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PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY IN AN AGE OF RADICAL RELIGION AND VIOLENCE[1]

James Veitch[2]

Introduction

The analysis of the power of religions in the histories of conflict is one of the keys to defusing the radicalization of religion and of nurturing a non-competitive religious pluralism to counteract the effects of extremism. It is also a key to defusing religious beliefs that authenticate

[1] This lecture was written in November/December 2006 and delivered in January 2007. At that time I was working in the Strategic Studies Program at the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. I shifted to Massey University at the beginning of 2011.The text of the original lecture has been edited and updated and expanded in May/June 20012.

[2] I am indebted to Ninian Smart for many important ideas: as a young researcher he taught me the importance of understanding the religious thinking of people in other cultures. Colleagues at the Theological College for Eastern Indonesia in Makassar (now known as INTIM) and in Trinity Theological College, Singapore, gave me practical experience that grounded and contextualized my theoretical academic training. I, and my family, learned to "walk in other peoples' moccasins" as we lived among fellow citizens in Makassar and Singapore and encountered their religious world views. I have been exploring the issues set out in this paper in a variety of contexts, some published and some unpublished (see bibliography). Ninian Smart died in 2001 after a lifetime of service to academia. He would have applauded the initiative of the consortium that has established this international PhD program in Indonesia.

and justify violence.[3] I will illustrate this thesis by reference to the critical situation faced by the world community in the wake of the attack on the WTC on September 11, 2001.

The views that I shall put forward in this chapter are based on the following three assumptions:

1. Religious pluralism and religious fundamentalism[4] are in opposition to each other: one leads to the acceptance and affirmation of diversity as a primary given in our modern world and the other to its rejection. One maintains that there are different religious world-views that have stood the test of time and these can be accommodated (sometimes critically) within the global world and the other claims that among the many there is only one right way to being religious and that seeks to impose its view on and over others.
2. Radical or extremist religion is the response to social dissension and political disagreement and the subsequent conflict, which stimulates and nurtures the growth of radical religion, more often than not leads to violence.
3. This radicalization of religion is not so much a response to modernization as it is a reaction to the conflicts and the struggles for power that surround the clashes between religiously empowered civilizations (I am thinking of Christianity and Islam) as each tries to dominate the other. These clashes have deep roots in the histories of the past particularly in the colonial and imperial periods of conquest and in the inequalities that emerged from the conflicts that have accompanied these histories into the life of every subsequent generation.

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[3] Toby Manhire, ed.*The Arab Spring*, (London, 2012). John R. Bradley. *After the Arab Spring* (London, and New York, 2012).

[4] See my article "Muslim Activism, Islamization or Fundamentalism: Exploring the Issues" in *Islamic Studies as an Occasional Paper* number 18 (Islamic Research Institute Islamabad Pakistan, 1996), 19. In this paper I pointed out my reservations for using the word fundamentalism to describe any part of a religion except the debates called by this name.

There is a widespread belief in parts of the western world that a small group[5] of Muslims are responsible for starting and perpetuating the violence that characterizes the conflicts in the Middle East and much of South and South East Asia. It is this *small* group of religious and politically radical Muslims dubbed (by the West) Salafi's, Islamists, fundamentalists, or extremists , who are responsible for this conflict and for starting what the United States President George Bush called the "war on terror" If this group can be restrained or eliminated there will be peace – or at least the cessation of conflict and the possibility of co-existence – for the vast majority of Muslims and Christians in the world prefer to live in peace and accept the reality of each other's existence. But in the meantime the West has entered upon a struggle against radical Muslims ("Islamists") for the heart and the soul of ordinary Muslims.[6]

The War on Terror[7]

The watershed that shook the ground from under the feet of the United States administration was, of course 9/11. From this point onwards the United States has become a different country in the way it considers its defence and security and increasingly in its emphasis in foreign policy.[8] In an explicit move the President publicly identified Iraq, Iran and North Korea as countries constituting what he called the "axis of evil" – two of the members of the axis are Muslim States and all

[5] See Michael Chandler and Rohan Gunaratna, *Countering Terrorism: Can We Meet the Threat of Global Violence?* (London, 2007), 213: "Less than 1 percent of the Muslim peoples, world-wide, is in any way involved in conducting or actively supporting terrorism… They tend to have an impact out of all proportion to their size. What they lack in numbers they make up for wit their actions and the resulting publicity."

[6] See Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London and New York, 2002).

[7] See my article: "President George Bush and the Beginnings of the War on Terror." *Peace and Security Review* 2.2, 2009, 87-111.

[8] See the *9/11 Commission Report* (New York, 2004) and Steven Strasser, ed., the *9/11 Investigations: Public Affairs* (New York, 2004).

three became the centre of international attention. According to President Bush, countries who are part of this axis are the enemies of the United States and its allies. In making this distinction the President hoped to identify the trouble- makers and to begin the process of isolating them from mainstream Islam, by force if necessary.

Caught in the political sights of the Americans and their allies is the international organization[9] or movement known as Al-Qaeda. Led by Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri,[10] Al-Qaeda is believed to have been at the heart of the attack on the Twin Towers and the violence against America and American interests elsewhere, both before and after 9/11.[11] The members of Al-Qaeda and its allied groups are Sunni Muslims committed to the implementation of a number of objectives of which the following are the most significant:

1. The re-establishment of the caliphate (dismantled by Ataturk in Turkey on March 3, 1924)
2. The revival of Islam in the world wide Muslim community,
3. The replacement of the ruling elite (often in power with Western help) in most Muslim countries by those who are Committed and faithful Muslims,
4. The removal of all foreign military forces from Saudi Arabia,
5. The removal of the state of Israel or at least new international agreements defining and guaranteeing its borders and limiting its

[9] See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda* (Carlton North, 2002) and the contrasting view of Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London, 2004). See also the interesting study by Jane Corbin, *Al-Qaeda: The Terror Network that Threatens the World* (New York, 2002) and Karen J. Greenberg, *Al Qaeda Now: Understanding Today's Terrorists* (New York, 2005).

