# INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

## Western Perspectives on Dialogue in a World of Conflict and Violence

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# Abstract

This paper outlines the conditions that make for a conducive environment for interreligious dialogue to take place effectively. Before arriving at the conditions, it discusses the difference between a religious and a rational cosmological worldview, and religion's place in the modern world. Though it is not inherent, there may potentially be a conflict between the traditional religious values of participation, hierarchy, and salvation, and the values of modernity including an emphasis on individualism, progress, and equality. Understanding this contestation, which contributes as a cause to religious conflict and violence, also illuminates the ways in which dialogue can be useful in promoting interreligious understanding.

## Introduction[1]

This paper expresses a deep concern at both local and global levels for the place religions have both as cause of conflict and violence and as resolution to that conflict. Dialogue is clearly an important element in the resolution of conflict, in shaping the future of plural societies, and in building a better world. But before we can examine the importance of dialogue, we need to understand something about religion itself, or religions themselves, in relation to violence and conflict.[2] Behind this theme are a number of questions, particularly why are religions so often implicated in violence despite a rhetoric of peace? Why are there so many different religions? Why have they not resolved their differences by now? Are religions still relevant to global politics and the future of humanity? I cannot address all of these problems here but wish to make the point that the issue of interreligious dialogue is complex because of the very nature of religions and their ambiguous relationship to conflict and violence. In order to formulate an understanding of dialogue and its importance for the future in resolving conflict and violence, we need analysis of where we are, what religions are, and how they see themselves in the modern world.

John Bowker has recently drawn our attention to how the question of difference between religions is extremely urgent, partly because of the violence done in the name of religion.[3] In the United Kingdom (UK) for example, Bowker cites that in 2017 there were three horrific attacks in three months in Manchester and London from people claiming a connection with Islam.[4] Throughout the world, religions have been implicated in some way with conflict and violence.[5] Topical examples include conflicts between Israel and Palestine,[6] between Sunnis and Shia,[7] between Christian fundamentalism and the secular state in the United States of America (USA),[8] Hindu extremists lynching 'cow killers' in India,[9] Christian communities targeted in Egypt,[10] and Buddhist violence against Muslims in Myanmar.[11] Of course, as Bowker observes, religions are not the sole cause of these conflicts but to deny that they are implicated in this violence is simply false. Religions can and

[1] I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for their extremely helpful and astute comments as well as those of the editors of the journal.

[2] In a good survey, Mark Juergensmeyer makes the point that since 9/11 religion has been associated with violence and there has been a proliferation of literature about this. See Mark Juergensmeyer, "Religious Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed Peter B. Clarke, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 890-908.

[3] John Bowker, *Religion Hurts: Do Religions Do More Harm than Good?*, London: SPCK, 2018.

[4] Ibid, 7-8.

[5] Steve Clarke cites several examples in the opening chapter of his book: the Mountain Meadows Massacre (1857) in which settlers travelling through Utah were massacred by Mormons, the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Huguenots by Catholics in Paris (1572), and 9/11 (2001) to cite just three; see Steve Clarke, *The Justification of Religious Violence*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, 1-2. There is a vast literature on this that is beyond the scope of this paper to review, but in brief some claim religion to be a direct cause of violence (see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed., Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003, and Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence*, Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2005), or at least a major factor (see John Bowker, *Licensed Insanities: Religions and Beliefs in God in the Contemporary World*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), while others claim that religion is simply a cover for other violent motivations (see Keith Ward*, Is Religion Dangerous?*, Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2006, and William T. Cavanagh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Clarke remains agnostic regarding the cause of violence and rather attempts to explain the ways in which religion is used to justify violence; see Clarke, *The Justification of Religious Violence*, 7.

[6] Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[7] Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shia Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 4-6.

[8] Douglas Pratt, "Religion and Terrorism: Christian Fundamentalism and Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22.3 (2010): 438-56.

[9] Cassie Adcock, "Cow Protection and Minority Rights in India: Reassessing Religious Freedom," *Journal of Asian Affairs* 49.2 (2018): 340-54.

[10] Jason Brownlee, "Social Relationships and the Prevention of Anti-Christian Violence in Egypt," *The Middle East Journal* 72.1 (2018): 66-88.

[11] Peter Lehr, *Militant Buddhism: The Rise of Religious Violence in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand*, London: Springer, 2019, 157-91.

do have a direct influence on conflict and violence and are not simply an excuse for conflict but can be integral to that very conflict. Hindu mobs killing of 'cow killers' is of course not simply because the cow is revered as sacred by most Hindus, but is linked to poverty, caste, levels of education, and manoeuvring by political elites,[12] but to deny the religious component, the Hindu worldview, is to ignore an important component of the situation. Extremist Christians who justify violence against doctors to defend the rights of the unborn in the USA,[13] or the suicide bomber who justifies her action through reference to the lesser *jihad* and the Qur'anic command to defend Muslims,[14] are acting in accordance with their true belief about the nature of their religion and = what is demanded of them as religious people. Now we might say, as many do, that these are perversions of Islam or Christianity, but it is nevertheless the case that violent acts are given religious justifications and their perpetrators are deeply saturated with religious conviction. Many secularists, with some justification one might say, ask why are religions always fighting each other and why are they now killing us?[15] So, my first point, is that religions are implicated in conflict throughout the world and that religion is not simply a rhetoric that covers purely political motivation. To address these issues, I will organise my remarks under three headings: tradition, modernity, and dialogue. We can only appreciate dialogue as it develops in the context of modernity and tradition. However, the conflict between tradition and modernity often gives rise to religious violence.

