

9 Religious Worldviews in Global Politics

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In the Preface to this book, Peter Katzenstein cites religion as one of our contemporary era's "foundational worldviews," indicating the degree to which religion is implicated in the concept and category of "worldview" that all of the contributors to this volume are seeking to define, explicate, and draw attention to. Indeed, this entire collaborative examination of worldviews and their role in International Relations (IR) relies, in part, on religious belief, religious practice, and religious modes of being as paradigmatic examples of the ways in which human beings throughout history have made sense of the world and their place in it. Katzenstein notes in Chapter 1, for example, that "worldviews contain arguments about the ontological building blocks of the world, the epistemic requirements of acceptable knowledge claims, and the origin and destiny of humanity." This construction could almost serve as the definition of the kind of "arguments" that varied religious traditions have provided for millennia in response to fundamental questions related to existence and meaning. What is the nature of being? What is the role of faith in constructing systems of knowledge? Where did the world and human life come from? How definitive is human experience on Earth? And what awaits humanity, both at the end of an individual life, and at the end of human history, as we know it? For many individuals and communities over time, religion has provided the most relevant and most meaningful answers to these perennial questions. For many individuals and communities over time, in other words, religion has resided at the very center of encompassing and foundational worldviews.

My central goal in this chapter, then, is to emphasize the depth to which – and the diversity with which – religion is *still* implicated in many of the worldviews that characterize our contemporary era. Modernity dawned. But, to the surprise of many social theorists and behavioral analysts, religion did not just fade away. As a way of making sense of basic reality, human experience, and communal belonging, religion has stubbornly and pervasively survived. In terms of the categories being used in this volume, the religious worldviews that continue to provide meaning and grounding for so many people can often be quite

mechanistic in operation. These worldviews constitute, at their core, meticulously tended “gardens,” with well-marked walkways and the promise of draconian sanctions for wandering off the prescribed path. But in other contexts and from other perspectives, religious worldviews can also be deeply relational. Relational religious worldviews are grounded in the intricate interconnections between humanity and the divine, between humanity and nature, and within humanity itself as the cocreative force of a world that is always in the process of becoming. In addition to constructing “gardens,” in other words, religious worldviews can also acknowledge the density of the “forest,” and even celebrate the uncertainty and inscrutability of the “jungle.”

Whatever metaphor one wishes to use in order to categorize them, however, I will argue here that religious worldviews – because they attach meaning to human experience and establish social order (or at least ascribe meaning to disorder) – are always deeply grounded simultaneously in both religion and in politics. In fact, I will go further and also argue that the category of worldviews points us to the way in which religion and politics relate to each other not as separate, distinct variables, but rather as constitutive elements of coherent, cohesive ways of being in the world.

9.1 Neglect of Religious Worldviews in the Analysis of Global Politics

A simple acknowledgment of the role that various forms of religion play in constructing worldviews relevant to contemporary global politics draws our attention to one of the great mysteries of modern scholarship in the field of IR: the relative paucity of reliance on religion as an underlying factor in explaining political outcomes on the global stage. To be sure, some IR analysts in recent years have responded to the unavoidable prominence of apparently religiously motivated actors on the world stage by acknowledging religion as a potential source of politically relevant identity, and a potential grounding for politically relevant interest formation. Nevertheless, recent examinations of research and publishing patterns reveal IR to have been slow to rethink the assumptions arising out of secularization theory and to reassess the role that religion might play in relations between states and among the broad array of nonstate actors engaged in contemporary world politics.¹

This myopia is particularly notable given how foundational religion, broadly defined, was in the very construction of the central theoretical

¹ Wald and Wilcox 2006: 523–529.

schools of International Relations in the first place. Realism, after all, was originally grounded in a conception of self-interested humankind that was derived from religious understandings of sin and the “fallen” nature of humanity’s relationship with God.² Liberal institutionalism, alternatively, reflected a belief that relationships between and among states – as between and among individuals – could be based in the recognition of mutual benefit and the building of mutual trust. Some prominent early proponents of these notions were driven explicitly by their religious beliefs,³ and some viewed the role of international organizations from a decidedly religious perspective. Constructivism, in at least some of its iterations, relied from the start on the political meaning of identity – a category that for many (most?) human beings is grounded, at least in part, in religious belief, practice, and community.

The central reason that IR has resisted a recognition of religion’s enduring importance is the same misapprehension that has plagued social science more generally: an overreliance on a deeply problematic secularization theory holding that “modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.”⁴ This overly simplistic understanding of the complex processes of secularization mistook the functional differentiation characteristic of modern life – the decline of totalistic social structures based solely in religion – for a much less certain diminution of actual religious belief and practice. Relatedly, the presumption of religion’s decline led many social scientists to discount the prevalence of what José Casanova has called the “de-privatization” of religion in our modern era.⁵

IR was perhaps especially susceptible to this analytical limitation because of how deeply the very founding of the field itself was grounded in the ostensible marginalization of religion in the arena of European power politics. In what has been variously called the “Westphalian presumption,”⁶ the “Westphalian synthesis,”⁷ or the “Westphalian legacy,”⁸ International Relations theory has long been laboring under the assumption that religion and religious motivations had been rendered insignificant to “modern” world politics by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The seventeenth century princes of Europe (disingenuously) declared that religion was too dangerous, too unpredictable, and too prone to conflict to serve as a meaningful grounding for their relations with one another. And so modern students of the state system that those princes created (inaccurately) presumed that they could safely ignore

² Thomas 2005; Niebuhr 1953. ³ Burnidge 2016. ⁴ Berger 1996/97: 4.

