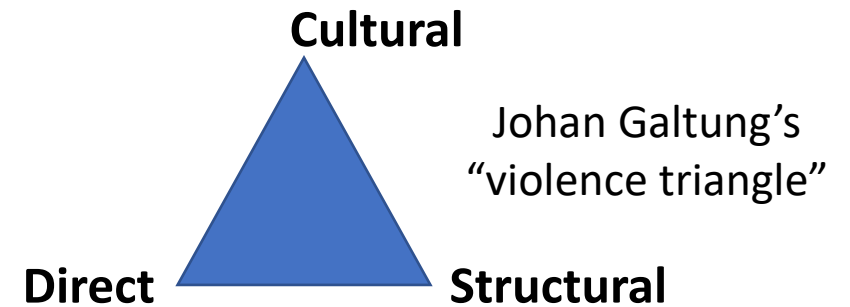
Johan Galtung argues "**Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right** - or at least not wrong…The study of cultural violence highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society."

We can also think about how violence serves a functional role in society. French philosopher René Girard refers to this as the **mimetic nature of violence**, by which he means that social competition driven by desire and rivalry—also called imitative desire—eventually leads to violence. To resolve this violence, a "**scapegoat mechanism**" is needed direct the violence. (Tutsis - Rwanda, Jews - Germany)

Religion in Conflict – Six Roles

In discussing the links between religion and violence, Schliesser et al. describe **six different roles** that religion can play in any given conflict:

- Religion as community (authorities, relationships, identities)
- Religion as a set of teachings (concepts, norms, values)
- Religion as spirituality (personal experience, motivation, meaning)
- Religion as practice (symbols, rituals, myths)
- Religion as discourse (language power, worldview "*Weltanschauung*")
- Religion as an institution (leaders, networks, service delivery)

As the authors note, in each of these six examples we can find ways in which religion both acts as fuel to fan the flames of social conflicts as well as water to put out communal violence. What matters for our purposes here is to understand that we need to pay attention to all these complex and interconnected dynamics to fully understand how religion and violence intersect and operate.

Religious Nationalism in a Global World

Juergensmeyer

Juergensmeyer - Religious Nationalism in a Global World

Juergensmeyer argues that "The vote in the UK in favor of Brexit, the election of Donald Trump in the United States, and the ascendancy of Victor Orbán's xenophobic regime in Hungary are all **indications that a strident new form of nationalism is sweeping the world** in the second decade of the twentieth century. Much of it is **interwoven with religion, creating an aggressive cultural nationalism** that has asserted itself from Myanmar to the Middle East."

At the heart of his argument is the claim that resurgent forms of **religious nationalism are tied to globalization** and changing political, economic, and culture dynamics at the global level. The **paradox**, as Juergensmeyer suggests, is that religions are increasingly global in scope, yet they are also reinforcing local ties and expressions of nationalism that are often hostile to these global trends. One reason, he suggests, is due to the **weakening of older forms of secular nationalism**.

Here again Juergensmeyer argues that "Among other things, **global forces are undermining many of the traditional pillars on which the secular nation-state have been based**, such as national sovereignty, economic autonomy, and social identity."

Globalization & Religious Nationalism

Religious studies scholars in the 1980s-90s largely saw the rise of religious and ethnic nationalism as part of anti-colonial struggles and the rejection of Westernization. But by the 2000s a growing number of scholars saw the "rise of ethno-religious nationalism not just as a rejection of modernity but also as **a response to postmodernity and its new transnational form, globalization**."

As Juergensmeyer agues, "**The fading of the nation-state and old forms of secular nationalism have produced both the opportunity for new nationalisms and the need for them**. The opportunity has arisen because the old orders seem so weak; and the need for national identity persists because no single alternative form of social cohesion and affiliation has yet appeared to dominate public life the way the nation-state did in the twentieth century…In the increasing absence of any other demarcation of national loyalty & commitment, **these old staples—religion, ethnicity, and traditional culture—have become resources for national identification**."

