# The Future of Religion

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Edited by

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Dedicated to the Basilian Fathers
who have nourished Assumption University
since its earliest days

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# PREFACE

Just over eight decades ago, in 1927, Sigmund Freud published his valediction to religion: *The Future of an Illusion.* Using the perspectives of psychoanalysis, Freud reduced religion to an illusion and opined that science would soon make religion unnecessary.

Freud was among the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, a century that has achieved world changing advances in science. Yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, religion has not only not disappeared or been reduced to insignificance; rather, it has become one of the most vigorous forces in contemporary geopolitics. Ironically, the awareness of the power of religion, on a global scale, is, in part, a consequence of the technological developments of the last century, the very developments that some thought would render religion inconsequential.

Religion admits of many definitions. Generally, here, we can say that religion is a meaning system that addresses the issues of ultimate meaning, or transcendent meaning. When this ultimate or transcendent meaning is named as "God" the dynamic we call "religion" takes a theistic turn, and moves toward the development of creeds, codes of conduct, rituals and that whole panoply of activities and dispositions that are the elements by which we normally identify religion. But the realm of *ultimate meaning* is the *foundation* of religion and only in this context, we submit, can the sustained power of religion be fully comprehended.

While the progress of the last century has not obviated the purpose and need for religion, the 20th century did manifest some of the dangers and consequences of religious distortions in various cultures, and thus, by contrast, the proper functions of religion in healthy societies.

## The Interaction of Religion and Culture

The role of religion in culture has a varied history. Beyond the particulars of specific historical situations, religion, it seems, has the capacity to provide culture with an internally rooted self-critical, self-correcting capacity. It is religion's role to present the possibility of self-transcendence to individuals and societies. In doing this, religion endows culture with an expanded cultural consciousness of what it means to be human, and thereby enhances the human enterprise of personal and social

development. This can be most clearly seen when religion is denied its proper role in the culture.

When a society becomes *officially atheistic* and religion is legally and forcibly excised from the life of the culture there is a marked diminishment of human standards and of the value of human persons. In fact, there is a diminishment of productivity and prosperity on almost every level, save possibly for a few select projects or people.

While the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics might be the most prominent example of this situation, it is not the only socio-political entity that has followed this route. Those who have lived under such atheistic regimes speak, not simply of the diminishment of human development, but of its destruction.

Similarly, when a society becomes *officially theistic* or *theocratic*, human, personal and social development are again diminished. In a theocracy, religion controls the culture rather than being a source of renewal or self-reflection within a culture. When this happens, the culture is narrowed down to a single, historically-conditioned perspective, which, it is said (by some demagogue), is God's perspective of what humanity ought to look like and how it ought to behave. And since the source for this perspective is religiously derived, it is perceived to have a sacred quality. This sacred quality imposes a supposedly divine imprint on, what is in fact, a limited, historically conditioned perspective. In a theocracy the culture rapidly fossilizes into rigid and righteously defined modes.

We can see this in the Islamic Republic of Iran where the Supreme Leader is a cleric who is not elected but holds the authority that his title indicates. While there is a parallel democratic structure, with a President, Prime Minister, electoral processes etc., at its core, Iran is governed by Islam. Iran is not the only country that would call itself a Muslim state, and many of them are basically theocracies. It is important to remember, however, that there is nothing intrinsic to Islam that would make this the only model by which Moslems participate in the political realm.

When religion neither dominates nor is dismissed, it gives voice to a dimension of humanity that summons the culture to foster increasingly the conditions for ever greater human dignity, freedom and creativity. Again, in the 20$^{th}$ century, the human rights movement is an example of how religion has historically contributed to the development of the culture's understanding of what it is to be human. Historians agree that the civil rights movement for racial equality in the United States could not have succeeded without religion and the institutions that maintain the religious dimension.

Recently among the rash of publications on religion is the voice of a militant atheism, at least among English readership (Harris, *The End of Faith*, 2002; Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2006; Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 2006; Onfrey, *In Defence of Atheism: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* 2007; Stenger, *God the Failed Hypothesis*, 2007; Hitchens, *god is not Great*, 2007). While this voice does not come from any governmental or juridical authority, it may be an indicator of a perspective emerging from other levels of the culture. This perspective identifies religion as the problem, and calls for the elimination of religion as the solution. It is, however, an inadequate analysis of the current geo-political situation in which the enormous variety of cultures, meanings, religions and systems, discloses to us the pluralistic nature of human reality and with which ordinary people must now contend in their everyday lives. We have truly become a "global village," and now we must learn how to live in such proximity.

