RELIGION AND CONFLICT

Terror, War, and Peace

World's religions in relation to violence cover a whole spectrum of options, ranging all the way from militarism at the one end to pacifism on the other. This part tries to represent this range and to highlight the concept of a just war, a concept toward which, in some form or another, most of the world's religions tend to gravitate.

Readers might well feel particularly drawn to two pieces in this section. One is the panel discussion on the conflict in the Middle East, in which each side presents its position with remarkable force and clarity without casting aspersions on the others. The other is the discussion on Bhagavadgītā. As is well known, the setting of Bhagavadgītā is explicitly martial, yet the text has hardly ever been used to promote war, and an attempt has been made to address this paradox.

Religion and Terror

A Post-9/11 Analysis

Stephen Healey

In the nineteenth century, Horace Bushnell wrote that

> Men undertake to be spiritual, and they become ascetic; or, endeavoring to hold a liberal view of the comforts and pleasures of society, they are soon buried in the world, and slaves to its fashions; or, holding a scrupulous watch to keep out every particular sin, they become legal, and fall out of liberty; or, charmed with the noble and heavenly liberty, they run to negligence and irresponsible living; so the earnest become violent, the fervent fanatical and censorious, the gentle waver, the firm turn bigots, the liberal grow lax, the benevolent ostentatious. Poor human infirmity can hold nothing steady.[1]

Bushnell's Christian account has much to commend it. Since the terrifying acts of September 11, 2001, the relationship of religion and politics—especially purported failures and dangers of Islam—has dominated scholarly and popular discussions. From the ashes of this catastrophe, Islamophobia, an irrational fear of things Muslim, has taken on new urgency. In the last few years, scores of books have been written either denouncing or defending Islam.[2] Authors have insisted that the West and Islam are at war. In the same broad strokes, Islam has been heralded as a religion of peace. When authored by Westerners these claims are often couched in, but not sufficiently critical of, the prevalent Western view that all religions should honor the separation of church and state. When authored by non-Western Muslims, these claims generally reject church-state separation as a secular system devoid of theology, instead of viewing it as an ecclesiology.[3] Beguiled by assumptions entailed within this ecclesiology, Islam's detractors have more often misunderstood than understood the religion, and Islam's defenders have more often misrepresented than represented it. The ecclesiological-theological, and not merely secular, dimension of church-state separation has often gone unrecognized. In the post-9/11 era, renewed conversation and critical theological thinking about religion, politics, violence, and peace is mandated for everyone who wishes to see a peaceful world. In work of this sort, comparative analyses of the major religions that treat social, political, economic, and cultural contexts will be most fruitful. Since the post-9/11 era is fraught with violence, ethical concern to understand and uproot violent tendencies is also a crucial starting point.

Two recently published books—Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* and an edited volume titled *World Religions and Democracy*, by Larry Diamond, Marc Plattner, and Philip Costopoulos—are especially worth considering in this respect.[4] Harris reflects ethically on the capacity of religious faith to precipitate acts of madness, and Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos examine the capacity of world religions to support development of large-scale social systems, especially democratic politics. On the face of it, the conclusions the authors draw are diametrically opposed. Harris argues that faith is poisonous to the prospect of civility, decency, and peace. Faith, he argues, is identical to irrationalism.[5] In his view, even religious tolerance and liberalism are dangerous, because they conceal the fanaticism lurking in all kinds of religious faith.[6] On the other hand, Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos argue that the world religions have multivalent resources that can be marshaled to nondemocratic and dangerous or to democratic and constructive ends.[7] Understanding conditions in which particular religions support democracy and yearn for peace, and those in which they might legitimate oppressiveness and hostility, is more complex than Harris's account acknowledges.

Key differences in the approaches of Harris and Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos, however, make synthesizing these works profitable. The two works together suggest important views for thinking about religion and terror in the post-9/11 age. The social-historical and empirical work of Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos can be used to broaden Harris's ethical-analytical treatment of religions, and the moral dimensions of Harris's analysis can be used to enrich that of Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos. Troubling aspects of Harris's moral analysis (Harris, for example, defends the use of torture as morally equivalent to collateral damage in war) can be addressed by democratic safeguards suggested in the other work.[8] Both Harris and Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos raise issues about religiously associated violence and peace, interreligious dialogue, and current politics that are worth pondering in the post-9/11 era.