[10] Montasser Al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right Hand Man* (London, 2004).

[11] See Peter Bergin, *Holy War Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York, 2001); Peter Bergin, *The Osama bin Laden I know: An Oral History of Al Qaeda's Leader* (New York, 2006); Bruce Lawrence, ed. *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (New York, 2005).

ability to intervene as and where it deems necessary in the Middle East

6. The cessation of foreign interference in the affairs of all Muslim States
7. The spread of Islam throughout the world

While (1) – (3) may be internal to the Muslim World (4) – (7) bring the Muslim community into conflict with western interests and agendas. Indeed the perceived clash arising out of the war on terror has revived talk of a crusade on both sides.[12]

In Indonesia it is Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the inspirational leader of Jemaah Islamiyah[13] and its *amir* or spiritual leader, who has attracted the attention of the international community for his strong criticism of the American administration and of western influence in general in the Muslim world.[14] Ba'asyir advocates establishing a caliphate in South East Asia where the majority of Muslims live, bringing together in a federation the Muslim communities of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Cambodia, Singapore, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines: if successful such a federation would include around 420 million people.[15]

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[12] Louise Richardson's *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat* (London, 2006) is a very useful study, especially her characterization of what they want in terms of "three Rs" - Revenge, Renown, Reaction. See in particular chapter 4 (95ff). In thinking about the roots of terror see also Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York, 2004).

[13] Jemaah Islamiah came into existence about 1982 and was associated with Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar. Isamuddin joined in the early 1990s and began to play a formative role in the movement both as its ideologue and as its go-between with Al-Qaeda. See also: Zachary Abuza, *Political Islam and Violence in Indonesia* (London and New York, 2007).

[14] Greg Barton, *Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the Soul of Islam* (Sydney, 2005). Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in South East Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder, 2003).

[15] James Veitch, "The Search for Identity in Muslim Southeast Asia: The Colonial Context for the Rise of Terrorism", *Papers Presented at the Colloquium on Religion and Identity at Victoria University of Wellington, September 2004*, eds. Asmah Haji Omar and Paul Morris (Institute of Malay

A detailed analysis of the activities of Jemaah Islamiyah suggests a linkage to 9/11. First in the Bojinka plot in Manila[16], second in the connection between at least two of the 9/11 hijackers and Malaysia,[17] and thirdly, with the presence of one of the key people in both movements Riduan Isamuddin (Hambali) at present in United States custody awaiting trial.[18]

But it was the Bali bombing on October 12, 2002 that thrust Jemaah Islamiyah[19] onto the international stage bringing international terrorism into the contemporary history of Indonesia and changing the relationships between the countries of the region.[20] Two hundred and two people lost their lives in the explosions and 209 were injured. Three

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Civilization, Universitas Pendidikan, Sultan Idris, 2005), 71-79. On Ba'asyir see Irian Suryahardi Awwas, ed., *Dakwah Jihad Abu Bakar Ba'asyir* (Yogyakarta, 2003); Arie Ruhyanto, ed. *Abubakar Ba'asyir Melawan Amerika* (Yogyakarta, 2002); Zuly Qodir, *Ada apa dengan Pondok Pesantren Ngruki* (Bantul, 2003).

[16] There are two parts to plan bojinka - the plan to assassinate Pope John Paul II on January 15, 1995 in Makati city and the second stage was to destroy 11 commercial airliners over the Pacific on January 11 and 12, 1995. The plot was discovered by accident on January 6, 1995. See Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Youssef, Osama bin Laden, and the Future of Terrorism* (Boston, 1999).

[17] On or about January 7/8, 2000, Khalid al Midhar and Nuwaz al Mazi (the pilots of American Airlines flight 77 which crashed into the Pentagon) were present at a meeting in Kuala Lumpur where the Twin Towers plan was allegedly discussed. They were joined at this meeting by Ramzi bin al-Shibh, the alleged operational planner of 9/11.

[18] Paul J. Smith, ed., *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia* (New York, 2005); Mike Millard, *Jihad in Paradise: Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia* (New York, 2004); Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia's Islam and September 11: Reactions and Prospects" in *The New Terrorism: Anatomy, Trends and Counter Strategies*, eds. Andrew Tan & Kumar Ramakrishna (Singapore, 2002), 178-192; Kumar Ramakrishna & See Seng Tan, *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore, 2003).

[19] On August 5, 2006 Zawahiri announced on a video that Jemaah Islamiah and Al-Qaeda had 'joined forces' and had formed 'one line facing its enemies'.

[20] See Maria Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Centre of Operations in Southeast Asia* (New York, 2003); Tracy Dahlby, *Allah's Torch: A Report from Behind the Scenes in Asia's War on Terror* (New York, 2005).

were later convicted of the crime and sentenced to death.[21] The executions took place in November 2008 against the background of the executions of the Poso Three, all Catholic Christians.[22]

The Indonesian Government, along with other governments in the region, has been pressured by the United States and Australia to take a firm line against radical Islamic groups. Some of these groups support violence to advance their goals and others prefer to work through the electoral system to gain power. Through judicious handling of the political situation, the government of President Yudhoyono has contained the earlier violence that followed the resignation of President Soeharto and the subsequent period of political confusion, and has resolved the areas of tension that threatened to destabilize the country.[23] In Ambon, Central Sulawesi and Aceh progress has been made towards resolving the tensions and in containing outbreaks of violence.