## Pluralism

Pluralism can be defined as the moral, intellectual or societal framework that allows for a variety of approaches to living communally, democratically and peacefully. This describes what we can call social pluralism, while religious pluralism refers not just to "a variety of approaches," but *contending* approaches at the *level of ultimate meaning.*

This is the situation in which we, in first-world Western culture, find ourselves today and which is referenced by the terms "post-modernism" and "deconstructionism." There is no single over-arching meta-narrative that commands the total assent of the culture. This is not merely an academic matter; it is also one that determines the degree to which shared meaning grounds the notion of the common good on which human society is built. When shared meaning is eroded, the common ground on which we stand is not simply shaken, it collapses. Symptomatic of this collapse are the relativism and radical subjectivism that many uncritically assume are the sole approach in the business of discerning the good, the true, the responsible, and the meaningful way of life.

There is an easy eclecticism that masquerades as pluralism, but as contemporary American Catholic theologian David Tracy comments: *authentic pluralism expects conflict and demands dialogue.* Conflict is intrinsic to pluralism because there is variety and difference at the deepest levels and about the deepest values. Dialogue is necessary to make authentic pluralism viable, to make these fundamental variations sources of diversity rather than sources of division. Without a robust dialogue we

can easily degenerate into the lowest common-denominator mentality which is insufficient to hold together the complexities of modern society and to keep them intact.

It is precisely this dialogue that a society needs at every level, including the academy, and yet it seems to be lacking. Where we should find and foster communication we see excommunication. We are awash in information without any coherent centre to bring it and us together. Indeed, the possibility of a coherent synthesis, and the people who search for such synthesis, are viewed with suspicion.

Yet, it is a mistake to see pluralism as the problem, which many "religious" perspectives seem to do. The problem is the absence of dialogue and the lack of protocols for how such a dialogue might proceed. And although the university may be no less shattered than the rest of the culture, it remains an important forum where this conversation must happen, even when there is no sure and clear path forward.

As part of an attempt to foster this dialogue, Assumption University, Windsor, Canada as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations in 2007 decided to hold an international conference addressing *The Future of Religion.* (The echo of Freud's title from 80 years previous was purposeful.) This volume, containing some of the papers presented at this conference, now extends the dialogue to a wider audience.

Dr. Charles Kimball, whose timely publication *When Religion Becomes Evil* (2002) addressed so many of the issues surfacing around religion, was invited to be the conference keynote speaker and kindly allowed his address to be part of this collection. Also, the internationally prominent Canadian theologian, Dr. Gregory Baum, agreed to provide an endnote address that is also included. Between these two scholars are eight presentations by scholars from various disciplines. These papers are grouped together under four headings: Religion and the Public Forum; Religion and Science; Religion and Communication; and Religion and Modernity.

We see this volume as an initial offering rather than as something exhaustive, and hope that this modest contribution to the dialogue will be of assistance, both in charting the future for religion and for our shared human community.

—The Editors
Windsor, Ontario
2010

# FOREWORD

# REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION AND THE FUTURE*

CHARLES KIMBALL

Two years ago, I was at a conference of Jewish and Christian leaders. There were about 16 of us. We were virtually locked into a room for about three days where we wrestled with the question: What is the future of relations, not just between Jews and Christians, but increasingly between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities? At one particularly pointed moment, one of the rabbis cleared his throat, got all of our attention and said: "My friends, the next 10 years will be the most difficult…they always have been!" Indeed, the next 10 years always have been the most difficult, but in the context in which we are operating today, our future prospects are complicated by some new features: In addition to a volatile mix of religion and politics, which I will be talking about, we also have to take into account the dynamics of pluralism and interdependence.

The world has always been religiously diverse—that's not new. What is new is our awareness of this diversity, not just globally but increasingly at the local level as well. Our growing awareness of our interdependence in all sorts of ways tells us that we really are in this together globally, nationally, locally, in some very dramatic ways. We see this every day in the news, but increasingly the dynamics are visible at the local level in the United States and Canada. We needn't look any further than Windsor or Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal, or across the river to Dearborn, Michigan to get the point rather quickly. The landscape is changing in the 21st century; we face challenges, and they are urgent.

We've learned a lot in the years since September 11, 2001. In many ways we're still learning, but I would suggest that there are three things that we can all readily agree that we have learned in the years since those

* This paper was originally given as a keynote address. The Editors decided to keep the colloquial, informal tone in reproducing the paper for this book.

horrific events. One is that religion is an extraordinarily powerful force in human society, and always has been. Religion has inspired people to their highest and noblest best. Throughout human history, some of the greatest things that human beings have done have been done in the name of religion, or they have been inspired by believers' faith in various religious communities. At the same time, we know all too well that religion has been a force for destructive behaviour or at least has been used as a justification by people for violent and destructive behaviour, again within various religious traditions. Religion is a very powerful force, and sometimes that force devolves into violent and destructive purposes.

A second thing that we have now learned is that the world is awash in weapons of mass destruction. We knew this before, but we know it now with sobering clarity. We all knew that there were chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons in the former Soviet Union stockpiles, but on September 10, 2001, few of us yet were desperately concerned about what exactly was happening with those weapons. We assumed somebody was paying attention, that somebody was minding the store. After 9/11, we realized that we can no longer make those assumptions. There are people in the world who want to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction, and will pay a great price to get them and use them against others to pursue whatever their goals are.

