

War, Human Dignity and Nation Building

War, Human Dignity and Nation Building:
Theological Perspectives on Canada's
Role in Afghanistan

Edited by

Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks

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SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

GARY D. BADCOCK AND DARREN C. MARKS

In his Foreword to the 2008 report to the Canadian Parliament of the Independent Panel on the Future of Canada's Role in Afghanistan, the distinguished Canadian politician John Manley wrote as Panel Chair of how Canada finds itself, as a NATO member and a sizable contributor to ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, "in a land that is far from us, little known by us and where our interests do not seem self-evident...whose recent history has been one long, unending tragedy, and whose prospects still appear bleak."¹ It was a fitting summary of the general problem faced, not only by Canada, by all the Western nations involved in the Afghanistan war. And yet, despite the fact that the Panel's Report made wide-ranging recommendations on the basis of an informed and realistic assessment of the prevailing situation on the ground, it was almost wholly silent on one of the central issues underlying and helping to sustain the conflict: religion. For it is religious factors, or, at the very least, cultural factors deeply interwoven with religion, that help both to make Afghanistan such an incomprehensible land to the average Westerner, and that equally help to make the presence of Western troops, diplomats and development agencies so ambiguous a blessing to the average Afghan citizen. But if Western governments, as represented by the Report of this Panel appointed by the Parliament of Canada, are silent on the question of religion's significance in the Afghanistan conflict, it is also true that religious traditions, particularly those of the Abrahamic family, have largely been silent on the conflict as well. Given the fact that Afghanistan is the longest running war in Canadian history and that Canadian casualties have been so heavy, and given the immense financial commitment made to the conflict since 2002, this is an astonishing oversight.

To say this, it must immediately be acknowledged, is not to deny that

¹ *Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan* (The Queen's Printer, No. FR5-20/1-2008), http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf, p. 3.

the Afghanistan crisis involves a great deal more than religion, as well as much that is not authentically related to it. Much of the conflict, for instance, is driven by lawless elements in the society, including criminals involved in the drugs trade. Such people have distinct and very different reasons than does the Taliban to want no viable central government to emerge, for their future is contingent on the failure of any campaign for the “rule of law,” whether Islamic or secular. Yet such diverse players are all perfectly prepared to use religious language in order to buttress their cause within the population. Sheer poverty is also a massive factor: where Taliban pay is much better even than that available in the employ of the Afghan National Army, never mind what can be earned from working on the land or in some trade, and where families go hungry, there must always be a ready supply of recruits to the insurgent cause. Corruption in government and in the security and police apparatus of the state is also a huge issue, helping to sustain hostility to the regime in marginal populations, and serving as an impetus to armed resistance against the regime. The tragic recent history of Afghanistan also feeds ethnic rivalries and provides a super-abundance of “scores” that must be settled according to the honour codes by which people live and die. To confuse such factors with religion per se would obviously be a mistake.

Nevertheless, though more than religion is obviously in question, the conflict also involves nothing less than religion. At its epicentre presently is a loose alliance of Sunni Muslims, drawn largely from the ethnic Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and reinforced by a steady stream of international jihadists allied sometimes closely, sometimes more loosely with the al-Qaeda cause, for whom the war is an overwhelmingly religious concern. Their fundamental loyalties lie either with a rigorist interpretation of Islamic law as formed by and enforced within longstanding tribal codes in the region, or else with the eschatological dream of a global Islamic Caliphate, bringing peace and justice to the earth by the enforcement of divine law (Sharia).

The former, as the case of Pakistan in recent months and years amply demonstrates, constitutes a power in the world of the sort that has long-since been forgotten in the West, but that in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan is capable of marshalling formidably determined foes. It can compete in the sphere of “hearts and minds” in the region very effectively against the ideals of “freedom,” “human rights,” or even “development” on offer from Western democracies. Indeed, even beyond the immediate region, such Western ideals are as often as not understood to be religiously undesirable, related as they are to social change and grounding as they do the availability of pornography and the like.

The dream of a global Islamic Caliphate, for its part, though clearly vague and incapable of realization, is just for this reason the sort of apocalyptic vision suited to inspire rebellion among disaffected youth born to a culture that has learned, often for good reason, to be suspicious of and resentful towards Western influence. The whole movement to resist the West in its policy in Afghanistan, finally, though financed in part from the drugs trade (as noted, for instance, by Erika Simpson in what follows in this volume), and sustained by a flourishing black market, is also supported financially by extremely well-heeled private individuals in the Gulf states and beyond, who have overtly religious as well as economic and political reasons for hostility to Western influence in the Muslim world—and who are perfectly prepared, it would seem, to tolerate the suffering of millions in order to see the West fail in its present Afghan venture.

There is, of course, a reason to explain why it is that the Independent Panel on the Future of Canada's Role in Afghanistan, among a multitude of other agencies internationally, resisted any substantial reference to the religious dimension. The reason can be very simply stated: the Western political process is strictly incapable of engaging it. Given the particular history of relations between politics and religion in the Western world in the context of modernity, it is able to address the question of religious identity only to the extent that religion has already been rendered purely "private," and thus apolitical, something precisely not fundamental to the common weal. And yet such is what is at stake for those who at this moment stand against American and ISAF forces in Afghanistan; indeed, one of the central things resisted is just this marginalization of religious obligation in the political sphere of human life.