In large parts of the Muslim world President George Bush is considered responsible for the violence that has flared up – for he

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[21] For further reading: *Orang Bilang Ayah Teroris… Catatan Harian Istri Mukhlas* (Solo, 2005); Imam Samudra, *Aku Melawan Teroris* (Solo, 2004); Al Ustadz Luqman bin Muhammad Ba'abduh (editor and writer), *Mereka Adalah Teroris* (Malang, 2005). See also James Veitch. "Indonesia: A Country in Transition: A Possible context for the Bombing Tragedy in Bali", unpublished article, *www.oaseonline.org/artikel/veitch-transition.htm*, 2003. Also James Veitch. "A War of Terror-The Bali bombing 2002". *Peace and Security Review* 4.7 (2011), 1-31.

[22] *www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2006/s1746412.htm* (Poso) "Three executed in Indonesia", The World Today - Friday, September 22, 2006, 12:18:00; Reporter: Geoff Thompson. For the details of the Poso three see James Veitch, "Human Tragedy in Central Sulawesi Indonesia 1998-2004" in *Terrorism and Insurgency in South East Asia*, ed. Andrew Tan (London, 2007). Also Fauzan Al-Anshari (et al) *Tragedi Poso* (Poso 2006).

[23] Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam in Contemporary Indonesian Politics* (Jakarta, 2006), especially chapter 6 "Islamic Militant Movements in Indonesia: A Preliminary Accounts for its Socio-Political Perspective", 132ff; Azyumardi Azra, *Indonesia, Islam and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context* (Jakarta, 2006). See also Jamhari, "Mapping Radical Islam in Indonesia", *Studia Islamika* 10, no. 3 (2003): 3-28 and "Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged but still Dangerous", *International Crisis Group Asia report* no. 63, August 26, 2003. See Jamhari, *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia* (Jakarta, 2004).

ordered the war in Afghanistan – in retaliation for 9/11. He then ordered the military invasion of Iraq in order to eradicate weapons of mass destruction that turned out not to exist. Since the occupation began, he has sought through regime change imposed by force (by violence) to establish democracy in Iraq as a pattern to be copied by other countries in the Arab world. Attention has since turned to Iran. By 2012 the position of Iran is still precarious.

The absence of a formal relationship between Iran and the United States since 1979 has created a serious problem for stability in the Middle East. The imposition of bi and multi-lateral sanctions is a major factor in strengthening the current influence Iran wields in the Middle East and upon its unflinching determination to continue its quest for an independent nuclear source to meet its growing electricity needs.[24] The isolation has been used by Iran to build a net work of relationships that will allow it to survive and to flourish under a strict regime of sanctions.

Alongside Al-Qaeda and its Sunni radical Islamic allies, the Shi'ite Muslim state of Iran stands accused of running terrorism against western and Israeli interests in the Middle East through its surrogates Hezbollah and Hamas, and of perpetrating unrest in the Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, as well as Iraq and of undue influence in the affairs of Afghanistan, the Lebanon, Syria, and neighbouring Central Asian States.

The Consequences of the War on Terror

Nine Eleven launched a new level of confrontation between the Muslim world and the West. As the war on terror progressed, the focus of attention shifted militarily from Afghanistan to Iraq and back to Afghanistan and now stands poised on the borders of Iran. Instead of a

[24] See the following unpublished draft articles, available from the author: Negar Partow and James Veitch, "Iran and the Nuclear Question" and Negar Partow and James Veitch, "The Iranian Hostage Drama and the Birth of The Islamic Republic" (2007).

search for weapons of mass destruction, attention has shifted to nuclear weapons technology and the refusal of the United States and Israel to tolerate the existence of a new nuclear state in the Middle East should such weapons be in the hands of radical Muslims.[25]

With this prospect in mind, the longstanding conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has taken on a fresh significance. The inability of the Israeli army to dislodge Hezbollah from southern Lebanon proved a morale booster to these radical movements. This, coupled with Iran's declaration that it is now a nuclear state,[26] has changed the architecture of international relations in the Middle East and in the wider world.

The war on terror unleashed a conflict of larger scope and significance than could have been envisaged at its launch. One of the reasons for this was the inability of the West to recognize the impact of globalization on local economies. Western countries appeared unable to acknowledge the negative ripple effect of globalization on political stability in the developing world, or to accept responsibility for policies that are tipped in favour of western economic interests and that undermine local initiatives, distorting the equitable spread of wealth and resources.[27] The radicalization of ordinary Muslims is one of the results and this is what underlies and nurtures the conflict that has accompanied

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[25] Uzi Mahnaimi & Sarah Baxter, "Mission Iran", *The Times Online*, January 7, 2007. Also, same authors, "Revealed: Israel Plans Nuclear Strike on Iran", January 7, 2007.

[26] These comments were made at a conference that I attended on the status of Jerusalem and the Human Rights of the Palestinian Peoples held in Tehran in April 2006.

