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**Religion, Identity,
and Global Governance**

Ideas, Evidence, and Practice

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3 Religion and International Affairs: The State of the Art

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Introduction

The aftermath of 9/11 has seen a veritable explosion in publications about religion and international studies. More books on Islam and war have been published since 9/11 than ever before, from the invention of the printing press up to September 2001, whereas references to Islam in the *New York Times* have tripled, on average. Many of these sources betray a deep suspicion of religion in general (particularly recent best-sellers written from a secularist perspective) and an antagonism toward Islam in particular.

We are members of a generation of Americans that derives its information about religion from sources that display a strong bias against religious belief. Our reasons for doing so, in the shadow of 9/11, are understandable but the costs of this secular, foaming-at-the-mouth backlash are prohibitive. Dismissing religion as a dangerous form of group dementia is not only unreasonable, it also is unhelpful because one cannot both reject and expect to understand religion. As chapter 2 points out, the liberal expectancy about the demise of religion already has been challenged by socio-political processes around the globe.

This bias in the popular press is mirrored, to some extent, in academia. Opinion surveys among academics reveal a systematic secular bias. Academic texts on religion and international affairs go one of two routes: The *broad* route, in which the focus is placed on the international level of analysis and religion is essentialized, reduced to economics, politics, or some parallel sphere; or the *deep* route, in which the political impact of a particular religious movement or the impact of religion in a particular region is examined at depth without offering generalizations for the international sphere.

The complementary approach I propose here, *thick religion*, requires sensitivity to theology, religious organization, iconography, ceremony, and belief but also a willingness to generalize from particular religious movements, regions, or instances to arrive at broader conclusions for international relations (IR). This implies an issue-area approach, in which the focus of analysis is a particular area of concern in which religion and international affairs interact. I examine several texts in the *broad* and *deep* traditions, exemplify *thick religion* by means of two prominent texts – Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God* and Daniel Philpott's *Revolutions in Sovereignty* – and suggest an agenda for future research. This agenda builds on the compelling case made in chapter 2 that religion was and remains relevant to IR concerns.

Religion and IR in the Popular Literature and the Media

Events on 11 September 2001 caused a rapid surge in demand for information on religion and conflict. A basic search of the Library of Congress online catalogue confirms that authors and publishers responded rapidly to this need. The catalogue lists five books under the subject headings 'religion' and 'politics' before 1970.¹ Of the three hundred-odd books published under this heading since 1970, a full third appeared after 9/11. The data on books discussing religion and international affairs are even more striking: the catalogue lists no books at all, in any language, before 1973. Half the books on these subjects that appear in the catalogue were published since 9/11.²

The average yearly output of books on religion and international affairs has thus sextupled, from about a book a year in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to approximately 6 books per year since 2002. The figures for volumes on religion and war are even more startling: publication has expanded from 2 or 3 books a year in the last three decades to an average of 14 books a year since 2001. The publication record on Islam and war, however, dwarfs all these achievements. More books have been published on Islam and war since 9/11 than ever before, if the online catalogue of the Library of Congress is to be believed. From the 1430s, when Johann Guttenberg first experimented with his printing press, until the end of 2001, only 154 books appeared under the subject headings 'Islam' and 'war' that would later take up space on the shelves of the Library. An additional 155 volumes have appeared since then (not counting publications after December 2006), thus raising the yearly average from just over 4 books a year in recent decades to a whopping 30 books per average year since 2001.

This spike in supply raises troubling questions regarding authorship. Writers who enjoyed an expertise on religion and international relations before 9/11 might have increased their output after 2001 but they are unlikely to have increased it six-fold. More often than not, then, popular books on religion and international affairs are being written by scholars of opportunity who have little to no substantive knowledge of the topic. Three recent best-sellers, all of which touch on the topics of religion, international politics, and conflict in one way or another, exemplify this trend: Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006), Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* (2006), and Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great* (2007).³

Popular texts such as these display an anti-religious bias aimed primarily at Islam, coupled with a startling disinterest in conversing with, or drawing upon, the rich intellectual tradition in the study of religion, secularism, and politics. By refusing to evaluate evidence carefully, these texts espouse a gross double standard. Whenever religion is associated with war, the authors emphasize and elaborate the correlation and characterize it as substantial and causal. Yet at the same time they dismiss as spurious any association of religion with the promotion of morality, science, or art, suggesting instead that such progress is driven by culture and civilization (Dawkins 2006, 86–7, 270; Hitchens 2007, 254). The reader learns that wars ostensibly fought in the name of religion do in fact reveal the true hatred and divisiveness that is at the core of all religious belief. Yet wars fought in the name of fascism and communism are no evidence for the wickedness of atheism; rather, they suggest that even fascism and communism may be religious at their core (Dawkins 2006, 275, 278). Religiously motivated pacifists, we learn from Hitchens, are either not truly religious, as is said to have been the case with Martin Luther King, or not truly pacifists, as was allegedly the case with Gandhi (2007, 176, 182–4).