At a deeper level, part of what was so shocking and what we live with all the time is that the world is also full of other kinds of weapons of mass destruction to which we had given less thought. The bombing in Oklahoma City and the events of September 11 did not employ chemical, nuclear or biological weapons. Fertilizer was the weapon of mass destruction in Oklahoma City, and the hijackers of September 11 used box knives and a clever plan to turn commercial airliners into new weapons of mass destruction. In other words, there are all kinds of ways that people can do great harm when their intent is to do great harm—quite apart from whether they get their hands on biological or chemical weapons. This is a third thing on which we can agree, and when you put these three points of agreement together, what really underscores the urgency is that we now know with certainty that it takes only a very few people to wreak havoc on a global scale.

I will be referring more extensively to Islam later, but one thing I would like to indicate here is that in my experience of well over 30 years of studying Islam, living in the Middle East, knowing many Muslims and knowing many people who study Islam, the vast majority of Muslims all over the world are horrified and offended by the acts of violent extremists in the same way that all of us Westerners are. There are many people in

various countries who are angry and frustrated for different reasons. Again, that's not the subject of my presentation. But if we explore the reasons for discontent, I argue in a number of books and articles that most of us, were we caught in those same circumstances, born in countries where there was such economic exploitation and human rights violation and political repression—given all that, we too would be just as angry and frustrated. Granted that there's a great deal of anger and frustration out there, that's still a very different thing than people who have reached the point of desperation and act out their violent extremism, often in acts of suicidal self-sacrifice.

My own introduction to religious diversity and pluralism began in childhood. The wonderful story depicted in *Fiddler on the Roof* is very much the story of a big part of my family. My great-grandfather was an Orthodox Jewish cantor who came from the Poland-Russia corridor. His was one of those families forced out in a Christian pogrom against the Jews. The family then immigrated to the United States and settled in the Boston area. My grandfather, one of nine children in this family, and one of his brothers began singing and dancing for pennies on the street corners of Boston. They were good, and took their show on the road and eventually became a famous song-and-dance comedy team on the vaudeville circuit. They travelled to Europe and Australia, all over the world. As a child growing up in this period, my father was often on trains, with The Three Stooges in the compartment next door. Charlie Chaplin, one of my grandfather's best friends, tried to get him to go into silent movies but Grandpa said "No, no, movies will never go anywhere. I'll stick with vaudeville, that's the sure thing." He wound up selling dental supplies in Tulsa, Oklahoma, while Charlie Chaplin, as it turned out, moved on to a different career.

During his days in vaudeville, my grandfather met and married my grandmother who was a chorus girl in the show and also a Presbyterian. Neither ever converted to the other's religion, so I grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a Jewish grandfather and a Presbyterian grandmother. My father and his brothers all became Christians, but it was really only a little pocket of the family out there in Oklahoma. The larger, extended family, comprising hundreds of second and third cousins, were all Jewish. I grew up thinking of, and being taught and experiencing, Judaism as something very good. What my parents taught me and what my experience taught me was that yes, we are Christians but it's also good to be Jewish: not just O.K. to be Jewish, but *good* to be Jewish. However, about the time I entered the third grade I discovered that not everybody else in Tulsa shared that same view. I didn't yet know the term "anti-

Semitism," but that was what I was beginning to hear from kids on the playground and street corners who had never met anybody Jewish, and who were just repeating what they had heard from parents and others. So, at an early age, I began to experience what racism and bigotry are, and not surprisingly, as a child, I took that as a personal assault on my own grandfather, the most wonderful person I knew. I tell you this story to explain why, from an early age, there has always been deep within me this question that I think we all wrestle with in different ways: What does it mean to be a person of faith—in my case, a Christian—in a world where my early experience clearly did not exhaust all the possibilities? Surely God must be greater than just my experience of God.

At some level, I knew what we all know: that had I been born in another part of my own family, I would have been Jewish. If I had been born in Tehran instead of Tulsa, I would have been raised as a Muslim. Now, to the best of my knowledge I didn't pick Tulsa and you didn't pick Iran as your place of birth. So where does God figure in all of this, and how do we make sense of it all? Our diversity continues to animate me as a student of world religions. Operating within the Christian context, I am very much interested in exploring these kinds of questions.

As already mentioned, I spent a great deal of my professional life working both in the Middle East as well as in the academic world, engaged in many of the situations that figure so prominently in the news. Political changes are happening all around us, sometimes in dramatic and violent ways. We see, too, that in many ways in our world of nation states, religion and various forms of democracy interestingly are often central factors. What is going on, we ask, and where do we find hope in the perilous journey that seems to lie ahead? A wise friend once observed that when you're standing on the edge of a cliff, progress is not defined as one step forward. I think that's a good thing to bear in mind. Perhaps, what we need to do is take a step or two back to gain a better perspective on what's going on, if we hope to find a way to move forward as constructively as possible.