One of the key challenges for scholars of religious studies is how to make sense of the diverse ways in which both religious and secular nationalists are responding to this breakdown of older forms of social organization—chiefly among them the waning global support for secular nationalism.

Religion, Ethnicity & Nationalism

Juergensmeyer argues the turn to older "traditional" values and ideas in contemporary times is quite radical, especially when those calls seek to restore pre-secular ideas and values, a trend which he notes makes these movements more "confrontational and sometimes violent. **They reject the intervention of outsiders and their ideologies and, at the risk of being intolerant, pander to their indigenous cultural bases and enforce traditional social boundaries**."

In a global context, this can translate into strongly anti-Western ethnic or religious nationalism, particularly in countries with a troubled history of colonial rule or imperial interventions. In the US and European nations, this often means a growing backlash against immigrants and cultural threats.

As Juergensmeyer notes, "Many of the supporters who voted both for Brexit and U.S. Presidential candidate Donald Trump thought that they were rejecting international trade alliances and the influx of refugees from around the world… [they] **imagine that their nations can return to a self-sufficient economic and political order that does not rely on global networks and transnational associations**."

Religion, Ethnicity & Nationalism

When they emerge, these ethnic and religious expressions of nationalism can be either isolationist—as in the case of the US or UK—or transnational—as in the case of India or Indonesia. Sometimes the idea is to create local religious state that could eventually merge into a larger transnational body, such as a revived Islamic caliphate within the Middle East. Other times the focus is more on creating or expanding religious or ethnic diasporas which can be leveraged to support local demands (e.g., Sikhs).

They can emerge in response to local calls for an ethnic or religious state—such as the 1979 Iranian revolution that usher in an Islamic state, or they can appear when an existing secular state collapses or becomes destabilized, such as Al Qaeda in Afghanistan or ISIL/ISIS in Syria and northern Iraq.

As Juergensmeyer notes, it is a new "world order that many of these religious and ethnic nationalists oppose. **They note that the increasingly multicultural societies of most urban communities around the world have undermined traditional cultures and their leaders**. They have imagined the United States and the United Nations to be agents of an international conspiracy, one that they think is hell-bent on forming a homogenous world society and a global police state." (aka "New World Order")

Non à Bruxelles
OUI À LA FRANCE

WE MUST SECURE THE EXISTENCE OF OUR
SOUTH WALES
PEOPLE AND A FUT FOR WHITE CHI

FREEDOM SUNDAY
AT FIRST BAPTIST DALLAS
JUNE 24
9:15 & 10:50AM

SPECIAL MESSAGE
"AMERICA IS A CHRISTIAN NATION"

FIRSTDALLAS.ORG

DR. ROBERT JEFFRESS
SENIOR PASTOR

OUTFRONT   2-2188

Religion, Ethnicity & Nationalism

Juergensmeyer refers to such examples as "**guerrilla antiglobalism**," a dynamic which runs the gamut from radical Islamist to Alt-Right and white supremacists groups like the Proud Boys.

As he suggests, these different possible futures each contain "a paradoxical relationship between the national and globalizing aspects of ethno-religious politics. This suggests that **there is a symbiotic relationship between certain forms of globalization and religious and ethnic nationalism**. It may appear ironic, but the globalism of culture and the emergence of transnational political and economic institutions enhance the need for local identities. They also create the desire for a more localized form of authority and social accountability." It is precisely these tensions that we are seeing playing out today around the world.

Assignment Reminders

A few reminders about class assignments for this week:

- Introduction class video due <u>Mon June 28</u> by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.

- Discussion post #1 is due <u>Wed June 30</u> by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.

- Peer response posts (x2) (post #2) are due <u>Fri July 2</u> by 11:59 pm in discussion forum.

- Be sure to take the online Pew Center Religious Typology Quiz linked from the class schedule page of BB, as you will need this to answer the discussion post #1 question.