Newspaper editors were as quick as their colleagues in the publishing world to realize the sudden salience of religion and politics after September 2001. Since 1999 the number of *New York Times* articles referencing Islam, for example, has undergone a dramatic shift: one is three times as likely to find an article about Islam in the *New York Times* in 2007 compared to 2001.⁴ The *Washington Post* rose to the challenge of covering religion and contemporary affairs by launching 'On Faith', an online forum for discussions 'about faith and its implications' (Meacham and Quinn, 2006). A year into the initiative, the online discussion of Islam and violence overshadowed in volume all other topics of conversation combined.⁵ Given the diversity within

Islam that emerges in chapter 4 on the international human rights regime, for example, this one-dimensional, violence-oriented dialogue is particularly disappointing.

Coverage of religion and politics is not merely comprehensive. It also is biased. Articles in English-speaking papers worldwide that contain keywords related to religion – such as *holy*, *Allah*, or *Islam* – are highly likely to be articles that also reference political violence. In 1999, I found that a quarter of the articles that contained the word *holy* also contained terms such as *terror/ism/ist*, *fundamentalism/ist*, *war*, or *violence*.⁶ This strikes me as a very high figure, considering the fact that articles about *holy* might discuss holy cows, holy week, or the Holy See. Instead, nearly a quarter were about holy war. The figures for *Allah* and *Islam* were even higher. In 1999, one in three articles referencing Allah was an article about violence, and these odds rose to one in two if the article contained the word *Islam*. The numbers for 2006 are even more staggering: half of the articles containing *holy* or *Allah* were associated with political violence as were 60 per cent of the articles on Islam!

Americans today are not deriving information about religion from even-handed sources. Bias is particularly worrisome, given evidence of how ill-informed the American public is in matters of religion. In Gallup polls from the 1950s, three-quarters of Catholics or Protestants questioned could not name a single Hebrew prophet, more than two-thirds did not know who preached the Sermon on the Mount, and a substantial number listed Moses among the twelve apostles (Dawkins 2006; Hinde 1999, 341). Stephen Prothero, chairman of the religion department at Brown University, who regularly tests his students on basic 'religious literacy,' only to see 87 per cent fail, has suggested that this ignorance leads Americans to be 'too easily swayed by demagogues' (2007). In particular, as chapter 14 will reveal, it bodes poorly for the ability of the United States to engage positively with societies outside the Christian West.

Social Scientists, Political Scientists, and Religion

Religion has garnered similar attention from social scientists. Political science was among the first academic disciplines to realize the growing salience of religion in contemporary society in the late twentieth century and to respond with invigorated research programs, increased publication in scholarly journals, and higher enrolment in academic organizations focused on religion and politics (Clayton 2002). This

pattern is also apparent in the subfield of international relations: the average number of articles on religion in leading international relations journals has shot up from about fifteen a year before 9/11 to nearly 60 articles a year thereafter.⁷ Coverage of religion in IR journals between 2001 and 2006 accounts for over 70 per cent of all the articles published on this subject in these journals before 2006. Indeed, the subfield of IR has outpaced by far the coverage of religion in the discipline as a whole (Wald and Wilcox 2006).

Sadly, the bias in the popular press is also mirrored, to some extent, in academia. Opinion surveys among academics reveal a systematic secular bias among academics, particularly social scientists. Some studies explain this tendency by suggesting an inverse relationship between IQ and religiosity (Terman and Oden, 1959). Others show an inverse link between self-definition as an intellectual, positive attitudes towards creativity, intellectual freedom, and scholarly perspectives, on the one hand, and religious observance, on the other (Bett-Hallami 2007). Universities dominated by religious organizations suffer a lower reputation, and student religiosity tends to decline in proportion to a university's ranking (Goldsen et al. 1960).⁸

Researchers focusing on science, religion, and academia in the first half of the twentieth century, such as James L. Leuba and Anne Roe, found consistently low rates of believers among eminent scientists and Nobel laureates (Leuba 1916). A more recent study by Larson and Witham showed that the rate of belief in a personal God among eminent scientists in the United States had fallen from 27.7 per cent in 1914 to a mere 7 per cent in 1998 (1998, 213). This figure is more striking yet if one takes into account that, outside academia, 72 per cent of Americans are said to believe in angels and 83 per cent of Americans believe the Bible to be the word of God (Gottlieb 2007, 79).