## Education

For me, the top priority is education, and here I mean education at several different levels. In my comments I'm going to talk about some different types of approaches to education. Some of what we need to do is to *unlearn* some of what we think we already know. Education is not always about learning something new. Sometimes it requires us to *unlearn* in order to understand something in a different kind of way.

There is also education in the form of developing better, more accurate, more coherent frameworks for understanding what is going on, even as we are participating in the events around us.

There is a most urgent need to educate ourselves about Islam because it is the world's second largest religion. There is a great deal going on in various places where Muslims are the dominant majority, and much of that scene is characterized by unrest and disagreement among Muslims themselves. Many people today in the West, certainly in North America—political and religious leaders especially, I find—want to frame the current situation in the world and our immediate future in terms of what is called a "clash of civilizations." In my view, and this is one example of the unlearning, I want to suggest that perspective is both inaccurate and dangerous. It is simply not a helpful way to understand the dynamics of what is going on. In 1993, in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, Samuel Huntington wrote an article "Clash of Civilizations?" in which he argued that world politics were entering a new phase. Three years later, he turned that article into a book titled *Clash of Civilizations*, this time without the question mark. It seems he'd answered the question for himself in those three years—that we are indeed immersed in a clash of civilizations. Huntington (1996) argued that the principal clash was between Western and non-Western societies, with a great deal of his focus centered on Islam. Fundamentally, what we now have in this argument is a recycled version of the Cold War thesis, one that now posits that the future conflict will not be so much economic and social as it will be ideological, with Islam and perhaps China as ascendant world forces, forces that are already threatening the West.

Huntington concludes his book with a survey describing what the West must do to keep our opponents divided. The West, he argued, must exploit differences and conflicts among Islamic states, while at the same time strengthening international interests and involvements that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values. He argues, that is, for an aggressively interventionist, even chauvinistic approach to much of the world. However, I think that the appropriate and more important approach should be one that sees the need to *understand* the changing world scene and the ways in which we can move forward toward reconciliation and cooperation among different cultures and different traditions. Why? Because we are all interdependent. By contrast, the conflict-of-civilizations mindset promotes a warlike approach and a mode of domination, one that advocates the West as the force that should dominate everybody else.

Interestingly, this idea of civilization and conflict predates Huntington. It took flight with Huntington, but the first person to speak in these terms was Bernard Lewis (1990) who is very widely read in the West. In an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* titled, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," Lewis, one of the influential voices that the U.S. government listened to in its preparation for the war in Iraq, stated:

> It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and movement far transcending the level of issues and policies of the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage and the secular present; and the worldwide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival (59).

## Understanding Islam

My friend, the late Edward Said of Columbia University, noted a fundamental flaw with this whole approach of using sweeping generalizations about 1.4 billion Muslims scattered over five continents, with dozens of languages, traditions and histories. Both Lewis and Huntington present Islam or Muslims as somehow all uniformly enraged, as if 1.4 billion people were really only one person, and as if Western civilization is itself no more complex than a simple declarative sentence, and as if you can set up this kind of us-versus-them dichotomy that only fuels the notion of a clash of civilizations. Do you see my point? Many people sometimes embrace this attitude without even knowing what they're saying. Using this kind of duality and its simplistic terminology puts forward a notion that somehow civilizations are homogeneous and monolithic. They're not.

It is imperative that we see the deep anti-Islamic bias at work here. The idea that anti-Westernism is what defines Islam is highly suspect, and yet people like Lewis and Huntington promote the simplistic notion that Islam is somehow anti-Western and anti-U.S. It's as if all Muslims sit around all day and try to figure what to blow up next, as though that's their life's agenda. Lewis's premises are that Islam never modernized itself, never distinguished in any way between religion and the state, and that Islam is incapable of understanding other civilizations. If you know much about the history of Islam, all of that is just patently untrue. On October 17, 2006, *The New York Times* published a very interesting piece, "Can You Tell a Sunni from a Shia?" which claimed that most of the leaders, at least in the United States, four years into the war in Iraq, had

not a clue about what the differences were between Sunnis and Shias, and that this included people on the intelligence committees who are supposedly being briefed all the time. The level of ignorance was astounding. But if you knew anything at all about Islam, you would know that long before Marco Polo and other European travelers, the Arabs had already been travelling throughout the east and throughout Africa, and that it was Muslims who, over many centuries, discovered and incorporated much from other civilizations.