The End of Faith?

Harris's main contention in *The End of Faith* is that religious belief is generally malicious and that religions insulate themselves from critical scrutiny by advancing claims that disallow rational analysis. Faith, defined by Harris as irrational assent, provides this insulation. Is there a God? God only knows! Harris denies that reason can answer this question. Instead of rational warrant, religions introduce the ministry of unfeasible certitude. Harris portrays this certitude as a cartoon he believes predominates in the minds of most believers. There is a God; this God revealed a book; he used especially good men as absolute examples; he gives reasons to kill neighbors when they harbor false notions of God (i.e., views that differ from this or that book, or this or that prophet). Harris suggests that religious faith exploits people's gullibility, overrides their basic capacity for sympathy, and leads them to believe incredible (even murderous) assertions. This is downright dangerous, he contends. Our beliefs, no matter how crazy, control our choices.[9] If a group believes that its neighbors are infidels whom God will punish in an eternal lake of fire, that group is likely to see violence toward these neighbors as justified. If a group believes its neighbors are worthy of love, it will love them. The religions, however, admix low and high views of neighbors and provide numerous examples of righteous warriors killing infidels. Human credulousness is easily provoked to a low view of the neighbor; thus, religions breed intolerance and foster violence. Harris points to history to show that this is more or less how it works. His catalog of evidence supporting this idea should give pause to believers and nonbelievers alike.

According to Harris, liberalism seeks to correct this penchant for religious violence. But it develops a view of religious belief, a metabelief, that Harris argues leads toward the abyss of religiously motivated global-scale destruction. Liberal tolerance, on Harris's reading, insists that religiously motivated choices should always be honored.[10] This essentially leads to winking at insanity. To make this point, Harris describes

bizarre belief-based practices. For example, Harris grieves,

> The rioting in Nigeria over the 2002 Miss World Pageant claimed over two hundred lives: innocent men and women were butchered with machetes or burned alive simply to keep that troubled place free of women in bikinis.[11]

But Muslims, Harris shows, are not alone in holding silly ideas.

> We should be humbled, perhaps to the point of spontaneous genuflection, by the knowledge that the ancient Greeks began to lay their Olympian myths to rest several hundred years before the birth of Christ, whereas we have the likes of Bill Moyers convening earnest gatherings of scholars for the high purpose of determining just how the book of Genesis can be reconciled with life in the modern world.[12]

Jesus wept, Harris sighs. Come now, he argues, if something is clearly erroneous, whether it is a religious creed that motivates people to harm their neighbors or one that espouses pure nonsense, it should be judged rather than tolerated. It is unethical not to judge crazy or harmful ideas, because such ideas lead people to dangerous and harmful actions. However sharply Harris makes his points, they are often leavened with humor and wit, and he is motivated by desire to see the world at peace. Without irony, he claims to have written the book "very much in the spirit of a prayer."[13] His prayer, put simply, is that people will start thinking and as a result will stop killing in the name of incredible beliefs.

Harris's criticism of religious faith is more or less ecumenical. All religions that inspire unreasonable thinking, those that make a virtue of irrational faith, come under fire. Especially prominent in his analysis, however, are Islam and Christianity. He gives special attention to the failings (witch burnings, torture ordeals for heretics, anti-Semitism, jihad, to name a few) of these two religions.[14] The evidence, though well-known, is arranged with dark humor to prosecute the case that faith itself is to blame for insane actions of Christians and Muslims. However dangerous these faith orientations are, Harris thinks they nonetheless address real human spiritual needs that science cannot satisfy.[15] The problem is not that religions address needs, but how religions conceive irrational faith as an answer to them. Instead of faith, the current moment requires ethics and spirituality that are aligned to truths about the world and self known through science. Harris presents this mixture of resources as a rational means to address spiritual needs.