Yet even among these relatively secular scientists, social scientists stand out as particularly unlikely to define themselves as religious (Leuba 1916). Survey data from the 1960s by Fred Thalheimer that compared religiosity across six academic fields found that social scientists scored lowest in professing an affiliation with a religion, lowest in church attendance, lowest in conducting private prayer, and highest in disbelief in God (1973, 183–202). The author concluded, 'The social scientists' lowest ranking in religiosity is a result of both the tendency of persons who are non-religious in high school to go into the social sciences and remain non-religious and the tendency for individuals in the social sciences to abandon traditional beliefs and practices after entering

college' (ibid., 194–5). Alarmingly, whereas the majority of religiously *active* social scientists in Thalheimer's survey expressed some concern about the relationship between their belief and their professional knowledge, most of those who *did not* believe felt no such compunction: 69 per cent claimed that they were not concerned at all about the relationship between their professional knowledge and their religious convictions (ibid. 200).

Several recent surveys have offered more specific information on the religious attitudes of political scientists. In a 1984 survey of college faculty sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, only 6 per cent of political scientists reported being deeply religious, compared to 12 per cent who reported being hostile to religion (Wald and Wilcox 2006, 526). As Wald and Wilcox, who analysed these results, report, both deeply religious and hostile political scientists might be inclined to investigate the impact of religion on politics, whereas those who reported an indifference to religion, 41 per cent in all, were likely to simply ignore the role of religion in politics (ibid.). A 2005 survey of 225 political scientists at elite research universities in the United States backed this statistic: only 34 per cent of political scientists surveyed expressed a belief in God and only 25.7 per cent attended religious services with any regularity (Ecklund and Scheitle 2007, 296). The 1984 Carnegie survey also confirmed findings from previous polls on the inverse relationship between professional vigour and religiosity: the political scientists who attended the most professional meetings, who published the most articles and books, who taught at the top-ranked universities – in sum, those who set the research agenda for the profession – were more likely to be secular than other political scientists (Wald and Wilcox 2006, 526).

Proponents of the 'new secularism' in the popular literature have used data such as these to intimate that religion is a form of feeble-mindedness, common among the less educated and those gullible and prone to superstition. Irrespective of whether this condescending presumption has some truth in it, these figures bear a different implication altogether: the data suggest that many political scientists might be ill-suited for conducting unbiased research on the topic of religion and politics. If the survey data are to be believed, political scientists are extraordinarily secular yet fundamentally uninterested in the impact of their secularity on their research. This disregard for religious belief not only places the social scientist out of touch with the religiously motivated actors and societies he or she may be studying, it also creates sig-

nificant obstacles in maintaining neutrality in research. Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that social scientists purposefully adopt a secular stance in order to distance themselves from the general public.⁹

Deep and Broad Religion

It is because of these proclivities, as well as the methodological challenges that I discuss below, that analyses of religion and international relations have experienced a bifurcation, diverging into a *broad* route and a *deep* route. In the former case, authors focus their attention on the international arena at the cost of examining religion at depth. Their analyses tend to essentialize religion and reduce it to its social, economic, or political implications. Authors espousing the *deep* route place their emphasis on an intimate familiarity with a particular religious movement or a particular geographical region, without offering generalizations for the international sphere.

This state of affairs, in which authors choose between generalizability and interdisciplinary rigour, is the exception to the norm in IR, an interdisciplinary field par excellence. International relations scholars habitually borrow insights, themes, and even methods from disciplines as far afield as geography, psychology, and anthropology. Yet IR scholars who rely on geographical explanations located on the sub-global level, for example, have taken great care to expand and link these accounts to the international outcome they are trying to explain. They do not simply assert that regional or state geography, for example, has immediate implications for global geography, nor are they content to conclude their analyses with findings at the sub-global level and leave it at that.

Similarly, scholars who seek insight into international affairs from psychology or anthropology have eschewed treating these fields of inquiry as mere metaphors for international affairs. Instead, they have linked findings at the individual level of analysis (for psychology) or the societal level of analysis (for social psychology and anthropology) to the international level of analysis of carefully traced causal chains. Studies of psychology and IR have inquired, for example, into the relationship between the perceptions of the individual leader and global outcomes by analysing individual leaders at crucial decision-making junctures that affect global politics. Students of anthropology and IR have extracted observations about cooperation and conflict at the tribal level to arguments about cooperation and conflict at the international level by establishing the causal chain with an appropriate methodol-

ogy at each intervening level of analysis – an ethnographic approach to sociology, for example, for the tribal or regional levels, a positivist approach to politics for the state level, and a positivist approach to international politics for global level of analysis.