⁵ Casanova 1994 ⁶ Thomas 2005: 54. ⁷ Philpott 2002: 66.

⁸ Carlson and Owens 2003: 1

religion, at least as it related to the definition of state interest or the trajectory of interstate interactions.

Unfortunately, the theoretical echoes of the Westphalian “synthesis” endured long after the modern evidence ceased supporting the historical “presumption” on which the “legacy” was based (indeed, if the evidence ever did support it in the first place). But as Scott Thomas has phrased it, using purposefully religious terminology: the secularizing effects of the “Westphalian settlement established a *political theology* for modern IR . . . a *doctrine* that prescribes what the role of religion and political authority should be in domestic and international politics that has lasted for 300 years.”⁹ As rejection of religion settled into the “genetic code of the discipline of International Relations,”¹⁰ several generations of analysts grew to intellectual and professional maturity almost completely ignoring religion, either because they explicitly deemed it not relevantly present in the field of study they were advancing, or because they were simply ill-disposed to notice it. Peter Berger, manifesting the zeal of the epistemological convert, went so far as to argue that “the difficult-to-understand phenomenon [was] *not* Iranian mullahs, but American university professors.”¹¹

Some who have sought to account for so many IR scholars and other social scientists remaining so blind for so long to the effects of religion on world politics have speculated that part of the reason might simply be that these scholars tended not to be religious themselves. We know that religion is nothing more than antediluvian superstition, the thinking went. So, surely, such outmoded thinking cannot authentically motivate the behavior of our research subjects. I have lately begun to wonder, however, whether the presumption of irreligious identity on the part of contemporary scholars might itself be a form of the secularization myth. During a lunch discussion among a number of the contributors to this volume, for example, it became clear that each attendee had a personal “religious story” to tell. Some of these stories included continued membership in explicitly religious communities. Some, to be sure, did not. But all of these stories and the significance that the participants readily granted to them suggested that each participant in that discussion had emerged from a personal background that prominently included religious experience in one form or another. Might it be reasonable, therefore, to consider the possibility that many of my colleagues’ “worldviews” – the “basic ideas that shape the questions [they] ask or fail to ask, provide [them] with explanatory and interpretive concepts, and suggest hunches

⁹ Thomas 2005: 23 (emphasis added) ¹⁰ Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003: 1

¹¹ Berger 1996/97: 3 (emphasis in original).

or plausible answers”¹² – have been shaped in part by their own exposure to religion?

One of the problems, I suspect, with acknowledging this dynamic in personal terms, and applying it analytically, is that emphasizing the widespread role of religion in contemporary politics in general and in the construction of worldviews more specifically runs counter to the deep commitment that most IR scholars have to reliance on scientific explanations that can be uncovered and specified according to the generally acceptable theoretical paradigms and methodological applications of the field. But Bentley Allan, in a chapter that focuses precisely on the sources and ramifications of this epistemological commitment, shows us just how limiting and distorting that reliance can be. Allan conjectures late in Chapter 8 that a full explanation for the Revolution in Haiti might have to include motivations and preferences related to the religious beliefs and predispositions of the revolution’s participants. Meaning no disrespect to Allan’s discovery or to his straightforward reporting of it, my response upon reading an early draft of his contribution was: of course! Given the widespread religious beliefs and practices of that place and time, why would our default position be to presume that religion was *not* a factor in the genesis and conduct of political phenomenon such as the Haitian revolution?

9.2 The Relevance of Religious Worldviews in Global Politics

Phrased more generally, given that huge swaths of the world’s population have (and still do) define their personal and collective identities and commitments in religious terms and in their relationship to “ultimate reality,” why in heaven’s name should we be surprised that many people ground their political commitments and political activities in their religious beliefs and worldviews? One central reason for our surprise, I suppose, is our headstrong insistence on the dominance of supposedly parsimonious explanations for complex and multilevel social dynamics that resist parsimonious explanation. To be clear, I don’t mean to suggest here that religion should be relied on as a totalistic explanatory factor in a simplistic or facile understanding of IR. We shouldn’t replace an unfortunate ignorance of religion with an equally inappropriate overreliance on it. What I do wish to suggest, however, is that it ought to be relatively uncontroversial to proceed under the presumption that, to cite a few examples: Islamists are grounded, in part, in their experience of Islam;¹³ Christian dominionists are grounded, in part, in their experience

¹² Katzenstein, Chapter 1, this volume. ¹³ Mandaville 2020; Hamid 2016.

of Christianity;¹⁴ and the Dalai Lama is more than just a grandfatherly avatar of compassion and self-knowledge.¹⁵ These are all examples of highly consequential political worldviews (or spokespersons for them) that in my judgment one would have to be willfully blind not to acknowledge as profoundly, explicitly, and (dare I say it?) obviously grounded in religion.