What a nation such as Canada faces in Afghanistan is, therefore, something profoundly foreign not only to its base values but also to its available political conceptuality, so that it is difficult to see how it can ever come to understand what it fights against. "Islamofascism" is a neologism much used by the Bush regime after the attacks of 11 September, 2001, as well as by a range of political scholarship, to define the enemy faced. It has prominent intellectual defenders (such as Christopher Hitchens, who credits the Scottish Islamic Studies scholar Malise Ruthven, writing in the British newspaper, *The Independent*, with its invention on September 8, 1990).² From the standpoint of religion, however, it is a poor word to use, ill-adapted to the motives of Taliban and jihadist alike, and thus prone to

² Christopher Hitchens, "Defending *Islamofascism*," *Slate*, October 22, 2007, <http://www.slate.com/id/2176389/>. A more detailed treatment was provided by William Safire, "Islamofascism," *New York Times Magazine*, October 1, 2006, 6.20.

badly misrepresent the underlying views of the enemy. Ruthven's original reference in the article, in fact, was to the disturbing strain of authoritarianism evident in Islamic politics in nations such as Pakistan and Morocco—administrations which the Taliban and the jihadists uniformly detest—and so was basically an *ad hominem* use of language intended for a predominantly Western audience. It nevertheless caught on, perhaps because, as projection onto the “other” by the West, it made a kind of sense. The term “Islamofascism” succeeds, in short, to the extent that it makes the “other” something made in our image, and so comprehensible in our own terms. The fact of the matter is, however, that the Taliban themselves have as little interest in Fascism, which in its main twentieth century representations was an anti-religious political philosophy in which talk of freedom and modernization featured prominently, as they do in the Liberalism that in the twentieth century triumphed over it. Their political goal is something else altogether, and that has nothing to do with the Fascist vision. The goal is a sacred Islamic state living under divine law, and it is to this extent a political order that resists and rejects the political claim of modernity (whether Liberal, Fascist or Communist) altogether.

In a certain sense, then, the problem of Afghanistan represents not just a crisis for the military strategist, the diplomat or the aid worker, but a crisis that places in question a whole set of assumptions foundational to modern Western politics itself. For in its politics, modernity is the universal claim of a practical reason that has abstracted itself from religious commitment in order to further a purely human good. The wars of modernity hitherto have concerned, for the most part, the details of that project. What has dominated is whether the aim of this or that modern state is the more human, and whether within the state it is Fascism, Liberalism or Communism that makes the more rational claim, thus (axiomatically, it seems) securing human freedom. Short of simply imposing a political vision on the world through military and economic means, as in the era of grand imperial ambition, or by attacking religion as *praeparatio* for the happy dawn of the secularist ideal, modernity in its political outlook has very little idea how to deal with a culture that rejects those broad assumptions altogether.

Since some are already calling the conflict that we face—with our children, on some accounts—“World War IV,”³ we might do better in our own context to address the religious question anew. Rather than continuing to pretend that, like all things religious in modern democratic liberalism, the religious question in Afghanistan too is a political

³ Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

irrelevance, perhaps it is time we asked some basic questions concerning the wisdom of the modern political stance. For religion is patently no irrelevance in the Afghanistan war. While an approach which takes the public dimension of religion seriously could obviously not resolve the conflict, the roots of which are tangled together with all manner of motives and grievances, it might at least help us to understand the sources of the conflict better, and to communicate more effectively concerning both means and ends.

Not the least of the potential shifts needed, for instance, is an abandonment on the part of Western politicians and pundits of the language of “Islamofascism,” which almost wholly obscures rather than illuminates the problem and the potential alike of politics in the Islamic world. However, the conceptual shift needed extends well beyond this, to such things as what the West instinctively wants to think and say and do in connection with that distinctively modern conception termed “human rights,” and to the kind of political ideals that not only can but actually ought to be embraced in a nation such as Afghanistan now and in the future.

No doubt most of the labour and pain required for any movement beyond the present impasse must take place in Afghanistan itself, as in the Muslim areas of South Asia generally. The problem that has to be faced emerges on two fronts, and it would be well for a moment to ponder the potential significance of each. The first concerns what can already been seen in Islamic religion and civilization today, and the second, what we are beginning to see in it, particularly in the Iranian setting, but which also must happen elsewhere as well if the first is allowed to continue. Nearly twenty-five years ago, the foremost non-Muslim interpreter of Islam in the West of his day, W. Montgomery Watt, observed the following in a essay written toward the end of his long academic career:

It is hardly too much to say that the conservative traditionalist ulema [the jurists at the centre of Islamic religion] are shutting themselves and the masses who follow them into a ghetto of their own where they are not open to what is happening in the rest of the world. In the long run this state of affairs must lead to disaster. There are so many weaknesses and contradictions...in the traditionalist Islamic self-image that sooner or later there is bound to be a great revulsion of feeling against those who are maintaining the image....It is almost certain, however, that only after much struggle and suffering will the medieval self-image be replaced by a

truer one and the power of the conservative ulema broken.⁴

The judgment thus expressed was based not on any antipathy towards the history and glories of Islam as such, concerning which Watt was regarded by Muslim scholars themselves as a trusted dialogue partner, but on an exceptionally well-informed sense of the recent character of Islamic religious sensibility, in which the self-image is, as he put it, “the product more of imagination than of reason.”⁵ Its profound deficiency can most readily be evidenced in the abandonment of any serious attempt at historical criticism within Islamic thought in the modern context. Watt traced the same deficiency, however, through a range of further themes: from the prominence of the view that Islam is totally self-sufficient and has nothing to learn from other religions and cultures; to the view that Islam has the final truth for all humanity from now until the end of time—which is not only an infantile idea but a profoundly unworkable one in a world of constant development and change (and is eerily similar to evangelical Christianity’s grotesque “creation science”); to its inability to adapt Islamic law to modern conditions. Watt observed: “It should be noted that the movement of Islamic resurgence has shown little interest in the adaptation of [Islamic law] to the world of today. Its main emphasis has been on those practices which distinguish Muslims from Westerners, in order to strengthen the sense of Muslim identity....”⁶ The trouble with such a strategy, of course, is that saying “No” in such a constantly reactionary mode turns out in the end to be a poor route to self-definition, and, quite literally, the pathway to a peculiar form of nihilism.