Few IR scholars have extended this courtesy to religion. The most cited text on religion and international affairs, Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, for example, offers one of the clearest examples for the *broad* approach. Although Huntington's argument is ostensibly about clashes between civilizations, it is, in essence, an argument about conflicts between large religious blocks (Huntington 1993, 32). Nonetheless, *The Clash* offers no insight into civilizational identity, not to mention religious identity. Relying explicitly on distinctiveness theory, Huntington presents a billiard-ball theory of religious conflict in which all cultural disagreements are zero-sum, all religious blocks in contact are also at war, and all clashes are uniform in kind and degree, irrespective of what particular religions happen to be involved (*ibid.* 67–8, 129–30, 245, 292). Religions clash not because of what they are but because of what they are not: a religious identity serves merely as a tag to differentiate one side of a conflict from the other. There is little about Islam or Christianity, for example, that explains conflict between these two civilizations other than the fact that Islam is not Christianity.

The mechanisms driving Huntington's global clash of religions are primarily demographic, economic, technological, and political, not religious. In the 360 pages in his volume, only four paragraphs discuss the religious causes of this clash and these offer a sophomore analysis at best: Huntington asserts that Christianity is distinct from Islam because it recognizes the separation of church and state; Islam is an absolutist religion of the sword; both Christianity and Islam are monotheistic (so they 'cannot easily assimilate additional deities'), universalistic, missionary, and teleological religions that espouse crusades and jihad respectively (1996, 70, 210–11, 263–4). These superficial observations are not linked to the outcome explained: Huntington does not tell us why theology, for example, should lead these two movements into conflict.

The disconnect between the explanatory outcome, at the international level of analysis, and the underlying religious cause does not invalidate Huntington's claim or detract from the value of his analysis but it does suggest that, while Huntington is writing *on* religion, he is not writing *about* religion. In contrast, Martin Marty and Scott Appleby's Fundamentalism Project exemplifies the *deep* approach to religion and international affairs. In over one hundred case studies spread over five

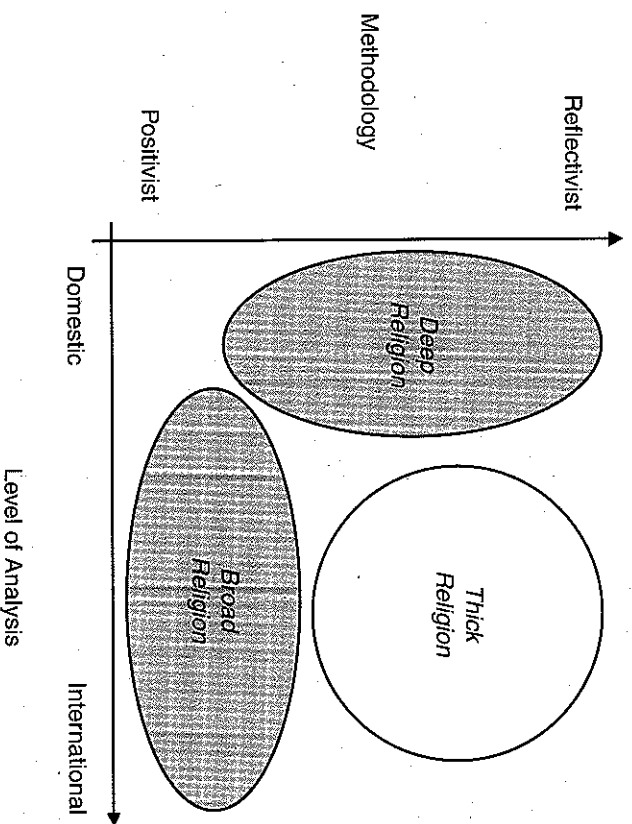
volumes, some of the foremost scholars of comparative religion, experts on extremist movements, and country specialists examine the problem of fundamentalism, using either the religious movement or the geographical region as their unit of analysis.¹⁰ The analysis, throughout, is sensitive to religious practices and beliefs, the content of scripture, exegesis and interpretation, rituals and symbols, religious hierarchies and leadership structures. Together, these volumes offer the most meticulous and comprehensive survey of fundamentalism available.