Michael Barnett's examination in Chapter 5 of the ways in which Judaism serves as the foundation of variable political worldviews in both Israel and the diaspora is a good example of the kind of analysis that takes seriously the religious concepts and categorizations that I argue are so foundational to modern worldviews. In my view, however, Barnett doesn't go far enough in acknowledging the depth of the relationship between religion and politics in the construction of Jewish worldviews. Indeed, part of the problem in this connection is our continued insistence on positing a "relationship" between two "factors" that are so deeply intertwined and so mutually constitutive that the analytical distinction between them may be hard to sustain. The above-cited examples make this point. Islamism, Christian dominionism, and Tibetan nationalism are not merely the political manifestations of underlying religious worldviews. I would argue, instead, that they *are* in a foundational sense worldviews themselves: ways of being in the world that have been mutually constituted through the profound interconnectedness of religious commitments and political interests.

This is why it is so futile, by the way, to try to convince Evangelicals in the United States that their enduring support for the manifestly un-Christian Donald Trump is, itself, un-Christian. The version of Christianity practiced by many Evangelicals in the United States today is actually at its core Trumpist, or at least reliably Republican in nature. And it has been for at least the last several decades. Church (or mosque or temple) and state can surely be legally and constitutionally separated. But a separation of religion and politics is a chimera. Religion and politics are not so much distinct realms of human experience as they are, often, mutually constituted and mutually re-enforcing elements of a single internally coherent worldview.

American voters whose personal identities are firmly grounded in such a cohesive worldview can no more be expected to readily separate their religion from their politics than members of the Bharatiya Janata Party can be expected to separate Hinduism from Indian nationalism. In "Hindutva," we have an example of the ultimate grounding of a politically consequential worldview in a religious identity.¹⁶ It is not

¹⁴ Goldberg 2006 ¹⁵ Mehrotra 2005. ¹⁶ Savakar 1923.

that a “religious” identity competes with or supersedes the “political” in this construction of a distinctively Hindu/Indian worldview. Instead, there is in this case a true fusion, or mutual construction, of the religious and the political in the formation of a distinctive worldview that today defines the dominant articulation of Indian nationalism.

This example – and this way of understanding religion’s role in constructing worldviews – highlights the frequency with which religious beliefs, practices, and communities are implicated in fundamentalist political projects that epitomize the order, conformity, and predictability of the “garden.” Reacting to the kind of unsettling cosmological uncertainty described by Milja Kurki in Chapter 3, many people apparently rely on religion to provide the clarity of divine and human authority, the certitude of clearly delineated ethical frameworks, the comforting promise of eternal life, and the succor of likeminded hands to clasp onto in the frightening darkness. These religious worldviews often define themselves precisely around the conjuring of an omnipotent and omniscient God who casts a judge’s eye on humanity while maintaining a direct line of communication with a clerical caste of one form or another who then authoritatively interpret the divine will and intention. Those interpretations are, in turn, transformed by an earthly priesthood into “dogma,” which is used to justify political power of the most unassailable sort. Polish Popes, Iranian mullahs, and Israeli ultra-Orthodox rabbis all claim exclusive access to God’s Truth, and all have constructed exquisitely detailed “gardens” that provide ordered meaning based in religious worldviews that drive non-negotiable political commitments.

As powerful as this gardening imagery is, however, it is not the only way of conceptualizing religion’s potential role in the construction of ways of being in the world. Religious beliefs, practices, and systems of meaning are far more diverse than the garden metaphor implies. Radical openness to uncertainty, after all, and to the relational fundamentals of human experience are deeply foundational to nondogmatic traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. In systems of spiritual practice explicitly based in values such as detachment, the negation of the self, and the pursuit of wakefulness to the real, the metaphor of religious worldviews as “gardens” is difficult to maintain.

However, the potential grounding of relational worldviews in religious belief and practice is a broad phenomenon that stretches well beyond merely those traditions that are based more in practice than in dogma. In fact, on close examination it turns out that even the most dogmatic of religious traditions can define themselves in deeply seated forms of relational theology. For example, if “God is love” – as Roman Catholic children have been taught to believe from time immemorial – then the

divine presence that lends ultimate meaning to human experience is not merely an anthropomorphized celestial “person,” but is instead the relational dynamic of creation itself. The very existence of the human race, in other words, is not merely a *sign* of God’s love. The mysterious reality of existence is, rather, the very expression and actualization of that love. Individual men and women, created “in the image and likeness of God,” are not enjoined to follow a detailed set of moral and religious laws simply as a kind of cosmic test or challenge by a distant self-interested judge. Instead, these moral and religious laws exist, in the first place, for the deeply relational purpose of knitting the human family together into a Church, into the “mystical Body of Christ.” This identity with the Christ, enacted in the sacramental experience of the Holy Eucharist, is a personal relation with the embodied “Word” of God, sent forth in order to reconcile God’s people to an eternal unity with the deeply benevolent Creator of the universe.

Looked at in this way, even one of the most dogmatic of religions does more than command its adherents to climb a ladder of ontological certainty toward a “God’s eye” vision from which order, conformity, and oppression can be imposed. A religion such as Roman Catholicism is inviting its members into intimate Communion with their God, and thereby challenging its adherents to embrace a form of courageous faithfulness in the face of an apparently inscrutable reality. Those climbing the ladder of religious belief, practice, and commitment may seek to convince themselves that they are heading ever upward to the safety of dogmatic certainty. But the ladder might more accurately be understood as the uncertain and rather treacherous upward path toward the life-defining act of leaping, faithfully, into the unknown.