[27] It has been recognised since the 1970s that the wealth of the western world has depended on access to cheap energy resources and that this wealth has been the reason for much of the conflict in the 20th century. William Engdahl, *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order* (London, 1992/2004). Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York, 2002). On the role of war see especially: Paul Roberts, *The End of Oil* (New York, 2004) and Richard Heinsberg, *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies* (Forest Row, 2003).

the war on terror.[28] This makes the recognition of religious plurality and diversity extremely difficult. Let me outline the reason why I think that this is the case.

Locating the Radicalized Muslim on the Map of Faith

The percentage of how many people in the modern world are Muslim differ considerably but a current figure of between 20 and 26 % seems possible and the percentage appears to be rising. According to Huntington,

> *The percentage of Christians in the world peaked at about 30 percent in the 1980s, levelled off, is now declining and will probably approximate about 25% of the world's population by 2025. As a result of their extremely high rates of population growth, the proportion of Muslims in the world will continue to increase dramatically, amounting to 20 percent of the world's population about the turn of the century, surpassing the number of Christians sometime later, and probably accounting for about 30 percent of the world's population by 2025.* [29]

Since the mid 1970s Islam has been growing as a world – wide religious community and this has happened at the same time as Muslims have been shifting from traditional homelands to new countries, as migrants or refugees. But only recently has the expansion of Islam been recognized and attention in western countries has begun to focus on Islam as a world religion. Since 9/11 this attention has become more

[28] I discussed some of the implications of this thesis in an article entitled, "Terrorism and Religion" published in *Stimulus* 10.1 (2002): 26-37.

[29] Huntington, 65-66. In 2012 there were various estimates of relative sizes of the Muslim and Christian communities worldwide. *Religious population.com* put the figures as Christian, 2 billion and Muslim 2.1 billion. *Adherents.com* put the figures as, Christian 2.1 billion and Muslim 1.5 – or as the site admits, more like 1.8 billion given the still high fertility rates in most Muslim countries. It would appear that the target Huntington envisaged may well have been achieved ten years ahead of schedule.

intense as questions have been asked about the nature of Islam in the modern world.

Islam is a world religion that encompasses many different expressions and interpretations: apart from Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi streams, the Sunni include four different schools of law and Islam has different faces in different places. As a religious tradition it is not unified nor is it monolithic. In this respect it is like Christianity. Of course wherever Muslims live and whatever cultural differences there are, some things are held in common: submission to God (the primary confession of faith), the five essential beliefs, the five pillars of worship, the centrality of the Qur'an governing daily life of individuals and the nation, the role of the prophet Muhammad, the use of Arabic, the observance of a number of rituals and ceremonies and belonging to the world-wide community, the umma. But defining a true Muslim is an area of disagreement.

The Path to Radicality

In every religion there are people who are committed members of worshipping communities and there are others whose commitments are more nominal and loosely defined. They are Muslim by birth and will die Muslim.[30] Particular celebrations at certain times of year – for example, the start and the finish of Ramadan – bring nominal and committed Muslims together. And there will be national celebrations when active and nominal will express together their religious solidarity. However, for the most part, the regular, practicing Mosque community will be smaller than the total Muslim community in a particular area.[31]

[30] Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians and Jews are the same, although some Protestant Christians stress the importance of conversion.
[31] It is the same for Christians. Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Easter Sunday are well attended services compared to other festivals.

The devout always hope that the more nominal members of the wider religious community will be galvanized into becoming active.

Within the regular Mosque-attending community, there are those who attend on Fridays only and others who attend on other days and at the regular prayer times as well – some will be more devout than others – this is a given. A smaller percentage of committed attendees will attend a study group as well as the Mosque and may follow the wisdom and guidance of a teacher or simply discuss religious matters with friends.

Out of these groups comes the vision of what the world would be like if the vision of a great prophet were taken seriously. It is what happens when people "get together" to share their faith that is important. To study more about faith is the greater jihad (struggle), because study will strengthen faith and enrich a person's life. To discuss and debate issues relating to faith is a normal part of being a believer.

Often being a believer feels incomplete without some practical activity that connects faith with action. It is not surprising, given the way that Islam is spreading throughout the world, and the issues Muslims are encountering if "putting faith into action" did not focus on the question of "what needs to happen to put things right". Sayyid Qutb raised and discussed addressed this question – for example in his provocative book *Milestones on the Road* (1964).[32] Consider these two estimates of the value and importance of Qutb's manifesto:

> *He is easily one of the major architects and 'strategists' of contemporary Islamic revival. Along with Maulana Maududi the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, the revivalist movement in South Asia, and Imam Khomeini, the leader of Iran's Islamic revolution, he gave shape to ideas and the world view that has mobilized and motivated millions of Muslims from Malaysia to*

[32] For the internet edition see *www.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/milestones*

> *Michigan. to strive to reintroduce Islamic practices in their lives and alter social and political institutions so that they reflect Islamic principles. Milestones was written to educate and motivate a potential vanguard of the re-Islamization movement.*[33]
>
> *A man of impeccable Islamic credentials, he made an immense contribution to Muslim political thought… Sayyid Qutb lives in the hearts of millions of Muslims worldwide. His books have been translated into virtually every language that Muslims read and remain hugely influential.*[34]

Paul Berman calls Qutb "the single most influential writer in the Islamic tradition… a formidable person".[35] This is not the place to evaluate the contribution of Qutb nor of others in the line of political Islam that the western world finds so difficult to counteract. There are a number of seminal and critical studies that are in the process of providing that much needed evaluation.[36]

Sayyid Qutb is recognized as the founder of political Islam and a strand of thinking within contemporary Islam with its origins in the Muslim brotherhood of Hasan al-Banna. This strand of thinking sets the agenda for radical activism and inspires the opposition to the West that the war on terror is designed to contain and eradicate. For this reason his writings are popular and influential.[37] The manner of his death and the

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[33] From the executive summary of *Milestones* by M.A. Muqtedar Khan, also on the above website.