Harris's analysis leads him to be *certain* that many religious believers are wrong about important matters. Against the faithful certitude of believers, Harris does not introduce hand-wringing liberal doubt or relativism. Instead, he introduces certitude of his own by combining the convictions that science tells us what reality is like, that we should not harm sentient creatures (unless dictated by very compelling ethical reasons, such as self-defense), and that we can learn about the nature of our own consciousness through spirituality and meditation. Harris is receptive to Buddhism as a source of genuinely rational spiritual insight. Indeed, the final chapter in Harris's book, titled "Experiments in Consciousness," is the most constructive one. In this chapter, he holds that meditation helps the practitioner distinguish between thinking and consciousness. That, he says, is a key assumption of mysticism, which is rational, in contrast to irrational faith.

Though the issues Harris raises are essential, the constructive point of view he offers will not support development of institutions that will bear pressures in the post-9/11 era. To discover these, Harris's narrow view of religious faith must be complemented by socially informed study of the world religions.

World Religions and Democracy?

Whereas Harris sees the destructive potential of faith, others look to the world religions for their civilization-building potential. The essays

collected in *World Religions and Democracy,* many first published from 1995 to 2004 in the *Journal of Democracy*, sponsored by the International Forum for Democratic Studies of the National Endowment for Democracy, examine whether the world religions are congenial to the development of democracy. Alongside articles by academic heavyweights such as Peter Berger, Bernard Lewis, Francis Fukuyama, and other significant academics, the volume contains essays by the spiritual leader His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Burma's human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi. Though authored by a diverse group, the articles are fairly well integrated. Those interested in the plight of democracy in our hyperreligious world will find that these articles challenge and complement the findings of Harris. Whereas Harris focuses on religious beliefs and their implications for action, the authors in *World Religions and Democracy* give more attention to religious institutions and social-historical context.

Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos have grouped nineteen chapters into sections on the Eastern Religions, Judaism and Christianity, and Islam. A conceptual framework for the book is set forth in the introduction, by Philip Costopoulos, and within the first article, by Alfred Stepan. The essays are dense with sheer detail and thoughtful analysis. The discussion that follows will illuminate areas in which Harris's criticism of faith can profitably be engaged from broader social and historical perspectives.

In *World Religions and Democracy,* the conceptual framework raises the concept of "twin tolerations," which presumes the differentiation of "religious and political authority."[16] In short, the idea of twin tolerations (one for each fallen tower?) means that religions should not have the constitutional right to set public policy for democratically elected governments, and that individuals and groups should have the unrestricted right to express their values publicly, so long as they do not "impinge on the liberties of other citizens or violate democracy and the law."[17] However, the authors reject the idea that twin tolerations can be honored only through one model of church-state relations.

As such, they critically examine assumptions about this relationship.

Stepan explores how religions have actually interacted with political systems along these lines. He convincingly shows that the idealized separation of church and state so often heralded by Americans is at variance with the historical reality in Western Europe. Five members of the European Union, for example, have established churches, and those that do not nonetheless often divert significant public funds to church agencies. Germans, for example, generally elect to pay *Kirchensteuer* (Church tax), because significant social benefits (the right to be baptized, married, or buried in a church, and to be afforded access to church-based hospitals, for example) accrue primarily to those who pay it. In the EU, only Portugal prohibits political parties from using religious affiliations and symbols. Additionally, an idealized language of church-state separation inhibits understanding of Eastern Orthodoxy, Confucianism, or Islam. In sum, "From the viewpoint of empirical democratic practice . . . the concept of secularism must be radically rethought."[18]

Based upon this study of European democracies, Stepan refutes three commonly held positions. All of the essays in the volume accept these basic premises. First, religions are not reducible to single essences that can be judged, thumbs up or thumbs down. The same religion might well support diverse, even antithetical, objectives, including some that are laudatory (democracy and love, for example) and others that are horrific (antidemocracy or mindless violence, for example). Second, Stepan questions whether the social and religious conditions that prevailed at democracy's origin are necessary to export it to another society. He pointedly questions the idea (propounded by noted political scientist Samuel Huntington, and accepted by many) that societies informed by Eastern Orthodoxy, Confucianism, and Islam will remain uncongenial to democracy. Third, eliminating religion from public and political discussions is shown to be pointless, since religiously based practice is a common part of the world's most established democracies. These

perspectives provide a valuable foundation to examine the implications of the world religions in the post-9/11 era.