One could argue, I suppose, that relational worldviews imply their own kinds of “Gods” that pose a threat to human freedom because we don’t really possess the capacity to truly know or resist their effects. But if a relational cosmology is grounded in faith or in the pursuit of what is “really real,” then the unknown itself is the basis of Truth and the human propensity to resistance is ultimately futile. We are, some religious worldviews might suggest, in the act of “becoming” through our relationships not only with each other, but also with that which we cannot measure, define, or know through Newtonian scientific methods.

I will leave others to argue over whether or not the “forest” or the “jungle” are appropriate metaphors for deepening our understanding of relational worldviews. But whatever metaphors we turn to, it seems that religious worldviews can and do span the categories that this volume was designed to highlight and compare. I would say that in this regard much depends on whether, in the words of novelist Sue Monk Kidd, one

worships “the God of rescue” or “the God of presence.”¹⁷ But the central point is that a broad-based examination of the role of worldviews in global politics ought to have the welcome effect of clarifying our acknowledgment that religion, in all its diversity, often defines what Katzenstein calls in Chapter 1 the “basic ideas that shape the questions we ask or fail to ask, provide us with explanatory and interpretive concepts, and suggest hunches or plausible answers.”

9.3 Methodological Atheism and Informed Empathy

The stunning diversity of religion as a category of human experience is a central and straightforward reason why religion is implicated in such a broad array of worldviews. However, the analytical use of the category of religion may have been hindered in some ways by the complexity and controversy that can surround the very act of defining the term. Sociologist Christian Smith, for example, offered that “religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with those powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding things bad.”¹⁸ Got all that? Looking forward to “operationalizing” it as a “variable”?

William Cantwell Smith ascribes the definitional challenge associated with “religion” not only to the complexity of the object of study, but also to the fact that religion is so often seen by the analysts themselves as a system of ultimate meaning in one form or another. Given that “what a man thinks about religion is central to what he thinks about life and the universe as a whole,” the meaning that “one ascribes to the term is a key to the meaning that one finds in existence.”¹⁹ I have noted over the course of my own career in this field that scholarly communities engaged in the study of religion often include members who are themselves explicitly motivated by their own religious commitments. Controversy over the serving of liquor was a prominent feature of the initial meetings in the 1980s of the “Religion and Politics” Special Section of the American Political Science Association. Tying the complexity of the subject matter directly to the diversity and predilections of those examining it, W.C. Smith concludes that “to hope to reach any agreement . . . is perhaps to look for a consensus on ultimate questions of man, truth, and destiny.”²⁰

¹⁷ Kidd 2020: 470. ¹⁸ C. Smith 2017: 22. ¹⁹ W.C. Smith 1962: 18.

²⁰ W.C. Smith 1962: 18.

This definitional problem has bedeviled everyone from theorists trying to specify the role of religion in society to Supreme Court justices trying to identify what qualifies for protection (and limitation) under the free exercise and anti-establishment clauses of the US Constitution. But for our examination of religion's relationship to (and embodiment of) world-views, a lack of clear conceptual consensus is itself an indication of the depth of religion's place in the category under examination. Definitional disputes among theorists writing about religion revolve mainly around the degrees to which varying approaches to the subject focus on the communal and institutional aspects of religion, or on its functional properties, or on its ethical or theological precepts. The disputes, in other words, are largely about the very question of exactly how religion and religions constitute and articulate various ways of being in the world, and of understandings of "how the world works."

Religious traditions vary so extravagantly, one from the other, that some theorists even resist the category and argue that it is "a distorted concept not really corresponding to anything definite or distinctive in the objective world."²¹ I don't think we need to go that far in response to religion's empirical variance, but it is advisable to steer clear, whenever possible, of sweeping pronouncements about the nature of "religion" per se. But again, such a caution serves our purposes well. If we acknowledge that worldviews are variable, then the degree to which, and the ways in which, religion is implemented in the construction of those worldviews can quite appropriately be expected to be variable as well. Even within a broadly defined religious tradition such as "Christianity" or "Buddhism," diversity of structure, system, function, and ethos can also be significant, in the sense of both large and important.

Given this diversity, and given how often these various traditions rely on mutually exclusive truth claims, one is tempted (I am tempted!) to reject the authenticity of all of the claims and to retreat into rationalist justifications about which interests (presumably materialist) are *really* being served through religious means. In our examination of religious worldviews, however, it is best to suspend judgment about the validity or even the authenticity of religious claims and assume for the sake of argument that people actually believe – or strive to believe – that which they say they believe. Seth Kumin provided a helpful guide on this point when he extolled "methodological atheism," or the idea that for social scientists "the claims made by believers themselves about the status of their religion or religious objects should be seen as data to be studied

²¹ W.C. Smith 1962: 17.

rather than as an authoritative statements about the nature of the object under study.”²²