[34] Zafar Bangash, *Remembering Sayyid Qutb*, an Islamic intellectual and leader of rare insight and integrity – quoted from an article on the same website. The Wikipedia article on Qutb has some valuable material, especially in the references and bibliography.

[35] *Terror and Liberalism* (London, 2003/2004), 60

[36] Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London, 2002/2003). Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London, 1994/1999). Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London, 2002).

[37] On Qutb see Ahmad S.Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (American University of Beirut, 1992). Adnan A. Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Praeger Publishers: Westport, 2005). See also Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford,

reason he was sent to the gallows made sure that his martyrdom gave his words an authority that he could hardly have hoped for in his lifetime. When his enemies condemned his thinking, then the principle of cognitive dissonance ensured that his words were taken seriously by subsequent generations. This is particularly the case when a person dies because they dared to challenge their contemporaries and the establishment that they represent. This is the way in which martyrs are created.

There is a thread running through the thinking of key Muslim leaders, from al-Banna and Qutb to Khomeini, Al-Zawahiri, and bin Laden,[38] Sunni and Shi'a alike, that provides an ongoing credentialing for the activist movements. Political Islam gives to a new generation of Muslims, a structure for mounting opposition to the West. These political thinkers give a new generation permission to become involved in changing what can be changed and in rethinking the meaning and significance of faith for their own cultural and social situations. More significantly a person like Qutb makes it possible for others to read and re-read the Qur'an in search for a rationale for their activism. It is no wonder Muslims world-wide have been inspired by the writing of Qutb,

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1969/1993). The introduction by John Voll is an important assessment in religious terms of the influence of this movement. See Fathi Yakan, *Revolusi Hasan al-Bana: Gerakan Ikhwanul Muslimin, Dari Sayid Qutb sampai Rasyid Al-Ghannusyi* (Jakarta, 2002).

[38] See Roxanne L.Reuben et al. *Princeton Readings in Islamic Thought: text and context from Al-Banna to bin Laden* (Princeton, 2009). Also Mohammad-Mahmould Ould Mphamedou, *Understanding Al Qaeda* (London, 2007): Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (New York, 2011); Karen J. Greenberg, ed. *Al Qaeda Now* (New York, 2005); Peter Bergen, *Manhunt: The ten-year hunt for Osama bin laden from 9/11 to Abbottabad* (New York, 2012); James Veitch and John Martinn, *The Death of Osama bin Laden and the Future of Al-Qaeda* (Bangladesh, 2011).

al-Banna, Maududi, Khomeini,[39] al Zawahiri [40] as well as by the actions of Osama bin Laden.[41]

The Vision

These activists give others a vision of what the world would be like if social injustice could be set right – and if hunger and thirst could be things of the past. If only financial equity, the sharing of resources and fair prices could balance poverty and the consequences of drought and drinking bad water. The developed world includes a quarter of the world's population and four-fifths of its income. In contrast, the developing world includes three quarters of the world's population living off a fifth of the world's income.[42]

The Call to Action and Pathways to Violence

Every once in a while someone with a vision gathers a group and together the group sets out to change the world as they have experienced it. The group attracts people of the same mind. Often the group is related to a particular Mosque (or church), school or college, or is centred in a university. Members of the group educate each other or attach themselves to a leader who has a vision and a sense of how the vision can be put into action. The group prepares itself religiously with meticulous care and then prepares itself strategically. If it does not have sponsors then it will seek out the right sponsor for a particular action that has been planned.

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[39] Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations* (Berkeley, 1981)
[40] Montasser Al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda* (London, 2004).
[41] Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York , 2007).
[42] See Willi Brandt, *North-South: A Programme for Survival* (Pan Books, 1980), 32.

There are many variables and there are many different passions at work. The genius of a leader is that all the differences can be harnessed to produce an outcome of which the group will be proud. Every so often these groups – when they find their plans are thwarted – resort to the weapons of their opponents and choose violence in order to transform the world as they see it. Sometimes they will be propelled by anger and hated. Sometimes they will be propelled by compassion and loyalty to each other and to the cause.

Sometimes they will die in the interests of that cause – believing that without humans sacrificing their own lives – or being sacrificed by others who wish to deny them their cause – nothing will change.[43] Suicide bombing has become very important today in areas of conflict. An expert in this field insightfully comments,

> *Martyrdom takes on a new form, combines Islamic notions and a modern content of self-expression. It gambles with life and death because its deadly sense of the sacred has been concocted inside a purely imaginary but warlike neo-ummah. Killing oneself and one's enemy in a generalized Apocalypse is a way of fighting the injustice of the Crusades from a Judeo-Christian west… Jihadism is a typically incoherent product of the globalization of the last world religion to have a social and cultural utopia that still has credibility in the eyes of some believers. It is one of the avatars of the globalization of the world.*[44]

Sometimes those who die will be tools in the hands of others who will manipulate them for their own cause. Outsiders wonder about the

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[43] But as Chris Hedges reminds his readers, "All wars feed off martyrs, the mention of the dead instantly shutting down all arguments for compromise or tolerance for the other. It is the dead who rule. They speak from beyond the grave urging a nation onward to revenge". *War is a Force*, 94.