More than that, Muslims have themselves contributed enormously to Western civilization as we know it. Indeed, our Western civilization is very much a product of Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage, along with Greek and other influences woven in. Islam, we need reminding, is a very big part of that. When Europe was languishing in the dark ages for centuries, the Muslims led the world as a most advanced and sophisticated civilization, to which we can trace many of our disciplines. It wasn't necessarily that they invented all these things, as they did algebra, but that they incorporated developed and nurtured them, e.g., medicine, philosophy. Learning has generally been very important within Islam. One of the famous sayings attributed to Mohammed is that "you should seek knowledge wherever you may find it, even unto China." Muslims are not anti-intellectual by definition. On the contrary, if you know much about the history of mathematics or medicine or navigation or horticulture, then you know that Islam contributed significantly to these disciplines and introduced many of them. Much of what we know about Greek philosophy was lost in the West after 529 A.D., and was reintroduced to the west by Muslim philosophers in Spain. Some of our great thinkers of the Middle Ages and Europe e.g., St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, were deeply indebted to, and openly acknowledged the contributions of, their Islamic counterparts.

One of my favourite examples is a man named al Biruni (973-1048), a scholar, philosopher, mathematician who lived in what would be Pakistan today. The author of over 100 works, al Biruni made a number of impressive experiments, involving the observation of eclipses and sophisticated mathematical formulas, in which he determined both the curvature of the earth, and its radius and circumference (to within 200 km by today's measurements). All this centuries before Columbus!

We need to remember, too, that our university system was also influenced by Muslim learning centers. I attended Harvard, the oldest university in the United States. I was impressed when I got to Harvard and learned that it was founded in 1636. (I'm from Oklahoma which wasn't even a state until 1907.) Harvard was founded three centuries after

Oxford and Cambridge, and they, in turn, about four centuries after the Muslims had already established their own university system. Our use of the term "chair," I believe, derives from the early Islamic universities. The professor is the person who sits in the chair, while the students gather around his feet. Our learning histories, therefore, are so intertwined and so much more connected than most people imagine that this idea that Islam is anti-intellectual is simply unsupportable. This kind of misconception flourishes or is widely embraced only when people know very little about Islam.

Recently I spoke at a major conference in Texas and made the outrageous declaration that Jews, Christians and Muslims all perceive themselves to be following the God of Abraham. It's not really a terribly complicated or outrageous comment, but in Texas apparently it is; and so I'm being denounced left and right, defended left and right; and I've also been receiving letters from all over the world thanking me for my courageous stand in stating the obvious. Others ask: "How can you possibly call yourself a minister?" To know anything about Islam, however, is to know that my statement is not controversial at all. There are 15-17 million indigenous Arabic-speaking Christians in the Middle East who pray to "Allah" because they speak Arabic, and "Allah" is the Arabic word for "God." If you speak French it's "Dieu," At one level, then, it's no more complicated than that. At the same time, however, these traditions that all see themselves connected to Abraham also have different ways of understandings what we mean by "God." That's true among Christians and Jews and Muslims, but it's hardly a shocking revelation.

In May of 2007, the famous American evangelical pastor, Jerry Falwell, died. Sadly, he was a master when it came to misleading people about Islam. He would say such things as "Allah is not the same God as the God in the Bible," and "We're not talking about that same God." This is just another way of dismissing and writing off 1.4 billion people. The argument often has been that if you don't include the divinity of Jesus in your understanding of God, then you're not talking about the same God. To which I respond: Then Jews and Christians aren't talking about the same God either. At that point the conversation's meaning also changes because obviously Jews and Christians *are* talking about the same God, but, again, we don't have the same understandings. Pick any group of people and you will find a diversity of views about the ineffable reality we call "God." How, indeed, can we ever understand and define the divine reality with anything approaching certainty?

## Looking for a Template

Religion and politics are linked, and education is the key to understanding this linkage. Currently, what is happening is that a number of groups, both in the United States but also in different parts of the Islamic world, are advocating particular visions of what it means to be a Christian-American and what it means to be an Islamic state respectively. Such people seem to believe that they have a template that can be known and followed. What I wish to argue is this: From our knowledge of the history of religious traditions, we can see that religion and politics have been linked in *various* ways, but that there is no fixed template for what that linkage looks like or what it should look like. We need to increase our awareness of how flexible this linkage has been throughout history. Let me give you brief examples from all three Abrahamic religions.

### The Jewish State Template

The first thing we need to recognize is that Israel is the only state in the world today that describes itself as a *Jewish* state. Historically, what was the Jewish template and how did it emerge? If you read the Hebrew bible, you could argue that the vision is one that began with Saul, David and Solomon. The nation really begins to become a nation when the people of Israel cry out to the High Priest Samuel "Give us a king!" Samuel thinks it's a bad idea, and God Himself isn't so sure either; but eventually God says O.K. and Saul becomes the first king. That didn't turn out too well. Then come David and Solomon, and one could argue that their reigns are the pinnacle of Israel's history in terms of power and influence. The problems that follow along with the whole prophetic ministry are connected to how Israel lost its way, and to how the "nation" lost its connectedness with its moral foundations—after which there is a return to God and to the faith. Then the Jews are dispersed, and, lacking in any real sense of power, the image of nationhood is lost for a long time, When the Jews finally regroup and came back together, they formed an explicitly Jewish state, one that was to be a homeland and a safe haven for Jews. The Jews weren't then saying: "Well, let's go back and revisit the Samuel deal, and see if we can reconstitute what God wants us to do." No, they had already carved out something very different.