Watt’s observations help to inform our understanding of the religious situation not only in Afghanistan, but also in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan—indeed, in the Muslim world generally. However, what his view also reveals is a rather prescient grasp of a second source of present and future contention, which is the crisis that must face Islamic civilization in the broadest sense if the religious situation does not improve. Watt said this, not of “secular” political systems such as obtained at the time in Syria, Iraq or Morocco, but specifically of Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. What may happen in Iranian religion, given “the great revulsion of feeling” that we are presently witnessing against the traditionalist *ulema* which seized power in 1979, is one of the great questions of the moment. It is so fundamental a question for Iran,

⁴ W. Montgomery Watt, “The Muslim Tradition in Today’s World,” in Frank Whaling, ed., *Religion in Today’s World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 248-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

indeed, that it can be doubted whether the Iranian *ulema* will survive it intact. What the future holds is uncertain, as again the capacity of the Iranian *ulema* to change is doubtful, but what has become all-too-clear is that further struggle and suffering are likely.

Afghanistan cannot be compared directly with Iran, for a host of reasons which include major differences in religious outlook, economics, educational standards, social development, tribal loyalties, and history generally. And yet, at the same time, many of the same dynamics that have shaped the history of Iran since 1979 and that have emerged so powerfully at the present moment are at the very least *echoed* in Afghanistan: from the genuinely popular desire for a more Islamic system of government; to the assumption that only an Islamic system can lead to a resolution of the troubles faced (both the Russian and Western-liberal alternatives being widely understood to be futile); to the existence of a powerful and highly conservative *ulema* which stands to gain from such a system of government; to the inevitability of failure in view of the inner self-contradictions and false self-image that its religious outlook represents; to the prospect of massive civil unrest and (especially in the Afghan context) the virtual certainty of curbed but continued violence. In this setting, it ought to be said here at the outset, the idea that the sending of a hundred thousand troops or even ten times that number to Afghanistan can resolve the problem is clearly a fiction. A surgical operation such deployment may be; a solution for Afghanistan's sorrows it is not. The bitter truth is that the path ahead will almost certainly lead through more sorrows—and this for the very reasons upon which Montgomery Watt put his finger a quarter century ago.

It would, however, obviously be short-sighted to treat the religious dimension of the conflict only in terms of the need for an in-house conversation within global Islam on the question of accommodating modernity, or even to see the underlying issue as that of a coming of age within Islam with respect to the political dangers of theocracy (as has been suggested by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain).⁷ For the fact is that there has for the most part been a failure of theological responsibility on all sides. To speak plainly, the editors of this volume in setting the Conference on which it is based had reason to anticipate, within the Canadian Christian fold, that the peace churches would align themselves with the theme of protest against violence; that the more established traditions such as the Anglican would move to respond pastorally to soldiers and their families and thereby mainly avoid politics

⁷ Jonathan Sacks, "Islam Must Separate Religion from Power," *The Sunday Times*, 6 November, 2009.

and criticism; and that evangelicals might be more politically realist at best or at worst selective in discussion of Islam. Such expectations were sometimes realized, but what was too often clear was the lack of theological foundation upon which the standard responses represented were built. The one possible exception to this was the peace churches, who did speak with a John Howard Yoder-esque inflection. With rare and laudable exceptions, however (and even these have been under-resourced and have gone largely unheard by the average pew-sitter, such as those examined by Ernie Regehr in this volume), there has mostly been silence on the war in Afghanistan within Canadian faith communities, both in those classically associated with *de facto* establishment, and in those more clearly on the margins.

The Canadian Muslim response was something of an unknown quantity at the outset, though it was perhaps to be expected that Muslims, who are overwhelmingly relatively recent immigrants, would for the most part want to keep heads beneath the parapet on the question of the Afghanistan war. Some, however, did join the debate to make highly constructive contributions concerning, for instance, the importance of the strand of religious tolerance that can be identified in Islamic tradition at its source in the lifetime of the Prophet, or concerning the widespread perception of many women in parts of Afghanistan today that things were *better*, not worse, for them under the Taliban, in view of the present danger of sexual assault. However, at this point it is also imperative that we be as honest about the deficiencies of Canadian Islam as we have been about those of Canadian Christianity. David Goldberg, a former University of Toronto professor and now an independent analyst, points out that the three largest national Muslim organizations in Canada have increasingly become more “extreme” in terms of dialogue with Jews, civil action, and Afghanistan.⁸ These organizations, he notes, undermine more moderate and likely more representative groups at the grassroots, who work in closer proximity to the other Abrahamic faiths and are likely more disposed to favour inter-religious dialogue. It may be, as Goldberg suggests, that moderates make up the majority, but the truth of the matter is that these are not the ones informing public opinion at large, or who are most visibly securing the “hearts and minds” of the average citizen. In Goldberg’s rather depressing estimation, in other words, too much of Canadian Muslim-Christian-Jewish dialogue in the public sphere has become

⁸ David Goldberg, “Jewish-Muslim Interaction in Canada,” (interview by Manfred Gerstenfeld) *Institute for Global Jewish Affairs* 57 (2010), http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=4&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=614&PID=0&IID=3934&TTL=Jewish-Muslim_Interaction_in_Canada.

uncomfortably extremist in character.