[44] Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (London, 2005), 236-7. Also Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York, 2005). Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York, 2006).

source of the power that propels people to do such things. They want to demystify the mystery that stirred humans to create religion in the first place in an effort to restrain and harness the urge to violence that lies deep within the human consciousness[45] and comes to the surface especially when people are alienated and dehumanized by others.

When religion drives a vision tagged with violence that comes out of a sense of deep alienation from human values, it is almost impossible to stop. When this happens, religion is truly radicalized. This kind of violence has deep religious roots that takes those involved back into the depths of the human consciousness and into the primal past of humans. Dudley Young expressed this sentiment:

> *It is important to recognise that all wars are holy wars, not because of the religious banners that may or may not be flown, but because the flowing of blood and the ripping of flesh consecrate the ground in the oldest and simplest sense we know. To kill and to die on the battle- field, to mutilate and bleed brings one before the dicing table of the Divine [gods], where luck and skill and courage combine to name the players definitively. Some will be chosen to play again tomorrow. Some will be wounded and scarred, and some will be mutilated and bleed. But all have been gathered in the presence of the most real thing, to know and be known with the utmost clarity in an ecstatic [orgiastic] festival of generosity and hatred.*[46]

From his experience on the war front Chris Hedges makes a similar point but uses different language,

> *There are always people willing to commit unspeakable human atrocity in exchange for a little power and privilege. The task of*

[45] Dudley Young, *Origins of the Sacred: The Ecstasies of Love and War* (Little Brown and Company: London, 1991), especially chapter 7. Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (Anchor Books, 2002), especially chapter 1 "The Myth of War".

[46] Young, *Origins of the Sacred*, 274. I have changed two words to suit my context. The words replaced are in square brackets.

> *carrying out the violence, of killing leads to perversion. The seductiveness of violence, the fascination with the grotesque…the god-like empowerment over other human lives and the drug of war combine, like the ecstasy of erotic love, to let our senses command our bodies. Killing unleashes within us dark undercurrents that see us desecrate and whip ourselves into greater orgies of destruction. The dead treated with respect in peacetime, are abused in wartime.*[47]

So the radical religion that chooses violence as its method of bringing about change, taps into religious roots that run deep into the human psyche. Jessica Stern sums up what I have been suggesting in this way:

> *Religious terrorism arises from pain and loss and from impatience with a God who is slow to respond to our plight, who doesn't answer. It's converts long for a simpler time, when right and wrong were clear, when there were heroes and martyrs, when the story was simple, when the neighbourhood was small and when we knew each other. When the outside world, with its vulgar cosmopolitanism, didn't humiliate us or threaten our children… It is about purifying the world. The way forward is clear: kill or be killed. Kill and be rewarded in heaven. Kill and the Messiah will come. It is about seeing the world in black and white.*[48]

Of course to achieve any outcomes of any consequence the issues need to be clearly set out and defined-they need to be black or white and achievable. Let us explore a little further the nature of radical or extremist religion.

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[47] Hedges, *War is a Force*, 88-9.
[48] Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, 2003).

The Characteristics of Radicalized Religion

Radical religion is a state of consciousness based on clearly articulated beliefs. The following are the most important:

- God is an objective, realist presence that commands respect and awe as the Creator of everything that exists has existed and will exist.
- The planet earth is the gift of God to the humans. The world of animals, birds and plants is included in this gift: humans are the stewards of creation.
- God has given humans a blueprint in sacred texts of how to live. Through the intervention of special individuals (Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad), God has endeavoured to keep people on the right path.
- But over time the situation has deteriorated until the end of life as humans have known it is now in sight.
- Humans of the 21st century have the ability to destroy the earth through the use of nuclear weapons.
- They have learned how to degrade the planet's capacity to renew itself by continuous conflict and war.
- They have abused creation so much that the environment under pressure has begun to crack, throwing populations into confusion.
- The social fabric of all societies is under extreme pressure. Humanity has lost its way. The judgement of God is imminent. There is a cosmic battle going on between the forces of good and evil and an apocalyptic end to the existence of the planet and the universe is imminent. Those who are loyal to God take the brunt of the struggle. The fact that they are persecuted for their loyalty is a sign that the end is near. If they remain faithful then a rich reward awaits them in an afterlife.
- God is on their side and the struggle upon which they have embarked is divinely ordained.
- There are verses in sacred texts to reassure and to justify this understanding of the world. God speaks through sacred texts to guide

their thinking and empower their actions. If they are called upon to act violently, then God has called them and instructed them to act in this way for the sake of others, for the redemption of the community of faith and perhaps also for the sake of all humankind.

To make this world-view work for believers, three things are essential.

1. A no frills approach to reading the sacred text- the simplest meaning is the obvious meaning.
2. The belief that the person's religious tradition, based on this sacred text, is the truth and that there are no other ways in which to be loyal to God. There is only one blueprint of salvation. Other ways have been replaced by this blueprint or else they are rejected by it.
3. The believer is under an obligation to spread this blueprint of salvation, first within the same religious community as the only way and then secondly to others outside the community, to seek their conversion.

Defusing the Radical Realist with Religious Non-Realism

But there are other ways of thinking about religion that allows individuals to be genuine believers without being religious realists. [49] The language we use in speaking about theological and metaphysical matters may be considered metaphorical. The claims that religious people make about the invisible divine world are not the same kind of claims that a scientist like Stephen Hawking makes about the origin of the universe.[50] In fact for many thoughtful believers, *a non-realist God* makes better sense of religious experience than does a realist God.