Within Israel today, what you find are very different visions about what defines a Jewish state. Indeed, how can a state be Jewish and, at the same time, democratic when a third to a fourth of the population is non-Jewish? These issues add to the dilemmas that Israel has faced over the

years, particularly during its occupation, over the last 40 years, of the West Bank and Gaza; and they have been exacerbated.

## The Christian Template

When we turn to the New Testament, the first words that probably come to your mind are Jesus saying "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22, 20-21) This statement somehow suggests that it is possible to separate these two realms. We also have the words of Paul urging us to "pray for those in authority over you" (1 Timothy 2, 1-3). People sometimes like to quote that, and pray for those in authority. Then they'll make a quick reverse decision such as: "Well, looks like God made a mistake with this one!" or "God couldn't possibly have wanted this person in power," and so Paul's suggestion doesn't always seem to hold up very well.

## The Muslim Template

For Islam, as well as for Christianity, some form of monarchy or dynastic rule has been the dominant form of government. Along with it there is also the deeply entrenched mindset that Islam is a complete, seamless way of life in which religion, politics, economics, the military, the social—everything—are all rolled into one.

That, I say, is the enduring image, the enduring idea, but it is hard to find examples in Islamic history where that kind of seamless fusion was ever achieved in any visible, workable kind of way. You find a lot of debates going on within Islam today, about the illegitimacy of various governments. Right in the heart of Islam—Mecca and Medina—what kind of government do you have? You have a monarchy which is one of the very things that Osama Bin Laden and others rail against. How can this be called "Islamic"? They do, indeed, have a point; and yet this power structure has been a form of Islamic government throughout the centuries as well.

My point is that you can try to develop a template, but when you actually see what Muslims have done and what the Christians have done, you will find they have done all kinds of things, and that generally they have been experimental in adapting to circumstances. Some things, of course, worked better than others, and both cultures are still in the process of changing, defining and refining themselves. Now, with the advent of democracy or, as I prefer to say, with the advent of participatory government, we have an increasingly important component in the mix.

Democracy can mean so many different things, yet people use the term as though they know exactly what it means even though it covers different forms of participatory government in different places.

## Looking Forward

Looking forward, I believe that we are in for a rough time. The next 10 or 20 years will be the most difficult. There are no easy answers or simple solutions, but I do think that there are positive ways to move forward constructively toward a more healthy and hopeful future. The road, I've already suggested, begins with education at several different levels: notably, defining our terms; developing better frameworks for understanding; developing an awareness and appreciation of the fact that part of what we're going to see and experience in our cultures may only be tentative and experimental. Future efforts will involve finding ways to combine religion, politics, and democratic principles in different structures. We see some of this explicitly in the Islamic world today. There are about 53 countries today with Muslim majorities, over half of which have some form of democratic process at work. One of the challenges is that the affirmation of democratic principles and procedures has sometimes been followed by a condemnation of countries when they go and vote for the wrong people. Democracy, we seem to think, is a good thing as long as the kind of people are elected that we in United States want to be elected. Democracy is great for the Palestinians, unless you vote for Hamas. When that happens, it's unacceptable, and so we're cutting off the money.

We see these socio-political experiments everywhere, and we need to appreciate that there is no one simple solution. If Muslims from the 53 countries, just average persons in those countries, were asked "Do you think that Islam can provide some kind of government structure that incorporates Islam in a meaningful way in the 21st century?" my guess would be that the large majority of them would say "Yes, I believe that's possible. I believe that's what we should do because Islam is our way of life, and it should shape and guide our government."

Even so, Muslims themselves differ widely in trying to make sense of all of this. Pakistan was founded as an Islamic state, and it's been a very difficult experiment for a number of decades. I know of nobody lining up to take classes from the Pakistanis on how to organize an Islamic state, and yet that was explicitly what they said they wanted it to be. The Taliban is an extreme manifestation of a vision of an Islamic state, and at the time of September 11, 2001, only three Islamic countries recognized

the Taliban as legitimate: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan. Most Muslims thought these people were crazy, and that this was certainly not the way they wanted to organize their states. These "little details" seem to slip by most Americans (I'm not sure about Canadians). This kind of limited understanding combined with a fear that all Muslims are bent on destruction makes for skewed perceptions.