Harris recognizes the pluralistic nature of religions, and he knows that religions have inspired great people to do great things and base people to do base things. He claims that the latter predominate by a wide margin. Whereas Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos work with the assumption that religions are multivalent, Harris focuses on faith and views it univocally. He holds that faith always requires suspension of reason and entails certitude about ridiculous creeds. He is aware of significant theologians (Paul Tillich, for example) who see matters with significantly greater nuance, but he does not engage their work because, in his view, the common believer gives shape to history. The common believer, Harris is convinced, is most likely a fanatic duped by unreason. Against a theological orientation, Harris's turn of mind is sociological; but his argument is a series of theological judgments. Thus, he develops an admixture of sociologically and theologically inclined perspectives. In short, Harris's *theology* is judgmental, too quickly dismissive, and thus unlikely to support the aims he has in mind.

The substantial notes to *The End of Faith* do not engage significant findings of religious studies scholarship. Too bad, because the devil, as they say, is in the details. For example, Abdou Filali-Ansary, who contributed three articles to *World Religions and Democracy,* points out that the influential work of Jamal-Eddin Al-Afghani (1838–97) has led many Arab and non-Arab Muslims to treat the word *secular* as more or less equivalent to *atheism* and *godlessness*.[19] This explanation illuminates Muslim resistance to secular democracy, but Harris's analysis does not ponder the issues deeply or broadly enough to get to this level. In his view, which he shares with Samuel Huntington, the West and Islam are at war.[20] Instead of broad-based analysis, Harris relies heavily upon his analytical schema (faith is ruinous; meditative reason is emancipatory), even when the data he presents suggests otherwise. For example, in a lengthy footnote, he states,

Attentive readers will have noticed that I have been very hard on religions of faith—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and even Hinduism—and have not said much that is derogatory of Buddhism. This is not an accident. While Buddhism has also been a source of ignorance and occasional violence, it is not a religion of faith, or a religion at all, in the Western sense. *There are millions of Buddhists who do not seem to know this, and they can be found in temples throughout Southeast Asia, and even the West, praying to Buddha as though he were a numinous incarnation of Santa Claus.*[21]

Harris's preconceived (and essentialist) understanding of Buddhism leads him to obscure it.[22] More thorough acknowledgment of the social history of Buddhism would suggest that the simple lens used against the so-called faith-based religions and then used to praise Buddhism distorts the historical realities both of what Harris affirms and of what he denies. Harris lauds an idealized, nonexistent version of Buddhism, which is at variance with most Buddhist practice in the world. The essays by the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi in *World Religions* provide examples of how to think about Buddhism as a living reality that is embedded in time, space, and culture. In contrast, Harris's focus on one particular definition of faith distorts the historical realities of the religions he surveys.

Harris believes that religious liberalism leads to suspension of judgment about foolish and dangerous creeds, when we should be willing, ultimately, to judge grotesque foolishness, even if it is dressed up in the pontifical vestment and florid calligraphy honored by a billion believers. Serious theology, in his view, is a mind game that ignores the predominant (and crude) dimensions of faith-based religions. This aspect of Harris's thought is not convincing, because serious theology and religious liberalism have more power to challenge foolishness than nonreligious naturalism does, even if the latter is augmented by spirituality and meditation. Harris's hope for peace is profoundly limited by the tenor and substance of his analysis. Diamond and coauthors show more ably how to

engage in analysis of religious propensity to justify harmful practices while remaining open to their contributions.

Harris has noted that Western religions tend to be historically focused and action-oriented. In the histories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it is undeniable that this orientation has been expressed in militant fashion. It is also true, therefore, that the basic texts of these religions contain theological justifications for war and violence.[23] Should a fanatic wish to justify his or her choices by citing chapter and verse, each of these traditions provides an ample store of references. Harris documents without attempting to understand these tendencies. As a result, he is curiously blind to the fact that his justification of war and torture is essentially analogous to what he condemns in Christianity and Islam. Harris gives no significant attention to wider histories and broader social possibilities entailed by these religions. Were he to do so, the question of ecclesiology would be a profitable beginning place. In this context, Peter Berger's brief article, titled "Christianity: The Global Picture," draws attention to the importance of social differentiation afforded by the church as an institution.[24] The article by Hahm Chaibong, titled "The Ironies of Confucianism," provides a fascinating discussion of Confucian values, statecraft, and economics. In short, Hahm argues that Confucian values show strong correlation to economic development and growth, but these same values have not provided significant resistance to absolutist governments. Confucianism's main loci are family and state, and thus it lacks "a realm of awareness or action over against the realm controlled by the state."[25] Harris's proposal may eliminate the capacity to build civil society and thus undermines a source of dissent against governments and a resource to challenge fanaticism. This is not to suggest that Harris should engage in detailed analysis of Confucianism but rather that his critical approach to the Western religions could be augmented by a richer understanding of their social potential.