Thus the failure in the Canadian political context to take the religious dimension of the conflict sufficiently seriously is also broadly mirrored in a theological reluctance or even paralysis in undertaking responsible conversation about Afghanistan—indeed, the two failures are surely related. For Christians, whether in mainstream churches or smaller sectarian denominations, the issue is perhaps equally their misgivings concerning the “relevance” of such engagement within a culture that officially only permits “private spirituality” on the one side, and a paradoxically related inability to separate between religious values and those of the wider culture on the other. If religion is conceived to be something purely private, in short, then one has a religious duty to keep it so. Canadian Jews for the most part are naturally worried about Muslim extremism nationally and internationally, and increasingly about the clear tendency of many Canadian Christians to avoid so much as hinting that this might just be a defining issue; in the public space thus left vacant, knee-jerk reactions in support of the state of Israel’s every gesture are only to be expected. The wider debate concerning Afghanistan has not, for the most part, been something that Canadian Jewry has much joined.

Happily, however, there are also instances of more developed theological reflection and criticism, and the papers represented in this volume reflect hope for the possibility of a deeper theological engagement with questions of realism, peace, and the spectrum in-between, as well as with the conduct of the Afghanistan war specifically. Though, in many of the churches, response to date has largely been driven by cultural cues, parroted theologies or indeed no theology at all, there is growing awareness that both criticism and support ought rather to derive from theological foundations—else the community in question clearly fails to take seriously its own religious dimensions. As terrible as it might seem to the Western mind, at least the Taliban has the wisdom to know that there is a connection between theology and human life as social reality. Ought we not to demand of the Judeo-Christian traditions in the West a similar commitment themselves to reflect seriously on these themes, and thus on how we might serve as co-agents in the mending of the world according to God’s will? And could Islam be expected ever actually to listen to what we have to say and to take it seriously if we have not first taken this crucial step?

It cannot be underscored enough that were faith communities deeply to engage with Afghanistan and with one another on Afghanistan, and then with their governments, the issue of the war might well seem less bleak than it appears at present. But as John Douglas Hall maintains in his sage

and sane contribution to this volume, such engagement might also have other, more unexpected benefits—not only for inter-religious understanding, or relations with secularists and secular government, or for future policy in Afghanistan—but also for each of the faith traditions themselves. Real dialogue among the traditions entails that each will be driven to discover why it is that it advocates what it does, and indeed, what that might and might not mean (the meaning of religious words being inherently subject to hermeneutical gloss). What passes for dialogue between faith traditions is too often only a kind of “dinner-club” friendship rather than serious engagement about serious issues, drawing as deeply as possible upon the resources of each faith. In any inter-religious dialogue of substance, however, it should for instance be possible for Judaism and Christianity to ask deep questions of Islam—and *vice versa*, let us say in the context of Christianity’s collusion with colonialism. In fact, the truth is that such real dialogue among the traditions scarcely ever happens. We ought not to be surprised, therefore, that what we do have tends to yield superficial results, or that in the absence of meaningful critique from within or without, more radical and entrepreneurial groups are so able to further their particular agendas in the name of religion. Multiple sources influence such things, of course, not the least of which is the history of modernity itself (e.g., in connection with colonialism). In the present context, however, we are driven to say that the lack of theological responsibility has the effect of yielding the field to theological *irresponsibility*, so that, at one and the same time—and for some of the same reasons—we get the kind of chauvinistic, right-wing religious rhetoric that helped sustain the Bush administration’s policies in Afghanistan, the distorted religious outlook of radical Islam, and the commonplace Islamophobia of the media and of many Western populations.

The end result is an incipiently weak theological voice, the utterances of which are steadily becoming more and more irrelevant to the cultural and moral fabric of society. Thus, as this Introduction is being written, the Canadian Parliament is challenged by the failure to meet a basic human—and, dare it be said, divine—mandate in the probable torture of combatants arrested, detained and given over to local officials in Afghanistan by Canadian soldiers. The official stance at least suspected by opposition parties (who, of course, would have done the same thing if in power—and indeed did do so even more egregiously in the case of the Liberals in the early years of the war) is that state security in the post 9/11 world must on occasion preclude the protection of basic human worth. However, all three of the Abrahamic traditions would surely be of a single mind that state security must be measured against a deeper awareness of what kind of

state is permissible under God. After all, a state which abhorred due democratic process, which obstructed Parliamentary access to state documents, and which permitted its military leaders to sign “treaty” documents without Parliamentary scrutiny, and then sought to remain unaccountable afterwards for the outcome, is something that has been experienced before, even in living memory. There has, however, been a deafening silence on this question to date from the faith communities of Canada. This silence, unfortunately, amounts to a failure to name the particular folly of the state for what it is: human sin. Chief Rabbi Sacks, in the article mentioned earlier, argues that this is a lesson that has been learned in the crucible of history by Jews and Christians, and, of course, he references Nazism and the Holocaust in this connection. But it would appear that, amid the absence of a deep theological conversation by all involved, the lesson has been only very poorly learned in Canada.