In a book I'm now working on, Iran figures fairly prominently because I really believe Iran holds some of the best hope for the future. Since the revolution of 1979, Iranians have been engaged in a process of democratization. It has had to confront many problems, and while it's not a pure democracy—one might wonder just what that looks like—it has engaged in the messy business of electing people and implementing democratic structures. Look at what the Iranians did as part of its revolution: Despite all the negative images that many Westerners have, Iran did not hearken back to Mecca and Medina, and then form a government modeled on that view. Rather, while drawing from Islamic principles in many different ways, they borrowed heavily from Western parliamentary democracy. They now have a parliament, cabinet officials and a supreme court system; and they elect their President. None of that came out of Islam. Rather, much of this Iranian government structure is modeled on Western parliamentary democracy. People tend to forget this. I single out Iran because it represents one kind of experiment, one that has to cope with a lot of difficulties, and yet continues to struggle. Iran has endured, and I believe it holds out real hope as others look at ways to move forward.

## The Example of Pope John Paul II

What is clear to me is that, in the 21st century, narrow sectarian forms of Christian, Muslim or even Jewish states are one-way, dead-end roads to disaster. What we desperately need are new approaches to interfaith understanding and cooperation that recognize several realities: that we are interdependent; that we live in the midst of pluralism and diversity; that there have to be ways to draw upon the best of our religious traditions but which, at the same time, affirm the values of diversity and respect both globally and locally. I believe John Paul II understood this and modeled something of this spirit throughout his remarkable tenure as Pope over three decades. In 1985, for instance, John Paul II addressed 80,000 Muslims at a football stadium in Casablanca. Listen to his words. "We believe in the same God. The one God, the living God who created the world. In a world which desires unity and peace but experiences a

thousand tensions and conflicts, should not believers come together? Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more urgent than ever….Too often in the past we have opposed each other in polemics and wars." He concluded by saying: "I believe that God is inviting us to change old practices. We must learn to respect each other. We must learn to stimulate each other in good works on the path to righteousness." (John Paul II, 1985).

In 1986, John Paul II invited leaders from all the major religious traditions and many other religious traditions to Assisi for a day of prayer and dialogue. He was, I believe, the first Pope to visit a Mosque in Egypt and Damascus, and to visit a synagogue in Rome and then later travel to Jerusalem to meet with Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities. I believe, too, that John Paul II realized that traditional ways of thinking about God and others outside our own religious communities of faith were no longer adequate. Narrow thinking that fails to see that there is, in the end, really only one community, the human community, is theologically suspect and increasingly dangerous in our interdependent, 21st century world. In addition to education at many levels, we can and should also look for ways to model this future that we want and need.

A great deal has already happened, a great deal is happening, a great deal more needs to happen. Dialogue can work for us at different levels, and so it's important to pursue it vigorously at many different levels. We don't have to reinvent the wheel here. The Catholic Church and various Protestant Churches have been involved in this enterprise for some time, and we have wonderful resources available: on-line communication, pamphlets, booklets, the long experience of learning how some things work better than others. We have all kinds of resources to facilitate a program of intentional dialogue in our *local* congregations, and this I think is an increasingly important part of the overall educational process, and an important way of connecting people in our own communities.

## Working Together

In addition to dialogue, I think it's very important that people of different religious traditions look for ways to work together on common concerns. To do that we don't have to be in theological agreement on the divinity of Jesus. In fact, we do this all the time right now. Consider the world of business for just one day and you will see it throughout the global economy. The most fundamentalist Christian is not going to bat an eye about doing business in Saudi Arabia. He's going to seize the opportunity, he's not going to be worried about whether his Arab counterpart believes

in Jesus because economically we are all interconnected and interdependent. It would never occur to a Muslim, Christian or Hindu doctor, or to a research physician working on AIDS or cancer, to look at each other and say "We really can't work together on this problem of AIDS because we just don't have the same views about Jesus." We would be horrified if somebody did something like that. Of course, we bring who we are to the process, and it may be that we do so out of our faith and religious commitment, but we don't disqualify one another simply because of our religious affiliations. AIDS and cancer are problems that affect all human beings, and we bring the best we can bring to reduce their incidence. If a Hindu doctor discovers the cure, so much the better since we all gain.

We need to be doing things such as this, with the full power of intention unimpeded by sectarian differences. Building Habitat for Humanity houses might serve as both our motto and our inspiration. Whenever a Jewish and Christian community or a Mosque and a church pair together and build a Habitat house, I believe that two things happen in the process: the builders contribute to the common good of people who need that help and, at the same time, they have put into practice a theology of religious pluralism, something that I think is far more helpful than anything handed down by a member of the hierarchy in a remote office. We grow into a lot of our theological understanding through real-world encounters. So *be intentional*, but *do something constructive* in the process.

There are ways that we can live, and I would even say to model, this sort of commitment. I believe that the U.S. and Canada are the two countries that have the most hope of modeling something for the rest of the world when it comes to interfaith understanding and cooperation. We've now been engaged in a lengthy experiment; both of our countries have incorporated within our very fabric a significant degree of diversity as evidenced by our inclusion of Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Buddhists and many others. We don't see that same sort of incorporation in some of the European countries, and this is proving to be very problematic and will continue to become even more problematic.