The multiple contributions in the Fundamentalism Project do not, however, amount to an international theory of fundamentalism. The disparate chapters remain distinct case studies and their findings are not generalized beyond the particular region or religion each discusses, despite introductory chapters that emphasize similarities and differences across cases. Because the project offers no generalized system-level explanation, it remains a text in comparative politics, not a contribution to international relations theory, no matter how thorough its coverage of the globe.¹¹

Vali Nasr's study of Shi'ism and its growing influence across the Middle East, *The Shia Revival*, offers yet another example for the *deep* religion approach (2006). It has been celebrated as the most important and most accessible contribution to the study of this religious movement in recent decades, and quite rightly so. Nasr bases his analysis of contemporary Shia politics in a reading of Shia history, theology, and religious hierarchy; he is as interested in the political significance of *ashura* rituals and the symbolism of the Battle of Karbala as he is in the demographic or economic underpinnings of the spread of Shi'ism (*ibid.* 31–77, 93–8, 130–6). His analysis thus extends from religion almost to the very top of the level of analysis ladder: he stops short of applying his conclusions to global Shi'ism and he does not develop his argument about this particular branch of Islam in a manner that would facilitate its extension to other religions or regions.

The two approaches exemplified by Huntington, on the one hand, and Marty and Appleby or Nasr, on the other, as well as the vast majority of texts on religion and IR currently available, can be located in a two-dimensional space that represents the relationship between an argument's level of analysis and its methodology. In this two-dimensional space (see figure 3.1), the horizontal axis forms a continuum ranging from the domestic to the international. This represents the level of analysis on which research of religious behaviour focuses. The vertical axis captures the degree to which research engages religion in a positivist or reflectivist manner. A positivist approach rationalizes

Figure 3.1: Broad, deep, and thick religion



religion by measuring its empirical effects in some parallel sphere, be it demography, ethnic identity, trade and so forth, whereas a reflectivist approach attempts to understand religious behaviour by describing religious beliefs and practices (Adler 1997).

Research in the *broad religion* category falls towards the international end of the level of analysis continuum because it tends to emphasize the effects of religious behaviour on the international sphere. At the same time, this research, so far, tends to restrict its methodology to positivism. These authors are interested in the effects of religion on international conflict and cooperation, diplomacy or globalization, but they have been hesitant to trace these effects to their origins in religion itself.

Research in the *deep religion* category, on the other hand, has adopted a reflectivist stance on religion and politics by using a religious context to understand religious behaviour. At the same time, this research has, so far, restricted itself to operating at or below the domestic level of analysis. These authors study a single religious movement or religion in depth, often revealing insights regarding ritual practice, the meaning

of symbols and language, the implications of theology and exegesis, and the role of beliefs in local political practices. However, they seldom if ever extend these conclusions to the international sphere.

Thick Religion

Figure 3.1 reveals a significant gap in the literature. What is lacking is an approach that combines an international relations focus with an interpretivist methodology. This is the approach I have labelled *thick religion*. It is not designed as a critique of or substitute for its alternatives but as a complementary method that ties a deep understanding of religion to broad-ranging effects at the international level. The challenge facing this approach is thus twofold: it must bridge the levels of analysis separating religion from international relations and it must adapt a reflectivist methodology, useful for gaining insight into religious beliefs and practices, to a discipline with a positivist orientation.

Given this formidable methodological challenge, the decision by most international relations scholars to opt for a *broad* or *deep* approach is understandable. Linking an explanation from outside the political realm to an outcome in IR necessitates shifts in both levels of analysis and epistemology. Whereas international relations works its immediate effects at the very top of the level of analysis ladder, religion affects the individual and group levels most directly. Scholars can approach either discipline with any of a variety of available epistemologies. Yet should they choose to employ a different epistemology for religion, on the one hand, and IR, on the other, then connecting the various levels of analysis that separate the individual or group level from the international level will also require 'translating' one epistemology to the other, possibly using an intermediary epistemology to bridge the two. Connecting religion and IR thus requires ascending the level of analysis ladder while presenting arguments with the appropriate methodology for each rung.

The resulting analytic chains connecting religion to IR come in different strengths: correlative, causal, and constitutive. At their weakest, these chains employ the language of *correlation*, suggesting that religious and political phenomena are merely associated with one another in time or space. Chains that succeed in establishing a *causal* link between observations about religion and outcomes regarding IR are of stronger analytic quality. A causal chain suggests that religious variables contribute directly to the production of international outcomes.

The strongest possible connection is established by a *constitutive* argument. By espousing a constitutive logic, the author asserts that the religious phenomenon observed gives not just existence but meaning and identity to the phenomena observed at the IR level.