[49] A realist God is a God "out there" and exists outside of human existence but whose presence (and existence) we can experience in our own lives. A non-realist God is a "God within" who does not exist apart from human existence and is to be found in the human consciousness.

[50] See *A Brief History of Time* (London, 1998) and *A Briefer History of Time* (London, 2005).

The sacred texts that provide the blue print for God's plan of salvation all have a historical context that can be ascertained-and hermeneutic methods exist to help the scholar and the believer place texts in the context of the world in which they originated. Claims that only one sacred text is *The Truth* quickly fade with the recognition that other sacred texts are just as important to the human search for reality in the ancient and modern world. Religious non realism in this sense does not lead to violent action to put things right; it leads in a different direction: to an accommodation with other world-views and to the recognition of religious pluralism.

It also means that believers from one tradition are able to work with believers from another tradition without that *working together* compromising a particular individual's faith. In both cases (religious realism and religious non-realism) religion empowers believers to act. However, the use of empowerment is different. Non-realism does not use violence to achieve its goals. In non-realism there is a commitment to change and often this is radical change, but it is pursued through critical analysis, persuasion, dialogue and compromise.

Moving Forward

The key to moving forward is to develop the ability of being able to give equal respect to the religious traditions. It also means developing the skills and attitude of mind to understand why others might believe the way that they do and why they may wish to express their convictions in a particular way that may be different – or even in some cases offensive. The "bottom line" is that people are different and experience the world differently and live their lives differently from each other. Culture, contemporary history, and the families and the communities we live in shape us as humans from the cradle to the grave.

A non-realist view of religion makes it possible to "put one's feet in another person's shoes", to see what they see, and understand the rituals

and beliefs of others. One may interpret the significance of all these things for believers in a particular tradition without making value judgements or being disloyal to one's own convictions and beliefs. Academics and teachers, at all levels of the education system can help believers discover the merits of this empathetic understanding of religion.

But it is not easy, given the situation in the Middle East and in much of South and Southeast Asia, to choose the path of "unity in diversity". Right now the Muslim world faces the Western world with a challenge that the Western world has not handled well. Unless attitudes change, and the foreign policies of leading countries in the world become more dialogical and less belligerent, there seems little hope of this confrontation dissolving. The lesson from the occupation of Afghanistan, the insurgency in Iraq, the conflict over Palestine, the conflict in Libya and the civil war in Syria suggests that activists have become encouraged by success and are now more certain than ever that the way of violence empowered by religion has rewards.

Misleading Terminology

I have implied in this paper that terms like "fundamentalist" or "Islamist" to describe the religious views of Muslim activists that choose violence is not helpful to the task of actually unravelling what they want and what drives them and why. These are pejorative terms and are often used because the user wants to dismiss religion as a major and controlling factor in the conflict. It is the unwillingness in the West to understand what motivates the Muslim activists and why, that is troubling – especially when this unwillingness controls and shapes foreign policy. This has prompted one scholar to write:

> *The consistent need to find explanations other than religious ones for the attacks says, in fact, more about the West than it does about the jihadis. Western scholars have generally failed to*

> *take religion seriously. Secularists whether liberals or socialists grant true explanatory power to political, social or economic factors but discount the plain sense of religious statements made by the jihadis themselves. To see why jihadis declared war on the United States and tried to kill as many Americans as possible, we must be willing to listen to their own explanations. To do otherwise is to impose a Western interpretation on the extremists, in effect to listen to ourselves rather than to them… To understand why September 11 happened, and what the jihadis are likely to do in the future, the reader must be willing to suspend cultural and intellectual perceptions and become merged in the mindset of the extremists.* [51]

Patrick Poole, in writing a review of S. K. Malik's book *The Quranic Concept of War*, makes this comment, "we are engaged in a civilizational conflict that exhibits religious and cultural presuppositions", and to paraphrase him – "we cannot afford to ignore the doctrinal issues related to Islamic society".[52] There is no shortage of books written in the West endeavouring to untangle the reasons for 9/11[53] but there have been few attempts to unravel the story, taking Muslim protests against the West seriously.[54] There is a very clear gap

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[51] Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, 2006), 7, 14.

[52] *patrickpoole.com/2005/12/quranic-concept-of-war-and-terror.html*, December 15, 2005, 5 (currently inaccessible).

[53] For example the books and articles of Bernard Lewis, particularly, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (London, 2002/3). But see also John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York, 2002). Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America* (London, 2002). Ziauddin Sardar & Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (Cambridge, 2002).

[54] But see Daniel Benjamin & Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War Against America* (New York, 2002/3); Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London/ New York, 2002); Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (London, 2004/2006).

here that needs urgent and sensitive attention.[55] Quick and easy responses, such as moves to quiet Arab streets through overwhelming force, may be emotionally satisfying but will in the long run prove ineffective and contribute to greater radicalization and anti-Americanism. Global terrorism will continue to afflict the international body until we address its political and economic causes, causes that will otherwise continue to provide a breeding ground for hatred and radicalism, the rise of extremist movements and recruits for the bin Laden's of the world.[56]

Conclusion

Religious pluralism and religious fundamentalism see themselves operating on different wavelengths. The fundamentalist[57] will see nothing in common with the pluralist and will wish "to get rid" of the pluralist. The pluralist on the other hand will always see the fundamentalist operating as one actor in the stream of religious thinking that appears in all of the world religions and will accommodate the fundamentalist. But this happens in the safety of academia. Out in the field it is a different matter. When radical religious activism is in the ascendancy and is claiming the hearts and the minds of believers, the

[55] See the following. Greg Fealy & Virginia Hooker, *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia: A Contemporary Source Book* (Singapore, 2006); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, 2000); Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, & Judaism in the Modern World* (Pennsylvania, 1994); Fabio Petito & Pavlos Hatzopoulos, *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (London, 2003); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (London, 2005).
[56] John L. Esposito, *Unholy War* (New York, 2002), 160.
[57] There is as much confusion around the meaning of terrorist and terrorism as there is around the use of fundamentalist and fundamentalism. But see the collection of essays *Terorisme dan Fundamentalisme Agama* (Malang, 2003).

pluralist has little opportunity and perhaps few credentials to claim a voice, either for moderation or for a liberal perspective.