The education level of the average Muslim in the United States is higher than the average level across the rest of the country. We need to continue to work seriously for this kind of result, to recognize that we have something that works, and with firm intention to nurture this kind of development. Education at various levels, dialogue, looking for ways to work together such as Habitat housing, cooperation in prison ministries—these are the kinds of undertakings in which we all share common concerns.

In Chapter Five of the Koran, there is a wonderful passage. I may be the only Baptist minister on the planet who periodically quotes what it says about religious diversity. It says: "If God had so willed, God would have created you one community, but God has not done so in order that God may test you. Therefore, compete with one another in good works. To God you will all return, and God will tell you the truth about that which you have been disputing." I think this is a wonderful image for all of us to have. It not only affirms religious diversity, it also affirms it as somehow being a part of God's plan. It urges us to compete with one another in good works: Be the best Christian, be the best Muslim, be the best Hindu…be the best whatever you can be. Let your competition be in the area of good works, and God will one day sort out the differences which we have been disputing. In the final analysis, we can leave the resolution of our differences to God. I think John Paul II understood and embodies this point, and so must we.

When it comes to religious and cultural differences, there are no easy answers or simple solutions. I don't have any magic formula to offer, but I think the way forward will become clear if we're willing to do hard work in the area of education, dialogue, cooperation, and if we stay open to experiments in religion, politics, pluralism, and cooperation. Some of these moves will happen in the next 10 years, and, as always, they will be the most difficult.

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# PART I

# RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC FORUM

## Introduction

If asked to identify the features that help to define *culture*, we would probably have no hesitation in adding religion to the mix. But when faced with the task of situating the place of religion within *society* or within the *nation*, the challenge is more daunting. Does religion—more precisely religious belief, structures and practices—have any place in the public sector, or should the state separate its functions (law, education, taxation, social policy) from any religious influence? Some insist that the public square should be "naked of religion," others seem quite willing to move into what many fear would be "a kind of religious terrorism."

The two chapters in this section deal with place of religion in society, and the tensions arising therefrom. In both Canada and U.S., religious belief and practice are constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. The presence of God has even been formalized in American currency ("In God we trust") and in our Commonwealth anthems ("God save the Queen," "God keep our land glorious and free"). However, while we can easily glimpse the presence of religious concepts and influences in public life, we do not, as in theocratic societies, have religious structures embedded in the governing apparatus. So far in Canada, we have resisted the inclusion of *sharia* in our legal sector.

Tensions are bound to emerge. What Moira McQueen calls an "aggressive secularism," that opposes the presence of any religious influence in the public, has emerged, and this translates even deeper into an active opposition to the expression of religious viewpoints in the development of law and public policy. Flashpoints are easy to recognize: morning school prayer; nativity scenes in public buildings; same-sex marriage; euthanasia; state supported abortion; public funding for selected religious schools in Ontario and Quebec; in Quebec, the introduction of an Ethics and Religious Culture course into all schools without parents' consent. Most recently, in both Canada and the U.S., the issue of polygamy, allegedly a divinely sanctioned practice, has become an embarrassment to governments, and a headline issue. And yet, because religion remains an inescapable fact of life in most democracies, it seems

impractical, "unreasonable" to insist upon a *total* separation of church from state.

A deeper theme runs below the surface: Can there even be such a thing as a value-free society, since so much of our moral and social values system is rooted in religion and its history. Historically, our legal system drew from church or canon law, and ultimately from the Stoic notion of "natural law" (*ius naturae*), a foundational concept that affirms the values of reason and human life, the common good and religion. Indeed, the unavoidability of ethical discourse reveals itself in our everyday appeals to "justice," and when, in the debate over euthanasia, both sides invoke the language of "compassion" and "dignity." McQueen sees something "clearly dangerous" in the attempt to silence religious voices.

Given the wide sweep of information-media, Carol Stanton points out that there is even a question about what nowadays constitutes the "public square," and where we might draw the line. As part of that new defining, she sees a need to improve the understanding between believers and non-believers, and to establish what religion can best do in the public sector. What kinds of conversation would be necessary for religion to claim a rightful and useful place in society? Who are the parties to that conversation? Will the imperative to converse require as well a "mediating language," a willingness to bridge epistemological and moral diversity, indeed the very ability itself to listen? Following suggestions by Cardinal Ratzinger, Stanton asks what kinds of limits to religion and reason are involved. Is the community of believers prepared to confront its own pathologies? Is there even such a thing as a "cultural ministry" in which religion can contribute both to society and to its own re-formation? Indeed, what would such a ministry or *diakonia* look like?

The chapters by McQueen and Stanton comprise a lively challenge to the entrenched dogma of "the separation of church and state" because they show us that its unquestioned acceptance threatens to weaken our social and political fabric. At the same time, if we want to preserve a place for religion within the public square, we need to ask, and find answers to, some daunting questions.