Some scholars have preferred the term “methodological agnosticism” as a somewhat less dismissive way of approaching the religious beliefs of research subjects.²³ But whether adopting a methodological posture of atheism or agnosticism, “the analyst must assume [for the sake of the analysis] that the object being studied is a social rather than divine product.”²⁴ And, at the same time, social scientists seeking to make sense of religion’s place in social and political settings ought also to heed Ninian Smart’s advice to adopt a method of “phenomenology . . . that tries to bring out what the religious acts *mean to the actors*.”²⁵ “This implies,” Smart says, “that in describing the way people behave, we do not use, so far as we can avoid them, alien categories to evoke the nature of their acts and to understand those acts.”²⁶

This posture of “informed empathy”²⁷ seems particularly apposite in the context of specifying religious worldviews. A simple set of thought experiments, involving the three Abrahamic religions, should be enough to make the point. Imagine for a moment that you actually believed as a matter of undoubted fact that Yahweh had purposefully selected the Jews as His chosen people and that a central identifying feature of this unique Covenant was the Jewish people’s right to live perpetually in the Land of Israel. Would that conviction not have powerful effects on how you interpreted the sweep of human history, the appropriate place of the Jewish people in that history, and the very nature of regional conflict and IR?

Imagine for a moment, alternatively, that you actually believed as a matter of undoubted fact not only that Jesus of Nazareth was the unique incarnation of The One True God into human history, but also that this same Jesus would return at the end of time to judge the living and the dead so as to reward the worthy with eternal salvation and consign the unworthy to eternal damnation. Would that set of convictions not have powerful effects on how you judged the nature of human sovereignty over worldly affairs, the finality of physical death, or the role of sin and virtue in human affairs?

Finally, imagine for a moment that you actually believed as a matter of undoubted fact that there is no God but Allah, that Mohammed is His messenger, and that the Qur’án is the direct word of the sole Supreme Being who created the universe, and who calls His followers to follow His mandated law in all aspects of human life. Would that set of convictions

²² Kunin 2003: 74. ²³ Smart 1973. ²⁴ Kunin 2003: 74.

²⁵ Smart 1996: 2 (emphasis added). ²⁶ Smart 1996: 2. ²⁷ Smart 1996: 2.

not have powerful effects on how you understood the role that this body of law ought to play in human experience and how you might react to the efforts of outsiders to control the social structures and legal systems under which your community of believers ought to live?

To repeat, the adoption of this “empathetic” perspective does not mean that one accepts, in the sense of sharing, the truth of the cosmic, sweeping, and (often) mutually exclusive claims being made by the individuals and communities under examination. To the contrary, it means maintaining a “position of neutrality”²⁸ that allows one to credit in experiential terms the depth of the convictions under study without judging their theological validity. And in so doing, it becomes rather obvious how central religion is in a dizzying variety of contexts to the construction of worldviews. Religion is often at the heart of the processes through which a community’s shared “truth” is enshrined as a kind of epistemological consensus in a given social context. Religion, in all its complexity, can provide the indispensable common knowledge that allows a community to live together with meaning and confidence in what otherwise might present itself as a deterministic or risky world. Perhaps this is why so many social theorists who include religion in their analyses explicitly rely on the concept of “worldview” in order to capture what religion so often comprises and provides.

9.4 Weber and Geertz

Max Weber, to cite perhaps the most prominent of these theorists, grounded his notion of worldview in the individual’s relationship to specific elements of society, prominently including religion. Positing a dynamic relationship between religious ideas and economic behavior, Weber argued that different religious traditions would have different relationships with economic structures and practices, particularly those associated with capitalism. This dynamic was laid out most expansively (and most famously) in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, where Weber starts with the observation that “a glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition brings to light with remarkable frequency . . . the fact that business leaders and owners of capital . . . are overwhelmingly Protestant [as opposed to Catholic].”²⁹ Weber ascribes this finding to “the permanent intrinsic character of [the two Christian communities’] religious beliefs.”³⁰ And then, as the heart of his argument, he asserts that the characteristically Protestant imperative to provide outward indications of one’s

²⁸ Kunitz 2003: 117 ²⁹ Weber 1976: 35. ³⁰ Weber 1976: 40.

membership in the select and saved requires a form of asceticism and industrious work ethic that is well suited to the spirit of capitalism.

Weber argues, in so many words, that religious beliefs at the individual level have variant relationships with modern capitalist practices, and that out of these particular relationships very different worldviews arise. Attitudes toward worldly economic matters such as thrift, industriousness, investment, trust, and the rest are closely related to religious belief. And those economic values, in turn, deeply influence other aspects of an individual's (or a religious community's) worldview, from ideas about appropriate family and social structures, to the setting of political priorities and interests, to convictions concerning the proper ordering of global relations.

These considerations bring to mind the several semesters I have spent over the years in Geneva, Switzerland, leading groups of undergraduate students as they performed academic study of the many international organizations that are housed there. Each and every semester, students would articulate in informal conversations with me a kind of visceral, vulgar Weberianism as they tried to make sense of the stark distinction between their living and working environment in (Calvinist) Geneva and the recreational opportunities afforded to them on weekend sojourns to, say, (Catholic) Barcelona. The students recognized immediately that the all-night adventures of The Ramblas were simply unavailable – virtually unthinkable, really – within the early-rising ethos of Geneva, whose skyline along Lac Lemman is dominated by the imposing edifices and twinkling lights of . . . banks and insurance companies.