One important voice, however, is largely left out in general conversation on Afghanistan in our daily politics, and this voice is a voice found in the Abrahamic faiths in thundering cascades. This is the voice of those without power, and without privilege, but of whom God surely knows and whose cry God surely hears. In the context of Afghanistan, this means the most vulnerable socially and economically, and in particular the women and children, the disabled, the dispossessed and the refugee. Advocacy, protest, and, not least, the provision of actual support for these people ought to be the concern of the faith traditions involved—yet our voice is largely silent, our actions are fragmentary, and both voice and action would have all the more power were it to be raised together. It is to the shame of the Abrahamic traditions that the extraordinary suffering of the disempowered and impoverished people of Afghanistan is left largely unmentioned in the midst of the political posturing taking place in the media and Parliament. While their discussion could not be included in this volume, it was enlightening to have Afghan women at our Conference speak on the on-going blight of the Afghanistan conflict, by which the most marginalized seem to pay the dearest price. It was also hugely hopeful to hear the voices of active NGOs whose experience in Afghanistan, working with actual human beings, seems so vastly different than what we hear constantly in the news. Remmelt Hummelen’s essay is just such a voice—a voice that offers an elegant solution to many of the Afghan people’s needs in so simple a project as reforestation.

With the exception of the contribution of John Douglas Hall, all the essays collected in this volume represent versions of papers presented at the inaugural Conference of the Centre for Public Theology at Huron

University College, University of Western Ontario, in May of 2009.⁹ Each offers a separate reflection on the Afghanistan conflict, drawing on disciplines from political science to military studies, philosophy, conflict resolution strategies and theology, each illumined in one way or another by reference to questions of religious faith. The contributors draw upon resources in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, together making a twofold case. In the first place, what becomes clear is that, religiously, something more than the view of the Taliban seems immediately problematic; as Rashed Chowdhury argues in “Muslim Opposition to the War in Afghanistan: The Case(s) of Bangladesh and Turkey,” even moderate Muslims globally are broadly opposed to the military policies of the U.S.A. and ISAF, the reason being that Western policy in general is perceived to be so morally tainted. Because there is little trust across a broad range of issues, there is an instinctive suspicion of motives in relation to Afghanistan in particular. Such suspicion has been profoundly reinforced by the death of civilians, particularly as a result of aerial bombings undertaken by (mainly) American forces.

What emerges from essays by Walter Dorn, Erika Simpson, and others is closely related: that while there is concentration in the West on the problem of extremist Islam, the reality is that the West itself needs to come clean concerning what is perceived to be its own extremism globally. It needs to realize that, to the more theologically and politically seamed Muslim world, our politics and the question of religion frequently appear to be one and the same. In more simple terms, the West’s motivations for war are neither understood nor received as something secular, but as stemming from a kind of relation to questions of religious significance that much of the Islamic world rejects *a priori*. On the opposite side of the spectrum, though to much the same practical effect, the Jewish philosopher Howard Adelman’s essay, “Death, Interpretation and Prophecy,” argues that the children and widows of the military’s dead need good reason for their loss, and that ultimately, none can be forthcoming. Adelman sees the war as futile, and maintains (against what he sees as a mistaken tendency within Christian civilization to think that the dawn always follows the darkest hour) that a very Jewish realism concerning evil in face of the inescapable prospect of suffering is what is needed. If this is so,

⁹ John Douglas Hall was, however, present and did address the Conference. Hall’s essay, “Many Faiths, One Planet: The Perils and Possibilities of Religion in a Fragile World,” is a version of a more developed paper delivered in a previous speaking engagement, the content of which represents a longstanding theme in his more occasional writings. The essay has had very limited circulation, and has been lightly adapted for use in this volume.

Adelman's essay can be taken to suggest, then the priority in military planning and in the political discussions surrounding it should be an early withdrawal.

There are also alternative voices to Adelman's represented in this volume. Theologians such as Gary D. Badcock and Darren Marks find themselves advocating continued presence, although for different reasons than merely stabilization or contribution to the war on terror. Both theologians argue that the war cannot be sustained if the goal is conceived purely in terms of geo-political stabilization or security. Instead, Marks asks whether such ideas may in fact be idols, and develops a theological response according to which the long term commitment to Afghanistan that is necessary—with its costs, both human and financial—must be rooted in responsibility to actual Afghan human beings and thereby also to God, whose command it is that we treat them with respect. Likewise, Badcock asks his own Christian context whether it is capable of detaching itself from civil religion for the sake of something theologically deeper, in order to sustain what will in all likelihood be decades of commitment, and suggests that both Islam and Christianity have a common stake in the outcome of such reflection. A vision of commitment rooted in God's own life that makes responsibility to Afghanistan a central theme thus emerges.

As a quasi-representative of the peace churches (working from their voice and for one of their institutions), interestingly, the young Canadian scholar Christopher Hrynkow argues for the importance, not necessarily of military detachment, but of much more widespread and better-funded grass-roots engagement. Bombing missions undertaken several hundred or even several thousand feet above ground, and military convoys which roar through villages in order to avoid contact with the local population, are absolutely no substitute for building trust with people, person by person and community by community, or to assisting them to establish good governance in ways attuned to the local culture. In Hrynkow's view, this is far more than a matter of the "battle for hearts and minds" as espoused in official counter-insurgency doctrine, but one of prophetic principle, which is what a Christian theological perspective is able to contribute to the process. The starting point again, therefore, must be respect for the goodness and dignity of the Afghan people themselves, which requires that humility be learned by the West as much as it does the offering of economic, political or military assistance. Evangelical theologian Craig Carter finds himself in agreement with Pope Benedict XVI, not so much in advocating for a theological renewal within Islam as in advocating the need for the kind of theological renewal within Christian civilization that alone can allow it to respond with wisdom to the challenges of our time.