None of the authors of *World Religions and Democracy* is an apologist for any religious tradition. Further, they are fully aware of the horrors cataloged by Harris. Yet the authors also rightly hold that the potential benefits of religious ideas, communities, and institutions must be weighed against their risks in a context in which religions inevitably exist. Religious communities are here to stay, and they will continue to represent promise and peril because they will guide the choices of billions of people. The best strategy is to work with urgency tempered by patience to encourage their long-term transformation. That process, almost surely, will entail religions engaging in self-criticism. Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos set forth examples of religious communities doing just that. Nothing Harris offers will encourage self-critique by religious groups.

Religious traditions need not speak in the idiom of liberalism, but they will need to cultivate their own deepest capacity to inspire tolerance and denounce fanaticism. In one of Harris's more heartfelt criticisms of religious faith, he points out that human beings did not require a prophet to teach them to be sympathetic to one another.[26] Harris believes that when human beings see someone suffer, they suffer along with them unless a religious tradition blunts this capacity. He believes that sympathy is rooted in human nature, which innately understands the golden rule. However true this is in intimate settings (small communities, for example), or in ad hoc settings that spontaneously partake in the intimacy of these conditions (seeing a family in the hospital worry about a sick child, for example), most societal experiences are constituted by impersonal relationships. Globalization is increasing the scope of these impersonal relationships. By their very nature, these impersonal relationships are not and cannot be founded upon sympathy; instead they need to be grounded in principle and abstraction. Prophets did not teach principle and abstraction of this sort, but they did expound religious visions that fueled later societal developments of universalistic significance.

Taken together, Harris and the authors of *World Religions and Democracy* raise questions that religious communities will need to address

in the post-9/11 era. Harris's suggestion that religious fanaticism could lead to massive destruction is correct. The terror of 9/11 is a wake-up call to renew the task of theology as a public mode of inquiry. The broad-based analyses in *World Religions and Democracy* support this suggestion as well. In particular, the following recommendations for the post-9/11 era can be derived from synthesizing the works of Harris and Diamond et al. and processing implications of the post-9/11 era.

Conclusions for the Post-9/11 Era

In the post-9/11 era, religious traditions must be engaged as multivalent moral institutions capable of inspiring good and evil. To use the term *religion* as an analogue for "good" or "evil" is irresponsible. In addition to being positive resources within civilizations, religions have been sources of profound malice. Nor should there be doubt that religions continue to harbor these potentials. The pressure of teleological pursuit (the need for decisiveness and urgent action) has led members of every religion to challenge, alter, and engage in ad hoc reinterpretation of basic principles that they deem to be absolute. The appearance of doctrinal permanence is usually preserved through theological sleight of hand even as the principles are being fundamentally altered.[27] Some of these compromises have reduced religious malignancy, but others have led to its development.[28] It is an essential task to identify, then reduce or eliminate these tendencies. Harris's work contains examples of compromise that a theological-ethical analysis might well question. He supports the nonviolent tendencies of Jainism and Buddhism, yet he denies that pacifism is a viable political strategy.[29] Further, he criticizes Christians for persecuting witches (with the strappado, for example), but on the other hand suggests it would be justifiable under certain circumstance to use the strappado against a terrorist.[30] Religious ethical analysis in the post-9/11 era will require examining how religious principles interact with particular social and historical settings to justify some courses of

action and discredit others. Such an examination will require making judgments for some religious points of view and against others.[31] This is not the task of one person, but a conversation for communities to inform policies of institutions. This conversation cannot rely upon Harris's judgmental idiom, since no participant will possess enough truth to justify the arrogant assertion of his or her point of view or the callous dismissal of other points of view.[32]