Weber's disquisition on the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism, of course, is one of the founding building blocks of modern sociology. Less well known, perhaps, is the fact that he applied this same method to other religious traditions as well, finding, in the words of Reinhard Bendix, that "some had an accelerating and others a retarding effect upon the rationality of economic life."³¹ Turning from Europe to China, for example, Weber argued that the "Confucian man's . . . cardinal virtue was to fulfill the traditional obligations of family and office."³² Embedded in a cultural system of kinship networks grounded in filial piety, followers of the Confucian ethic were at one and the same time sheltered from the potential hardship that provides incentives within capitalism, and oriented toward a form of harmony and social order that discourages the economic stratification that characterizes capitalism. As Bendix sums up the comparison: "the Puritans combined their ascetic conduct with an intensity of belief and an enthusiasm for action that were

³¹ Bendix 1977: 83 ³² Bendix 1977: 136.

completely alien to the esthetic values of Confucianism.” “It was this difference,” he concludes, “that contributed to an autonomous capitalist development in the West and the absence of a similar development in China.”³³

Weber performed a similar comparative analysis concerning Hinduism in India. I don’t need to detail that analysis here beyond noting his emphasis on the ways that the caste system and a transient understanding of an individual’s relationship to personal identity and worldly achievement militated against “the incorporation of the acquisitive drive in an inner-worldly ethic of conduct.”³⁴ I should stress, I suppose, that in laying out Weber’s arguments I am not endorsing his views on the relationship between religion and economics – and that relationship’s role in constructing worldviews – any more than I am endorsing any other way of conceptualizing the role of religious belief and practice in establishing what is “really real” about “how the world works.”

Indeed, Weber’s theory seems particularly susceptible to oversimplification (see, for example, my earlier mention of my students’ attempts to account for their personal experience of Europe’s cultural variations). And all of Weber’s statements about how “Protestants” behave, how “Confucian” families operate, and how “Hindus” construct identity are exquisitely open to the charge that he essentializes very complex social phenomena. Nevertheless, Weber’s voluminous writings on religion represent a deeply theoretical effort to ascribe the content of different worldviews, in part, to the content of different religious belief systems. Protestantism, Catholicism, Confucianism, and Hinduism, he argues, have different ways of relating to economic structures because those different religious traditions represent very different ways of defining the ultimate reality underlying human life and human meaning.

For his part, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz explicitly ties religion to the notion of world views (two words for Geertz), or what he also calls “way[s] of seeing.”³⁵ Geertz defines religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”³⁶ The key to this definition is the characterization of religion as a “system of symbols” that serves to “synthesize a people’s . . . world view – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order.”³⁷ These religious world views rest on conceptions of what is

³³ Bendix 1977: 141. ³⁴ Bendix 1977: 197. ³⁵ Geertz 1993: 111.

³⁶ Geertz 1993: 90 ³⁷ Geertz 1993: 89.

“really real,” a commitment to the proper ordering of supernatural and natural experience that the “symbolic activities of religion . . . are devoted to producing, intensifying, and rendering inviolable.”³⁸

The potential political significance of a “system of symbols” that undergirds “comprehensive ideas of order” should be obvious. Geertz argues that religion, understood in this way, “objectivizes moral and ethical preferences by depicting them as imposed conditions of life, implicit in a world with a particular structure.”³⁹ To cite the metaphor we are using here, this conception of religion imagines a “garden” constructed in intricate detail. The garden’s form, structure and layout are all understood by those who live within its borders as absolute givens of the natural order and profoundly symbolic of the cosmic reality that gives meaning to earthly design. For their religious advocates, then, opposition to homosexuality, say, or insistence on faithful stewardship of creation are not merely “positions” to be argued, equal in epistemological validity to their opposites. They are, instead, “mere common sense given the unalterable shape of reality.” “Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence,” in other words, “between a particular style of life and a specific metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each other with the borrowed authority of the other.”⁴⁰ Political interests grounded in metaphysical worldviews claiming congruence with *The Truth* are not likely to be particularly open to negotiation, compromise, or (sometimes) even rational justification.

These symbolic systems also produce widely accepted understandings of important aspects of human experience. Questions about the very existence of life itself, the perennial problem of human suffering, and the presence of evil in the world can all be answered through religious conceptions of general order. And, of course, conflict can be (and often is) based in contact between and among peoples whose “experiential evidence for their truth”⁴¹ lead them to differing “conception[s] of the established world of bare fact.”⁴²

9.5 The Sacred and the Profane

Geertz links religious systems of symbols and everyday life through the ultimate meaning that those symbols grant to “common sense” and “order.” Many other theorists, however, have drawn a clearer distinction between two realms of human experience, identifying them most often as the “sacred” and the “profane.” In a seminal work titled *The Sacred and*

³⁸ Geertz 1993: 112. ³⁹ Geertz 1993: 90 ⁴⁰ Geertz 1993:90. ⁴¹ Geertz 1993: 90

⁴² Geertz 1993: 119.

