

RELIGION AND SECURITY: THE NEW NEXUS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Robert A. Seiple and Dennis R. Hoover, eds.

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It ought not to be surprising that, since September 11, 2001, scholars and assorted others (policy wonks, for instance) have published many volumes exploring the links between terrorism, religion, and national security. *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* is one such effort, and a good one. The eleven essays comprising this volume illustrate some of the variety of perspectives on the issues discussed. The ideological “mix” includes conservatives as well as liberals, former government officials, even a former (Protestant) seminary president, among others. And, for the most part, they point the way toward a future in which religion does not divide us and even contributes to violence, but rather facilitates dialogue and the healthiest kind of pluralism.

The book is divided into four sub-sections: “Religion and (In)Security: The Twenty-first Century Challenge”; “Perspectives on Pluralism: Making a World Safe for Diversity”; “Into the Breach: Restoring Sustainable Security”; and “Religious Freedom and Security: The Civil Society Nexus.” Each of the four sections contains some very good essays, and the general level of all the essays is quite high, the editors having chosen their contributors wisely, for the most part. On the other hand, partly because the essays are on the brief side—some ten pages or less—they are unable to do the kind of detailed analysis which at certain points seems essential. For instance, Pauletta Otis, in her book-opening essay, “Religion and War in the Twenty-first Century,” concludes that “those responsible for for U.S. national security are increasingly convinced that religion and war must be addressed in a new, comprehensive and focused way” (p. 22). But she does not go more deeply than this. I applaud her citation of Mark Juergensmeyer and his recent book, *Terror in the Mind of God*, but I wish she had also mentioned his earlier, and very useful volume—especially in academic courses dealing with nonviolence—*Fighting with Gandhi*.

It is not the case that the volume under review includes no material dealing with constructive conflict resolution—the Gopin essay, “When the

Fighting Stops: Healing Hearts with Spiritual Peacemaking,” is particularly notable here. But it is really the only such contribution, all of the other essays being mostly theoretical, some *very* theoretical, rather than “applied.”

It is clear that most or all of the authors in this interesting collection of essays see religion—in particular, the three great monotheistic faiths—playing an increasingly important role as an international security issue. But some of them are justifiably worried that religious persecution (Jenkins), or a simplistic foreign policy (Seiple—Chris, not Robert—and White), or misleading analyses of Islam (Bakar) may lead Westerners to misread the reality of the current situation. Thus Osman bin Bakar has to remind us that Islam is in fact committed to religious pluralism: “It is not God’s plan to make us human beings into a single religious community” (p. 110). But are evangelicals in the U.S., I found myself wondering, willing to say as much?

One of the most interesting and provocative essays in the book is Jean Bethke Elshtain’s “Military Intervention and Justice as Equal Regard.” Elshtain tries to show that “sustainable security will become possible,” in the world of the future, “only if military intervention is guided, not be narrow realpolitik nor by naïve humanitarianism, but by a religiously grounded philosophy of *justice as equal regard*. This philosophy emerges,” notes Elshtain, “from the rich and venerable tradition of moral reflection known as just war theory” (p. 116, italics in original).

The Elshtain article immediately caught this reviewer’s attention, as it would that of anyone who thinks just war theory largely obsolete. She maintains that nations have an “equal claim” to the use of coercive force, deployed on their behalf, if they “are a victim of one of the many horrors dependent upon radical political instability.” (p. 117). So far, so good. But what does this have to do with religion—specifically, Christianity? Elshtain’s answer: “Christian universalism,” in the specific form of just war thinking, presupposes a “theory of comparative justice” which must be “applied to considerations of war and intervention” (p. 119).

And so, roughly, her argument is that the just war tradition generates a kind of “universalism flowing from the obligation of neighbor-regard...” (p. 119), extending eventually to a “wider circle” which presumably may include anyone anywhere. In short, 1) just war thinking is still sound and 2) it can help—where the model of “humanitarian” intervention (as the Somalia case, e.g.) cannot—to provide reasons for the use of military force.

But, this reviewer found himself asking, early on in her essay, exactly where has the United States done this, in the post-World War II world? What examples can Elshtain cite where the U.S. has actually practiced the kind of “universalism” she extols?

Certainly, “human beings qua human beings deserve equal moral regard” (p. 120). This claim is beyond dispute. But Elshtain realizes that it is *not* uncontroversial to defend “the use of force as a remedy under a justice claim based on *equal regard and inviolable human dignity*,” a claim which “takes a political form” and leaves room for “the operation of prudential and consequential concerns” (p. 121, italics in original).

Elshtain’s essay is weakened as noted, by an analysis which stays sufficiently abstract that one may not notice how devoid her article is of real-world examples. Yes, Kosovo (1999) and the Balkan wars of the early 1990s showed both the limits of the UN and the “casualty phobia” (as some have called it) of the Clinton administration. But, as remarked earlier, where are her examples of “equal regard” thinking in post-World War II U.S. military interventionism?

It is one of the strengths of this book that Elshtain’s abstractness is more than balanced by some other contributors’ focus on specific conflict areas—for instance, Seiple and White’s “Uzbekistan and the Central Asian Crucible of Religion and Security.” Another strength is the insistence in more than one essay—notably those by Christopher Hall and Manfred Brauch—that the “Abrahamic religions” represent a large enough tent that, as Brauch puts it, “embrace” rather than “exclusion” can and ought to be our primary aim.

If, as some scholars believe, the twenty-first century will have to see the world’s faiths reach some sort of accommodation with one another—if not an actual convergence of sorts—this process can only be helped along by contributions such as those in the volume under review. If war and military intervention are ever to finally terminate as ways of attempting to settle conflict, religion and the contributions it makes will have to be a central part of the story. There is no other way.

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