The differences among these three modes of explanation can be discerned in one of the most ambitious book series on religion and IR, the Praeger series, *Culture and Religion in International Relations*, edited by Yosef Lapid. Authors in this series have focused their attention on the international relations level of analysis and have employed a positivist epistemology to do so. They rarely 'dip' more than one level of analysis below the international level towards the religious phenomena they are relying on as explanatory variables, thus exemplifying the *broad religion* approach.

Most often, the authors in this series link the international level of analysis to the level immediate below it by means of a correlative claim. In *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (2004), for example, Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler rely on the religious identities of states to explain patterns of conflict and cooperation. Yet, as in Huntington's *Clash*, the identities assigned to states by these authors are religious in name only: the analysis does not go beyond the state level to examine where this religious label comes from or how the presence of dominant religious groups in a state, a religiously influenced constitution, or high levels of piety among leaders, which must have given rise to this label in the first place, shape the outcome they are trying to explain. There is, in sum, no causal or constitutive link between the independent variable (the religious identity label attached to a state) and the dependent variable (conflict or cooperation). A similar *broad religion* approach employing correlative logic can be discerned in Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart's *Sacred and Secular* (2004), in which statistical analyses of survey data provide the sole input on religion.

Scott M. Thomas in his contribution to the Palgrave project, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (2005), takes the analysis further by providing a causal underpinning for the link between the international and religious levels of analysis. This remains a text in the *broad religion* tradition: Thomas does not venture into the specifics of religious belief or practice. But he does investigate the causal pathways through which religious identities shape religious alliances, transnational religious actors exert influence on states, and religious ideas act as ideological motivators for state action. *Thick religion* offers an alternative approach to the study of religion

and international relations that is both *deep*, in that it traces the pathways by which religion affects international affairs to their origins in the content and meaning of religion, and *broad*, in that it offers generalizable implications across states and regions. A *thick religion* approach to the study of religion and international politics requires an understanding of religious detail but also a willingness to generalize from particular religious movements, regions, or instances to arrive at broader conclusions.

The term I have chosen for this approach is an obvious nod to Clifford Geertz's seminal text on the study of culture as well as a useful mnemonic for those aspects of religion in which studies of religion and international relations should be grounded: theology, religious organization (hierarchy), symbol (iconography), ceremony, and belief (or knowledge – hence 't.h.i.c.k'). A *thick religion* analysis should thus be anchored in answers to one or more of the following questions:

- *Theology*: What are the tenets of this religious movement? What do its most important texts and scholars propose?
- *Hierarchy*: How is the religious movement organized, socially and politically? Who rules and makes decisions? How are these individuals chosen and ranked?
- *Iconography*: How does this religious movement use symbols, myths, images, words, or sounds to convey its ideas? How do believers treat these icons?
- *Ceremony*: How do believers act out the theology, hierarchy, and iconography of this religious movement? What are their rituals, practices, feasts, and commemorations?
- *Belief*: What do members of this religious community believe in? What are the foundations of their faith?

We need to know at least some of this before we can proceed to critically examine the role religion plays in current affairs, notably as related to global governance.

Thick religion implies an issue-area approach that focuses analysis on a particular topic of concern in which religion and international affairs interact. Instead of identifying mere correlations, this method traces a comprehensive logical chain, from the content of specific religious ideas to particular outcomes in international politics, and thus identifies causal or even constitutive relationships between religious ideas and political behaviour. *Thick religion* starts its investigation with the

religious micro-foundations of a political phenomenon and then constructs successive layers of explanation, each more removed from the religious and closer to the political, until it reaches the outcome to be explained. By encouraging the analysis of a broad range of religious belief and practices, this approach is as suitable to studying the monotheistic religious movements of the West as it is to studying religions of the East. This distinguishes *thick religion* from prevailing Christian-centric approaches that privilege theology over practice, conflate scripture with theology, and marginalize the impact of heterodox beliefs, figurative art, and religious ceremony.

Thick religion rests on the assumption that the study of religion and international politics is necessarily an interdisciplinary exercise. Viewing religion merely through a political lens will not do. In addition to politics, we ought to also study religion directly, be it through the sociology of religion, comparative religious analysis, or theology.