the Profane: The Nature of Religion, Romanian historian Mircea Eliade identifies the two realms of his title as two very different “modalities of being,” or “ways of being in the world.”⁴³ “*Homo religiosus*,” he argues, “always believes that there is an absolute reality, *the sacred*, that transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real.”⁴⁴ These manifestations of absolute reality, or “hierophanies,”⁴⁵ drive the ritual orientation and construction of sacred space, space which for adherents to the resulting religious tradition is experienced as “the only real and real-ly existing space” amid “the formless expanse [that] surround[s] it.”⁴⁶

It is important to note here that Eliade is talking about actual physical space, the sacred designation of which powerfully influences the world-views of those who acknowledge the sacrality of “our world” and its centrality in the cosmos. According to this conception, religious believers are quite literally “viewing the world” either from the confines of a sacred space itself, or at the very least from a frame of mind and spirit that is defined in terms of a very particular sacred space. “Our world,” as understood by adherents, is situated at the center of the universe – indeed, *is* the center of the universe – given that it is the place where the hierophany took place or where it is ritually recognized and re-enacted. Eliade offers the examples of “an entire country (e.g. Palestine), a city (Jerusalem), [and] a sanctuary (the Temple in Jerusalem)”⁴⁷ as examples of the kinds of sacred space he has in mind.

Indeed, for many Jews, the Land of Israel is idealized as the “geographical center of the universe and the point of contact between the spiritual and material spheres.”⁴⁸ Zionism is one central manifestation of this understanding of sacred space, and the status and destiny of the modern legal state of Israel has resided near the center of contemporary debates concerning Jewish identity, as well as of contemporary constructions of how many Jews understand their place in an often hostile world. There is no Jewish creed, no Jewish Church. There is, instead, a Jewish *people*, albeit a diverse and complex one. And as a people, Jewish interests tend to revolve around the survival, sustainability, and flourishing of the collective. This is not merely a theoretical or mystical notion, of course, but rather a practical responsibility and duty, carried out through a history of unimaginable suffering, struggle, and forbearance. As Michael Barnett shows in Chapter 5, membership in that people, participation in that enduring history of struggle and survival, is what binds Jews together

⁴³ Eliade 1959: 14. ⁴⁴ Eliade 1959: 202. ⁴⁵ Eliade 1959: 11 ⁴⁶ Eliade 1959: 20
⁴⁷ Eliade 1959: 42. ⁴⁸ Schweid 1987: 538.

across vast geographic distances and amid significant diversity in terms of belief and practice.

The Christian religion, obviously, is more creedal in nature. Despite the great diversity of Christianity in institutional, social, and pastoral terms, the vast Christian Church is united in the belief that Jesus of Nazareth represents the unique, direct intervention of the divine into human history. Jesus is, in a sense, the ultimate hierophany, whose own manhood redefined human experience itself as sacred space, and whose own sacrificial death and redeeming resurrection redefined humanity's relationships with death, eternity, and the divine.

For their part, Muslims valorize Medina and Mecca as paradigmatic sacred spaces out of which grew a people (*umma*) who should ideally be governed by rulers and legal systems attuned to God's authoritative message, as contained in the Qur'an. Moreover, the call to pray (toward Mecca) five times a day, as well as the requirement (if possible) to visit Mecca at least once, have the effect of placing "our world" at the center of the universe, a center around which the proper ordering of human affairs ought to be oriented.

Eliade also argues in a vein directly relevant to our purposes here that this spatial cosmology serves to breed communal interests that tend to be exclusionary, geographically based, and absolutist. The idea that "our" communal space, in both physical and symbolic senses, is uniquely sacred and uniquely central to the meaning of human experience is not something that can be easily extended to outsiders or compromised with competing claims. Indeed, worldviews based in conceptions of sacred space often include within them definitions of outsiders as particularly odious and illegitimate: "As 'our world' was founded by imitating the paradigmatic work of the gods . . . so the enemies who attack it are assimilated to the enemies of the gods, the demons, and especially to the archdemon . . . conquered by the gods at the beginning of time."⁴⁹ When identity and conflict are defined in this way, it is no wonder that so many theorists and practitioners of IR have tried since at least 1648 to marginalize the role of religion in global affairs. It really can be that disruptive, dangerous, and noncompromising of a force.

No theorist of religion, of course, is more closely associated with the sacred/profane dichotomy than Emile Durkheim. For Durkheim, religion is defined as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church."⁵⁰ The whole key to this understanding of religion is its

⁴⁹ Eliade 1959: 47–48. ⁵⁰ Durkheim 1995: 44

emphasis on *function*, on the mutually constitutive role of religion and society. Based in an examination of Totenism, and then applied to other religions, Durkheim argues that sacred objects represent both the divine *and* the group through the group's shared understanding of the divine. A central function of religious belief and practice, in other words, is actually to form and define the group engaged in the belief and practice itself, and to construct "solidarity" among adherents. As Kunin puts it: "ritual practice serves the social function of validating and strengthening group cohesion."⁵¹ The whole enterprise, for Durkheim, is definitively collective.