In the post-9/11 era, the capacity to engage in interreligious dialogue must be developed among believers of every religion. At this time, few believers are adequately equipped to engage in interreligious dialogue. Most religious communities have expended enormous energy instilling the basics of their own perspectives, but they have expended almost none teaching about other points of view.[33] Harris is correct to suggest that religious claims are not exempt from the canons of reason, argument, and debate.[34] Some positions of faith, at least the most dangerous extremes, can be shown to be unreasonable through dialogue. Conversations of this sort are important. Harris's criticism is flawed where it renders dialogue impossible, but his view that religious positions require defense is correct.[35] Interreligious dialogue and theology will not bring religiously associated violence to an end, but both are indispensable pursuits in our time. Because they will shape the choices people make, both dialogue and theology have political import. The article by the Dalai Lama in *World Religions and Democracy* demonstrates that a religious leader can benefit from fresh perspectives.[36] However, to engage in fruitful interreligious dialogue, everyday believers will need to learn how to recognize, challenge, and modify malignant tendencies in their own religions, and to engage with others in discussion about this. All religions possess resources to recognize enduring principles, accommodate change, and engage in self-correction, but too few of these resources have been made broadly available. In our time, these potencies will need to be fully utilized. In short, rethinking religions in this manner will require theological analysis combined with broad awareness of the social histories of

religions. Communities will do well to train specialists and to equip everyday believers in the area of interreligious dialogue.

In the post-9/11 era, renewed attention must be given to the relationship between Islam and the West. A good starting point is to view the post-9/11 era as analogous to the post–Cold War era. A dimension of the analysis ought to question this us/them rhetorical construction. In the new post–Cold War era, "Islam" often is used as a dyadic other that replaces "Communism." If aggregate concepts are used, careful historical analysis is necessary to understand the influence of these entities.[37] All religions have at times inspired terror and violence; Harris's declaration that Islam is especially bloodthirsty is unwarranted.[38] It is true that terror attacks currently waged by Muslim terrorists capture news headlines, but this should be understood in a historical perspective. Most Muslims quietly (some vocally) find terrorist acts un-Islamic, but many Muslims also share the anger that motivates them.[39] Huntington correctly identifies the need to develop a post–Cold War *conflict* paradigm, even though the paradigm he suggests is significantly flawed.[40] The collapse of Soviet Communism and the turn of China to a market-style economy have raised questions in the minds of many Muslims about political economies that have prevailed in the Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa, most of which have been Islamic socialisms, dictatorships, monarchies, or an unhappy mixture of these. Leaders in these regimes have emulated Machiavelli more than Muhammad to exploit the construction of faith, world, and identity particular to Islam in order to solidify political power.[41] In the post–Cold War world, the deepest assumptions that prevailed in these regimes and in the minds of their citizens are undergoing rapid change. Whether democracy will prevail in the Middle East and North Africa—the U.S. presence in Iraq is not auspicious—is unclear.[42] But current acts of Muslim terrorists ought to be viewed as the surface-level reaction to an immense ethos shift of which the actors are only dimly aware.[43] The intellectual maps of "the world" that

have guided these actors are being dramatically altered, and what the world will become—to put it in other terms, whether Allah will emerge as the victor—is unclear. This ethos shift contributes to deep anxiety, which couples with the youthful demographic of the Arab world and the Islamic notion of divine sovereignty that seems thwarted by recent events, to promote conditions conducive to profound resentment and, for the fanatically inclined, terrorism.[44]

In the post-9/11 era, the role of theology originally promoted by sectarian ecclesiological practices and then later accorded to it by political liberalism must be rethought.[45] In the post-9/11 era, which is the post–Cold War era, the intellectual basis of political liberalism is also changing. The words of and actions sponsored by U.S. politicians show that anxiety about these profound changes is not limited to Muslims. Political liberalism renders politically (and as a normative ecclesiology) the sectarian Protestant account of the relationship of church and state. In this view, the epistemologies of faith on the one side and of politics on the other are viewed as completely separate matters.[46] Faith is viewed as a matter of speculation and opinion or unassailable heartfelt conviction. Harris is correct to criticize the notion that faith is merely private: as he says, "It is time that we recognized that belief is not a private matter."[47] When faith is held strictly separate from other cultural spheres, over time it becomes irrelevant and idiosyncratic. Further, when politics is viewed as a matter of self-evidence, the many normative, religious, and doctrinal dimensions of politics become opaque. To examine the separation of church and state, theological analysis will be necessary, because the separation itself entails many issues that are essentially theological in character. Theology must be renewed as a matter of public, and not simply ecclesial, reflection. This renewal will in turn mean that political science as a discipline will need to be intellectually reconceived, as the strictly secular object of political science is a fiction of political liberalism.