One of the most successful texts in the *thick religion* tradition is Mark Juergensmeyer's (1998) analysis of religiously motivated terrorism. The first half of the book consists of five case studies, examining distinct fundamentalist religious movements in five locations around the globe. Juergensmeyer focuses on how particular sets of religious beliefs and practices drive the history, identity, and motivation of each unique movement. The second half of the book identifies commonalities among these cases and expands the case studies into a generalized argument about religious violence worldwide, thus translating the *deep religion* of the first half of the book into a *thick religion* argument at the international level of analysis. The author then relies on an argument from the sociology of religion – Rene Girard's theory of religious ceremony as ritualized violence – to translate the disparate findings from the case studies into a unified theory of fundamentalist terrorism as performance in which theology supplies both script and justification. Juergensmeyer translates this interpretivist theory into a set of empirical hypotheses that predict the location, timing, and audience for the 'performances' of terrorism, based on the cosmology and eschatology of a given religious movement.

Juergensmeyer constructs his *thick religion* argument in a progression of detailed and gradual steps. Yet *thick religion* does not require protracted analyses or exhaustive description. In *Revolutions in Sovereignty* (2001), Daniel Philpott succeeds in linking the religious underpinnings of the Protestant Reformation – indeed, the theological foundations of that Reformation – to the ensuing revolution in the structure of inter-

national relations in less than four pages. He begins this segment of his volume with a discussion of Martin Luther and John Calvin's theology, tracing their argument from their interpretation of the Fall of Man and the Original Sin to the doctrine of *Sola Fide* (104–5). This provides the background for the Reformation's critique of the papacy, its practices, wealth, and temporal powers (105–6). Here the analysis shifts gradually from the religious motivation of the reformers to their political aspirations. These, in turn, provide the explanation for the political and military support provided to the reformers by the princes of Europe, a support that results in the creation of sovereign states ruled by secular rulers (106–8).

Having spanned the gap between theology and the structure of the international system at lightning speed, Philpott pauses briefly to consider the implications of his argument: 'In none of Luther's tracts, nor in Calvin's *Institutes*, do we explicitly find mention of sovereignty, or still less, a Westphalian system of sovereign states. But what their political theology prescribed was the substance of sovereignty ... The point is crucial: sovereignty, in substance if not in name, comes directly out of the very propositions of Protestant theology in all its variants' (2001, 107–8). Philpott concludes this *coup de main* by contrasting Protestant theology to the theology of other 'heresies' of the period to demonstrate why the particular ideas at the core of the Protestant Reformation unleashed political effects that other theologies did not. This is *thick religion* at its finest.

Conclusion

Thick religion proposes to trace international phenomena to their religious origins while identifying generalizable patterns across states and regions. If successfully implemented, this methodology can provide the impetus for investigations into a wide variety of areas at the confluence of religion and international affairs. Two broad categories suggest themselves: issues linked to fundamental concepts in international affairs and issues related to contemporary international concerns.

Research in the first category might shed light on core themes in international relations theory, from sovereignty and identity to legitimacy, leadership, power, and global governance. Philpott's work on the religious roots of sovereignty in the West exemplifies this research agenda. Further research might investigate the religious foundations of the sovereignty concept outside the Western hemisphere, trace the

identities and interests of international actors to their roots in religious beliefs and practices, uncover the religious foundations of international legitimacy and leadership, or establish the religious sources of power in the international sphere.

How do theology and religious hierarchy, for example, inform notions of hierarchy and law in international affairs? The investigation in chapter 11 of Christian mediation in international conflict answers some of the preceding questions in one significant context. By adopting thick religion as an implicit approach, Lloyd finds that theology and hierarchy affect the negotiating styles of respective Christian traditions. Other questions might follow: How do religious rituals, beliefs, and symbols underpin international institutions and organizations, foster cooperation, and bolster alliances? How can religious communities contribute to the spread and institutionalization of international taboos and norms? How might religion as a transnational authority contribute to global governance that is more 'ethical and moral'? (Murphy 2000, 789). The concepts have preoccupied IR scholars for decades but the religious dimension of answers to most of these questions have eluded us so far.

A second avenue for fruitful research encompasses issues of current concern, from weapons proliferation and war to underdevelopment and state collapse. Jürgensmeyer's work on terrorism fits into this category. Research projects might seek to reveal the link between religious ideas and military doctrine, uncover how faith informs key aspects of war (the willingness to fight, how and when to fight, what weapons are considered legitimate), and establish links between religious power structures and the rise of militant fundamentalism. What role do religious leaders play in exacerbating or restraining the costs of civil and ethnic wars? How do believers employ the sacred, be it sacred land, ritual, language, or icons, to justify, motivate, or constrain violence? An example of thick religion in action is provided by chapter 4, which investigates directly the roles of Islamist and Islamic states in relation to human rights. Another instance is the connection in chapter 7 of Islamic thought in India to the relative dearth of violent protest by Muslims in that state. In sum, by engaging some of the preceding questions with a sensitivity to religious context and detail, students of faith and politics can begin the rewarding task of shifting the research agenda in religion and international relations towards more fruitful directions in the quest for improved global governance.