Sacred objects and rituals give meaning to life, but in an even more fundamental way they also function to create the social realities from which a collective can actually have a shared worldview. At its most basic core, this type of religious worldview is defined by the conviction that *we* are sacred while *they* are profane; *our* system of identity and solidarity is based in ultimate reality while *theirs*, to put it mildly, is not. At the same time, as Durkheim stated in his original definition, this conception of religion's functional role in constituting society also involves the recognition of "prohibitions" that serve to construct moral ethos and to "devalue the importance of the individual as a mediator for social facts."⁵² Religion forms identity, defines it in collective terms, and works to focus the collective's worldview on that which renders its social structures sacred.

History shows us, of course, that these sacred systems of solidarity can, and often have been, closely linked to national identity and state sovereignty. In cases as diverse as Poland, Iran, Israel, India, and Tibet, religious worldviews can define a people's understanding of their place in the global order and define the interests that the society's leadership is expected to advance. But in our modern era, it is just as common for religious solidarity to cut across national identities and state borders. Numerous sacred social structures are defined in "transnational" terms as systems of solidarity and belonging that are constructed through shared belief and, perhaps even more profoundly, shared ritual.

I have spent many years, for example, studying the political role of transnational Catholicism in a variety of settings.⁵³ Along the way, I have never failed to be impressed by the consistency of ritual that I have encountered in Catholic communities all across the globe. The order of service, the role of music, and, most importantly, the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic worship clearly function as experiences of effervescence that construct the Catholic Church, *as such*, and form bonds of

⁵¹ Kunin 2003: 21. ⁵² Kunin 2003: 23 ⁵³ Byrnes 2001; Byrnes 2011.

solidarity among more than a billion Catholic adherents worldwide. In a similar way, the transnational Islamic umma is not just knit closer together by the Five Pillars of Islam. It is, in Durkheimian terms, actually constructed by that set of divinely mandated ritual practices that function to engender solidarity and define identity. And of course, in the words of Huston Smith, “Judaism is a faith of a people.”⁵⁴ There is great significance placed within Judaism on the preservation and cohesion of that people, and on the functional construction of that people into a nation. From Abraham’s acceptance of the covenant with God, through the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, to the eventual dispersal in a global diaspora, the national identity of the Jewish people – separate and apart from any other definitions and articulations of sovereignty – has been a basic element of how many Jews have viewed their place in the world.

In this way of viewing religion, then, a “Catholic worldview,” or an “Islamic worldview,” or a “Jewish worldview,” or any other religious worldview is more than a way of seeing the world based on theological tenets. Such religiously defined worldviews are, at a deeper level, ways of *being* in the world; they are ways of constructing the most meaningful and most basic social structures, and ways of delineating who qualifies for being recognized as part of the sacred order.

The implications of including these religious worldviews in our approaches to global politics can be immediate and profound. Much of modern International Relations theory, for example, identifies survival – in both individual and collective terms – as *the* overriding “interest” that needs to be protected and advanced in virtually all political interactions. Religious worldviews that do not acknowledge death as final, however, or that do not even conceive of death in particularly negative terms – some even prominently value and reward martyrdom – will be at odds with, and potentially problematic for, systems of global order that assume survival as an overriding value. Common military considerations such as deterrence and the avoidance of collateral damage may look very different if one is viewing this world as a prelude to the next, if one sees earthly death as a moment of clarifying transition to a faithfully anticipated eternal unification with a Divine Being and coreligionists who have previously gone on to their “heavenly reward.”

9.6 Conclusion

Describing what he called “Islamic exceptionalism,” Shadi Hamid wrote that “the tendency to see religion through the prism of politics or

⁵⁴ H. Smith 1991: 31.

economics (rather than the other way around) isn't necessarily incorrect, but it can sometimes obscure the independent power of ideas that seem, to much of the Western world, quaint and archaic."⁵⁵ Applying Hamid's point more generally, I argue here that religious "ideas" – or, more broadly conceived, religious beliefs and practices – have played and continue to play central roles in the construction of politically relevant worldviews in a wide variety of contexts. In fact, rather than claiming that the relationship between religion and politics should be viewed as the former constructing the latter (rather than the other way around), I argue that these two foundational aspects of human life and community relate to each other as mutually constitutive elements in "systems of order," "ways of viewing the world," and, most essentially, ways of "being." According to this way of viewing religion's place in modern life, beliefs, practices, and meaning that we generally classify as religious in nature are not epiphenomenal or incidental to some other dynamic that is "really going on." They are not atavistic holdovers that we can either wish away or presume will go away soon. They are, instead, in many places and for many people, the defining features of contemporary life.

To be sure, secularism does seem to be on the rise in some societies and polities,⁵⁶ and it is certainly plausible to imagine that those secularizing dynamics might spread geographically and demographically in the coming years, decades . . . centuries? But even modern political orders that are based in liberal individualism and that place humanity at the center of individual and collective meaning still have to contend today – and will continue to have to contend in the future – with nonsecular and anti-secular elements of their populations that view the world from very particular perspectives. What I have chosen to call religious worldviews – while acknowledging their great diversity – are manifestly still animating the way that many people understand their identity, their interests, and their conception of how the political order should be structured. That being the case, we who purport to illuminate the workings of global politics – or, if you like, International Relations – should take these religious worldviews as seriously as do those who embody them.

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⁵⁵ Hamid 2016: 10. ⁵⁶ Norris and Inglehart 2004.

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