In the post-9/11 era, an important task of theological and comparative religious reflection, then,

is to develop principles for dealing with religiously inspired terror. Terror is not simply a concern of political science. Religious communities can and should propose solutions to states that are dealing with terror. Further, they ought to denounce terrorist acts committed in their name; the practice of excommunication may seem a quaint residue of the past, but now is the time to renew it. The post-9/11 era has altered the moral landscape, and standard ethical and legal replies to moral questions are not sufficient. Harris's justification of torture lacks moral basis, but he is correct to encourage articulation of new principles and strategies. The acts of 9/11 contribute urgency to the suggestion that globalization is altering the significance and power of nation-states.[48] The acts of 9/11 were committed by individuals whose creed justifies, even sanctifies, acts of violence against perceived oppressors and idolaters.[49] Nation-states and international agencies will continue to supply police who find and bring terrorists to justice. The nature of justice remains somewhat open, however, since rogue individuals can affect the plight of millions of people. Also open is the question of strategies to employ against terrorists in various religious, political, and legal contexts. Without open, public reflection on these questions, the prevailing spirit of anxiety will foster extremist replies, even by those who mean well.

In the post-9/11 era, Max Weber's empirically based insight that religious strategies often lead to unintended results is worth recalling in the context of religion, terror, and dialogue. Efforts that aim to reduce religiously associated violence may actually increase it, similar to how Protestant attitudes of this-worldly asceticism had the unintended effect of stimulating wealth production. In the case noted by Weber, dualism was at work: the early Protestants feared the temptations of luxury, since they viewed luxuriousness as a tool of the devil. In seeking to avoid luxury, they created conditions that favored promoting it. In considerations of religion and violence, it seems wise to formulate less dualistic accounts, understanding that a certain level of violence and conflict are inevitable. Instead of seeking to rid the world of religious violence and conflict, it is better to seek ways to manage it and minimize its destructive potentials. This notion of conflict is a key assumption of democratic theory that has distal roots in Protestant theology. Formulating institutions that recognize the inevitability of struggle is prefigured in Protestant ecclesiologies.

The post-9/11 era apparently will be highly religious, and neither secularism nor scientism is likely to replace religious communities in the near or distant future. Thus, in the post-9/11 world, the role of religious institutions and democratic safeguards for them and against them are invaluable societal resources. It has become commonplace to observe that religion has not dwindled in significance as predicted by the so-called secularization thesis of early twentieth-century social theorists. According to that theory, the advance of modernity would lead to the decline of religion. In a vein similar to that of the great Enlightenment philosophe Voltaire, whose witty dictum was that humanity would not be free until the last king was strangled with the entrails of the last priest, these theorists foresaw a day in which religionless modernity (democracy, urbanity, capitalism, and science) would prevail. In the fully modern, hyperreligious world of today, however, religions show remarkable vitality. In addition to their power to heal, religions possess shocking destructive potential. If anything, to take a phrase from philosopher Jürgen Habermas, it is the "philosophical discourse of modernity" that has declined.[50] An implication of this is that Niebuhrian realism should prevail.[51] The world's religions are aspects of the power struggle that dominates all of life, and this power struggle is an ineradicable part of historical existence. Christianity, Islam, and the other world religions provide adherents something to live for, something to die for, and, under certain conditions, something to kill for. This way of putting it raises the issue of peace and violence in religions and begs for careful analysis. In that respect, the post-9/11 era—an era that began in 1989—will require renewed attention to theology, which itself will need to be transformed. In a theological idiom, willingness

to criticize and be criticized must be cultivated. Whether the future ushers in a new dark age, an age of global renaissance, or a combination of these depends upon how well religious communities and individuals accomplish these acts of self-critique and conversation.