NOTES

- 1 These findings are based on a Boolean search for the subject keywords *religion* and *politics* in the online catalogue of the Library of Congress for books published on or before 2006. The search was not limited to books in English. The search for texts using these two keywords presumably includes as many books strictly irrelevant to the topic of religion and politics as it excludes relevant volumes. It should nonetheless provide a rough metric for the supply of books related to politics and religion.
- 2 Twenty-two books on religion and international affairs appear in the catalogue as having been published before or during 2001 compared to twenty-four books on *religion* and *international affairs* published between 2002 and 2006. Similar results apply for the subject headings *religion* and *international relations*, with thirty-five books up to 2001 and thirty-one books since.
- 3 These volumes were accompanied by other publications, somewhat less popular, that shared their anti-religious fervour, such as Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* and Sam Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation*. For a brief critique of this literature, see Gottlieb (2007).
- 4 I searched the Lexis-Nexis online database for *New York Times* articles that included the words *Islam*, *Islamic*, *Muslim*, or *Muslims*. An average of 1.9 articles per day mentioned these terms prior to the end of September 2001 and 5.8 articles per day on average did so between October 2001 and the end of 2006.
- 5 As of October 2007, the homepage of the On Faith initiative (<http://news-week.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/>) listed 659 comments on Islam and violence, 117 comments on Middle East politics, 121 comments on life after death, and lower figures for discussions of clergy sexuality, religious tolerance, etc.
- 6 To arrive at these figures, I conducted a Lexis-Nexis search of articles in the first nine months of 1999 and the first nine months of 2006 that included the terms *holy*, *Allah*, and *Islam*. I searched major newspapers in English worldwide. I then conducted searches for articles that included each of these terms in addition to one of the political violence keywords listed above. Since the first set of searches necessarily subsumes the second set of searches, I was able to establish the ratio of articles with religious keywords that include political violence keywords as well. Needless to say, the presence of any of these keywords in an article cannot reflect the actual content of the article or its position on religion and violence. Presumably

- this sample includes as many irrelevant articles (that mention religion and violence keywords in passing) as it excludes relevant articles.
- 7 These data are based on a search of the Academic Universe Citation Index, which includes only articles cited in journal articles. I searched for articles with the words *religion/religious* and then limited the results to IR journals.
 - 8 For a more nuanced analysis of this claim, see Mixon, Lyon, and Beatty (2004, 400–19).
 - 9 This argument about the 'boundary posturing mechanism' among social scientists was proposed in Wuthnow (1985, 187–203).
 - 10 In order of publication, these volumes, all edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby and published by the University of Chicago Press, are *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education* (1993); *Fundamentalisms Observed* (1994); *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (1995); *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economics and Militance* (1996); and *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (2004).
 - 11 The authors amend this, to some extent, in a separate text that functions as a summary of the Fundamentalism Project: Almond, Appleby, and Sivan (2003).

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4 Mutual Renewal: On the Relationship of Human Rights to the Muslim World

ANTHONY CHASE

Islam and Human Rights

The issue of compatibility of the Muslim world with human rights is often posed as if the question is whether or not a monolithic bloc of Muslims cares about human rights. Indeed, the Bush Administration showed a sort of split personality on this issue during its eight years in office, at times demonizing the Muslim world as a global outlier standing outside the human rights regime and, at other times, using rhetoric suggesting that human rights are not ideologically contested within predominantly Muslim states, but rather are blocked solely by unrepresentative governments. This framing obscures the diversity within Muslim societies and their definition in the context of interconnections with a wide variety of local, regional, transnational, and international forces. There, the issue is not the relationship of human rights to a disconnected 'Muslim world' or an unchanging religious-cultural entity called 'Islam,' but rather to individuals and societies that cross regional borders, exist within differing political systems and shifting ethnic configurations, share commonalities across oceans, and experience intense local differences.

'Do Muslims care about human rights?' and 'Are Muslim societies compatible with human rights?' are, therefore, questions that are as irrelevant as asking analogous questions of Catholic Chileans, Hindu Indians, or practitioners of diverse (and often syncretic) religions in countries such as China or Vietnam. These queries reflect the anti-religious and especially – given their prevalence regarding the Muslim world – anti-Islamic biases that chapter 3 identifies as regrettably ascendant since 9/11. Instead, the essential question is this one: Do