Can the two co-exist? Yes, because the two, along with other strands in between, reflect the world views that believers and adherents hold in particular religious traditions. In spite of the tendency of the radical activist to eliminate the pluralist and to purify the religious tradition from deviations, in the long run the activist knows that only by recognizing differences and a middle ground can they continue to exist and use their power.

This is one of the ironies of being human. An individual can seek to purify their soul in a lifetime by living a particular lifestyle. But whole nations can hardly be expected to do the same – especially in the numbers that now occupy this planet and the degree of cultural and social diversity that is represented by the peoples of the earth. An individual's agenda can seldom be successfully applied to a nation. A cursory reading of the history of religions makes this point abundantly clear.[58]

The contribution of the religious studies scholar, however, is crucial in other respects. A critical knowledge of the histories of religions ensures that the claims that are made about one religion being superior to another are kept in perspective. For example the history of conflict is essentially the story of religious clashes. The Crusades (1096-1270) brought Muslims and Christians into conflict, and left an indelible footprint in the psyche of both Muslim and Christian – but the causes of this conflict are complex and multi-layered and have kept historians of different perspectives busy for some time.

The religious wars in Europe (1450-1750), some of the bloodiest ever waged, eventually brought people to the point of realizing that if

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[58] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London, 2004); Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginnings of Our Religious Traditions* (London, 2006/07). See also footnote 3.

such wars were to continue there would be little progress made in any other area of life. But it took time for the futility of conflict to be recognized and for people to realize that the church did not have a clear enough view of truth and to kill each other in the quest for truth would not make the matter any clearer.

The Peace of Westphalia (1648) was a series of treaties signed in Europe by the war weary and one of these (the Treaty of Osnabruck) formally acknowledged and accepted that there are different ways of being Christian, thus taking the first step towards Catholic and Protestant Christians agreeing to tolerate each other's right to be Christian. The overall outcome of Westphalia was an agreement to separate the role and activities of the State from the role and activities of the church be it Catholic or Protestant and to put the responsibility for declaring and waging war in the hands of the State and not the church.[59]

Gradually Christian academic thinkers began to realize that the basis of the conflicts lay in the way the Bible was interpreted and as human knowledge grew the interpretation of the Bible kept pace with an increasing historical knowledge of the Bible. So scholars began to ask for example some of the awkward questions about the Gospel traditions concerning Jesus. Once this step was taken late in the 18th century the revolution in the study of the Bible took a new direction – although it would take until the 1960s before the academic study of the Bible would begin to make a real difference.[60]

From the end of the 18th century until now scholars have worked to piece together the story of the origins of Christianity and have explored the way believers in Judaism, Christianity and Islam came by their faiths. Conflicts have continued but they have increasingly been

[59] For the detail see Christopher Catherwood, *Making War in the Name of God* (New York, 2007)

[60] See James Moffatt, *The Historical New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1901). Something similar may well have been the case with the Qur'an. See for example John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu* (Oxford, 1978) and Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, 1987).

conflicts of words and not of force. With better knowledge of who we are as Jews, Christians and Muslims, comes a better framework with which to tackle the issues that hurt and divide us now. These issues have been better pursued in the University in religious studies departments than in the Church and seminary where confessional issues take precedence over history.

Muslim scholars also need to move forward and explore similar pathways with regard to the Qur'an[61] and the history of Islam. If this scholarship can be carried together (with differences respected and acknowledged) then the myths about each tradition can be tackled and the re-education of scholar, teacher and student begins in a serious way.[62] This is why this doctoral programme at the University of Gadja Mada is such an exciting creation – especially in an academic environment where institutions make it possible for staff to pursue the answers to questions in a context of respect and without threat to academic integrity and personal religious commitments.

There is no better place to begin such a project than in the cultural capital of the largest Muslim country in the world – although one will hope that in the not too distant future similar programmes will open in the capital Jakarta where the policy decisions are made that affect the whole country. To take this step is a gift from Indonesia in the years to come for other parts of the world. Time will tell. It is more modest I daresay to begin the dream here and to launch it and to see it through the fragile foundation period with all the support that is needed to enable

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[61] An academic approach to understanding the Qur'an was promoted by Richard Bell, *The Qur'an Translated with a Critical Re-Arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh, 1937-38). See also Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Quran*, ed. W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh, 1970) and the essays in Ibn Warraq, ed., *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (New York, 2000).

[62] One of the scholars already working in this way is Karen Armstrong. See in particular, *A History of God: The 4,000 year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London, 1994); *Islam: A Short History* (New York, 2000); *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (London, 1993); *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* (London, 2006).

such a project to succeed. To found a programme such as this in a time of crisis is just the starting point that is needed in the scholarly attempt to enable Christian and Muslim to respect each other's faiths and the rich traditions (the good and the bad) and histories that come with these faiths and to lay a platform for seeking pluralism and diversity in our age of radical and extremist religion and violence.

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