Just as Islam must look within in order to find resources to answer extremist claims, so the Christian tradition as represented in its old heartlands also must rediscover the resources to critique its own deficiencies and excesses.

No attempt is made in this brief Introduction, however, to offer a full survey of the essays here collected. Nor is a synthesis of the arguments developed possible. The varied writers, rather, must be left to speak for themselves. What emerges is a contribution to the theological and political debate concerning the Afghanistan war, in which no single view is defended, but in which a series of positions occasionally standing in tension can be identified. The collection, therefore, offers no final or definitive treatment of its theme, but as a step in that direction, it can hopefully serve as a resource for others who may be able to take its question further: for politicians, for example, or even social scientists, who need a rationale to escape modernity's one-dimensional and reductionist view that religion is irrelevant to these issues; for representatives of non-governmental organizations and government-sponsored aid agencies, who must at all points engage with the question of religion as inescapable in their work in the non-western world; for religious leaders who wonder about the silence of the quietist stance or the equally passive alternative of mere civil religion; for students and teachers of politics and ethics; and for soldiers and those families of soldiers who must one day wonder for what cause their sacrifices were made. Public theology has something to say to each of these groups, and while it is too much to expect that a little volume of this sort can have a great impact, it is not too much to hope that, inshallah, here or there and for some people it might.

One final point, however, can be made by way of transition to what follows, which is to re-emphasize that it is not only the religious situation in Afghanistan that requires discussion or that may be problematic. The greater number of the contributions to this volume insist, to the contrary, that it is Western (and very often, therefore, Christian or post-Christian) attitudes that require the closer examination, both in light of the profound moral issues raised by war, and in connection with the clearly religious and inter-religious dimension of the Afghanistan conflict. Though generally denied by NATO members, the religious dimension of the war in Afghanistan is in fact inescapable, precisely because it is so often through the lens of religion that the "mission" of nations such as Canada in Afghanistan is read and received by large sections of the Afghan population, and by hundreds of millions of Muslims globally. To fail to see this ourselves is to fail to perceive the importance of religion in the world generally; to fail to be self-critical about it, therefore, is to miss

opportunity both for self-understanding, and for communication with and to the people of Afghanistan—that “land that is far from us, little known by us and where our interests do not seem self-evident.”

WARFIGHTING, COUNTERINSURGENCY AND PEACEKEEPING IN AFGHANISTAN: THREE STRATEGIES EXAMINED IN THE LIGHT OF JUST WAR THEORY

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Just War theory is an ethical framework, refined over many centuries, to assess whether war or a particular use of force in war is justified.² The theory can be contemplated in the abstract or applied to specific cases, either actual or contemplated. It offers a set of important principles (typically five to seven) that cumulatively suggest the degree of moral justification for the application of armed force. These principles have proven so useful and meaningful that they have been largely incorporated into international law.³ Furthermore, the UN-endorsed “Responsibility to Protect” criteria for military intervention were based on them.⁴

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² A standard modern work on Just War theory is Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1977, 2006). Original texts with commentary, showing the evolution of Just War theory, are provided in: Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse, Endre Begby, eds., *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005).

³ See, for instance: Richard Falk, “Legality to Legitimacy: The Revival of the Just War Framework,” *Harvard International Review* 26 (Spring 2004): 40-44.

⁴ The “Responsibility to Protect” (“R2P” for short) concept was developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, established by the government Canada in 2000. R2P adopts the following principles explicitly: “Just cause,” “Right intention,” “Last resort,” “Proportional means,” “Reasonable

One of the enduring strengths of the Just War theory's principles is that they can provide relatively straightforward answers to some of the most basic questions concerning war. As these questions will be addressed in connection with the Afghanistan conflict later in this essay, they can at the outset be briefly enumerated as follows: Question 1: Why use force? Answer: Just War theory requires that there be just cause, right intent and a net benefit. Question 2: Who should authorize force? Answer: A legitimate authority should authorize the use of force. Question 3: When can force be used? Answer: Force can only justly be used as a last resort. Question 4: What type of force can be used? Answer: A proportional means of force can be used. Question 5: Where is it just to apply such proportional force? Answer: Proportional force may be applied to military, not civilian locations and targets. Question 6: How to apply force? Answer: Force must be used with right conduct.

Just War theory has often been used as a simple checklist to declare a war as either just or unjust. However, such applications are prone to oversimplification. For example, if each criterion is somewhat satisfied (as is often the case), a proponent might declare the entire war just. A more refined application takes the theory beyond simple binary evaluation of yes/no or just/unjust and recognizes that the criteria are almost always satisfied *to some degree*. To handle this, a novel measure, the "Just War Index," is introduced later in this essay. The Just War Index gives scores to each criterion, and will be applied to the case at hand—the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan. The Index allows us to compare not only the justifications of different wars or conflicts but also the strengths and weaknesses of different strategies or operations within the same conflict.

Afghanistan provides an excellent test or "proving ground" for such an approach, since several international forces are in the country, struggling to achieve different ends through different means. The United States government heads the "Operation Enduring Freedom" (OEF) coalition, whose primary objective is to "defeat terrorists," especially al-Qaeda and more broadly the Taliban. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), whose mission is to enhance security in the country. Over time, ISAF has

prospects of success," "Right Authority," and a series of "Operational Principles," including adherence to international humanitarian law. See: International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre), <http://iciss.ca>. Endorsement of R2P was made by a summit of world leaders in 2005. See: United Nations General Assembly, "2005 World Summit Outcome," UN Doc. A/60/L.1, 15 September 2005, para. 138-9.

fashioned itself as a counterinsurgency mission. Finally, the UN's peacekeeping department directs the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) with the aim of creating conditions for a long-term peace. While these missions overlap significantly, their methods differ considerably, including the degree and type of armed force applied. OEF uses primarily a warfighting strategy, while ISAF takes a counterinsurgency approach and UNAMA resembles a preliminary peacekeeping mission. OEF has to date shown considerably less restraint than ISAF. UNAMA, for its part, has at present only a small cadre of uniformed personnel in Afghanistan and very little ability to use force, but a more robust future peacekeeping operation can be envisioned with combat-capable forces, though undoubtedly with less firepower than either ISAF or OEF. Broadly speaking, these three missions can be classified as warfighting (OEF), counterinsurgency (ISAF) and quasi-peacekeeping (UNAMA).

Each of the three missions has a different origin, objective and strategy, arising out of different worldviews. Since the Just War theory provides an excellent prescriptive framework of factors that ought to be adhered to by each mission, it will be used in what follows to develop a moral assessment of the missions. In addition, the Just War Index offers a subjective measure of the degree of adherence to Just War criteria, permitting a contrast between the two missions employing force (OEF and ISAF) and an additional possible future mission involving robust peacekeeping (UNAMA II). Both the background below and the quantitative Just War Index assessment afterwards are intended to help intellectuals, planners and the public judge which activities are justified and worth pursuing.

Why Fight?

This fundamental question finds a natural answer in Just War theory: there must be a just cause coupled with the right intent to fight. In addition, there should be a net benefit arising from the fighting, so that the damage done does not exceed the good achieved. Different thinkers may define these three criteria differently but the general sense of the criteria remains clear. In the case of Afghanistan, the three missions are deployed for quite different reasons, which it would be helpful to parse out. While most of the reasoning summarized below is of American and international (UN) perspectives, the Canadian position is also presented and explored.

1. Warfighting (OEF)

The Bush administration formally launched Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001 as the operational (military) arm of its “Global War on Terror.” The goal of this war, in the view of President Bush, was to defeat “the terrorists.” OEF was, to this extent, a direct response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001. Speaking hours after the attack, Bush told the world he had ordered a search “for those who are behind these evil acts.” He also vowed to make “no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them.”⁵ On 16 September 2001, President Bush vowed to “hunt down and smoke out” the terrorists who were believed to be in Afghanistan.⁶ Bush made a more assertive and encompassing statement of this policy (sometimes called the Bush Doctrine) in his 20 September 2001 address to the U.S. Congress:

We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.⁷

This doctrine became the justification for the October-November, 2001 “regime change” in Afghanistan, since the Taliban government was known to harbour al-Qaeda. From the beginning, the cause behind OEF was clearly stated (i.e., the defeat of terrorism), even if its logic and application to the Taliban might be questioned.

In contrast to its cause, the *intent* of OEF is harder to determine. Intention, like motivation, is often multifaceted and may not even be understood by the actors themselves. However, at least the overt intent of OEF was clearly stated by President Bush: “My administration has a job to do, and we’re going to do it. We will rid the world of the evil-doers. We

⁵ The White House: President George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation,” 11 September, 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>.

⁶ The White House: President George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President Upon Arrival,” 16 September 2001, at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>. There is evidence the US administration was also contemplating regime change in Afghanistan at this point. See: Ian Traynor and Gary Yonge, “Secret memo reveals US plan to overthrow Taliban regime,” *The Guardian*, September 21, 2001.

⁷ The White House: President George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” 20 September 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

will call together freedom loving people to fight terrorism.”⁸ In this black and white world view, the “evildoers” were terrorists who “can’t stand freedom” and “hate what America stands for.”⁹ America was again taking on leadership of the “free world,” as it had during the Cold War.¹⁰ It was protecting its allies as well as itself.

Critics suggest that other factors, similar to those allegedly behind the 2003 Iraq invasion, were behind the Global War on Terror and the OEF-Afghanistan mission. These suspected motives include: self-promotion of a would-be war-president, along with the accompanying sharp increase in popularity;¹¹ a new global enemy on which to target governmental and military efforts, and divert attention from other matters such as the disputed election of 2000 and the economic challenges of 2001;¹² a new “lease on life” for the Pentagon over a decade after the end of the Cold War;¹³ associated funding for the military-industrial complex (with annual defence expenditures increasing by well over \$100 billion);¹⁴ and control

⁸ Bush, “Remarks by the President Upon Arrival.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The White House: President George W. Bush, “President Bush’s remarks on Afghanistan to the local business community Elizabeth, New Jersey,” 16 June 2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/afghanistan/20040708.html>.

¹¹ “Going the legal route won’t boost the President’s approval ratings the way a war does, nor will it make the world fear our military power. But at least we won’t be fighting terrorism with more terrorism, and fuelling an escalating cycle of violence.” Mark Weisbrot, “A War on Civilians?” *Counterpunch*, November 3, 2001, <http://counterpunch.org/weisbrot1.html>.

¹² “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.” The White House: President George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation,” 11 September, 2001. See also: The White House: President George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” 20 September 2001.

¹³ “The Bush doctrine has been used to justify a new assertiveness abroad unprecedented since the early days of the Cold War—amounting nearly to the declaration of American hegemony—and it has redefined U.S. relationship around the world.” Michael Hirsch, “Bush and the World,” *Foreign Affairs*, 18, no. 5 (2002): 19, <http://comw.org/qdr/fulltext/0209hirsh.pdf>.

¹⁴ A major critic of the Bush administration is Professor Paul Krugman (winner of the 2008 Nobel Prize in Economics, and New York Times columnist) who wrote in 2002: “It’s true that the administration is using the terrorist threat to justify a huge military buildup....Second, the military buildup seems to have little to do with the actual threat, unless you think that Al Qaeda’s next move will be a frontal assault by several heavy armored divisions....No politician hoping for re-election will dare to say it, but the administration’s new motto seems to be ‘Leave no defense

over natural resources such as oil resources and future pipelines envisioned for the region.¹⁵

After assuming the Presidency in 2009, Barak Obama has continued OEF but he has generally avoided the black and white Bush outlook, with its U.S.-centred and jingoistic overtones. He has also dropped the term “Global War on Terror,” saying it inflated the opponent and the nature of the conflict.¹⁶ Nonetheless he has vowed to “disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future,”¹⁷ and has strongly defended the justice of the war. In keeping with these views, Obama increased the number of troops in Afghanistan by over 70,000 in his first two years of office, though some of these troops were placed under ISAF command and are not part of OEF.

Canada made its original military contribution to Afghanistan in 2001-02 through OEF, providing Special Forces to help search for al-Qaeda members, particularly its chief, Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien declared on 7 October 2001: “we are part of an unprecedented coalition of nations that

contractor behind.” Krugman, Paul, “Bush’s Aggressive Accounting,” *New York Times*, February 5, 2002, <http://nytimes.com/2002/02/05/opinion/05KRUG.html>.

¹⁵ “[T]he U.S. and U.K. ousted the Taliban and secured Afghanistan for the construction of an oil pipeline from Turkmenistan, south through Afghanistan, to the Arabian Sea.” Marjorie Cohn, “Why Iraq and Afghanistan? It’s About the Oil,” *Counterpunch*, July 30, 2003, <http://counterpunch.org/cohn07302003.html>.

¹⁶ The Obama administration did away with the Global War on Terror label using the following reasoning: “[D]escribing our efforts as a global war only plays into the warped narrative that al-Qaida propagates. And perhaps more dangerously, portraying this as a global war reinforces the very image that al-Qaida seeks to project of itself, that it is a highly organized, global entity capable of replacing sovereign nations with a global caliphate.” Speech by John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism at the Center for Strategic and Intelligence Studies, “A New Approach for Safeguarding Americans”, Center for Strategic and Intelligence Studies, 6 August 2009, Washington, D.C., 8, http://csis.org/files/attachments/090806_brennan_transcript.pdf.

¹⁷ “So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future. That’s the goal that must be achieved. That is a cause that could not be more just.” The White House: President Barack Obama, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” 27 March, 2009, The White House, http://whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/.

has come together to fight the threat of terrorism.”¹⁸ In 2002, Canada provided over 500 soldiers in the U.S.-led Operation Anaconda to scour the caves above the Shah-e-Kot valley, but the operation ended like the more famous Tora-Bora operation, without finding senior al-Qaeda leaders.

In 2003, Canada provided about 1,500 troops to ISAF, which was at the time confined to Kabul and its environs. In 2005 Canada went back to OEF, jumping from the “the frying pan into the fire” by accepting the leadership of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar, the “homeland” of the Taliban insurgency. On his first trip abroad as Prime Minister, Stephen Harper visited Kandahar in March 2006, explaining to the soldiers the cause for which they were fighting: “You have put yourself on the line to defend our national interests; protect Canada and the world from terror; help the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country.”¹⁹ He clearly wanted Canada to be a leader internationally, not merely a follower, and boasted of the “Canadian-led security operation.” In fact, the senior Canadian general (one star) in Regional Command (South) reported to a U.S. general (two star), even as the international operation in Kandahar transitioned from OEF to ISAF (NATO) leadership at the end of July, 2006. The U.S. two-star reported to Central Command in Tampa, Florida, which reported to the Pentagon, so Canadian “leadership” was really an insertion into a longer U.S. chain of American command.

2. Counterinsurgency (ISAF)

After the fall of the Taliban government and the creation of the Afghan Interim Authority, the UN Security Council established ISAF, in accordance with the Bonn proposals of December, 2001. The Bush Administration wanted to leave the envisioned “nation-building mission” to the United

¹⁸ “We are part of an unprecedented coalition of nations that has come together to fight the threat of terrorism.” PM of Canada, Jean Chrétien, “An Address to the Nation Concerning the International Campaign Against Terrorism,” 7 October 2001, Archives Canada, http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/prime_minister-ef/jean_chretien/2003-12-08/stagingpm_3a8080/default.asp@language=e&page=newsroom&sub=speeches&doc=nationterrorism.20011007_e.htm.

¹⁹ Later in the short speech PM Harper said: “Of course, standing up for these core Canadian values may not always be easy at times. It's never easy for the men and women on the front lines. And there may be some who want to cut and run. But cutting and running is not your way. It's not my way. And it's not the Canadian way.” *CBC News Online*, “Text of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's address Monday to Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan,” March 13, 2006, <http://cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/pmspeech.html>.