## Tradition

Although there is a long history of religious violence going back hundreds of years,[16] violence and conflict involving religions today is bound up with contemporary, global conditions, and in particular, I would posit, the development of modernity, globalisation, and secularism. There has been a shift in what Charles Taylor calls the 'social imaginaire',[17] the collective imagination of what our values are and what we deem to be a good society or a society that fosters human flourishing. This social imaginaire of modern, global societies can conflict with traditional religious imaginaires and cultural values. There are historical roots to this, particularly in what I have called the Religious Cosmological Model (RCM) in contrast to the Galilean Mathematical Model (GMM) of understanding the world.[18] The GMM is the scientific way of explaining our lives, based on what is measurable and quantifiable. It claims that it can explain the cosmos, where explanation means the location of a cause, and rejects religious accounts of the universe. On this account, the universe is a material, measurable and quantifiable entity that can be explained without reference to any supernatural origin. There is no God in heaven, there is no evidence of such an entity. Nevertheless, since the universe is controlled by universal laws and mathematical rules, predictions can be made about it, which is the job of science to discover. Galileo is arguably a key figure in the origin of this worldview that leads through to Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton.[19] The GMM of the universe has generally replaced the RCM since the seventeenth century and the rise of secular science.[20] While I have distinguished the two models

[12] Julia Eckert, "The Social Dynamics of Communal Violence in India," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3.2 (2009): 172-87.
[13] D.S. Cohen and K. Connon, *Living in the Crosshairs: The Untold Stories of Anti-Abortion Terrorism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[14] Elena Mastors and Alyssa Deffenbaugh, *The Lesser Jihad*, Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007.
[15] Bowker, *Religion Hurts*, 7.
[16] Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, London: Vintage Books, 2015.
[17] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaires*, Harvard, MA: Belknap Press, 2004.
[18] Gavin Flood, *Religion and the Philosophy of Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019; C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.
[19] See W.B. Dress, *Religion and Science in Context: A Guide to the Debates*, London: Routledge, 2010.
[20] In the retreat of Christian religion from cosmology, the place of Galileo is central. Galileo's discoveries of moons around Jupiter, of sunspots, and that the moon reflects the light of the sun were all rejected by Church authorities as being against

rather sharply (they are, after all, models), and while there is a history of antagonism between them, the detail of their interaction is more complex. For example, in the contemporary world sometimes the GMM seeks to articulate itself in more 'religious' terms, laying stress on transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence (AI), for example Donna Haraway's merging of science with transhuman ideals and the notion of the cyborg in the 1990s.[21] But in principle, generally the hard sciences have not traditionally accommodated religious or cosmological ideas, although there are exceptions (as with Haraway).[22]

A second understanding also began to develop that places emphasis on humanity, the humanist perspective from the Renaissance, with figures such as Erasmus that came to articulation in the eighteenth century, especially with the philosopher Immanuel Kant whose later lectures on anthropology exemplify this approach.[23] What is important in the human case is not mathematics but understanding human reality in terms of our motives, cultures, and language (although Kant himself, curiously, did not emphasise language so much). This emphasis on the human, the development of humanism, is associated with ideas of progress and also emphasises individualism and equality. In contrast to both the scientific and humanistic understanding of human life, the RCM seeks anchorage in the past, and offers a certain fixed hierarchy in the universe, in which all things have their place. In this traditional worldview, like in the Abrahamic traditions and some kinds of Hinduism, there is a graded hierarchy of beings with God at the top, followed by ranks of beings such as angels, demons, humans, and other life forms below him. This pre-modern worldview has been linked to theocracy and provides a justification for polities with a king or emperor understood as a manifestation or representative on earth of a higher, transcendent source. In the UK the last echo of this is with James the 1st (1566-1625) and the doctrine of the divine right of kings that his son Charles inherited and lost his head for. This RCM was found in pre-modern Europe, India, and even in China with the emperor as the representative of heaven on earth. An illustration of this old worldview can be found in medieval England.

In 1194 a young man in Oxford called Edmund, whose brother Adam was the Abbot of a Benedictine monastery at Eynsham some five and a half miles away, fell sick. He was taken to his brother's monastery where he became a monk but remained very ill for over a year in the days before antibiotics. According to the written account, he collapsed on Good Friday 1196 and during this state of coma had a vision. He met St Nicholas who took him to the other world where he perceived the suffering of those in Purgatory, including the old abbot of the monastery who had misused funds and behaved immorally, and a drunken goldsmith from Oxford who owed him money. From Purgatory, St Nicholas took Edmund up to heaven where he perceived Christ enthroned, surrounded by angels and blessed souls. There was even a higher heaven that Edmund was not allowed to go into. St Nicholas returned Edmund to his body and he woke up on Easter Saturday, recounted his tale, which was written down in Latin by his brother Adam as the *Monk of Eynsham* (*Visio monachi de Eynsham*) and translated into Middle English, French and German some three hundred years later.[24] There are thirty-three manuscripts of this text remaining, which bears witness to its popularity. This was one text

scripture. See Drees, *Religion and Science*; Jerome J. Langford, *Galileo, Science and the Church*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992; Gavin Flood, *The Importance of Religion: Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 155-57. Indeed, Galileo's works were only removed from the index of prohibited books in 1835; see Drees, *Religion and Science*, 25.

[21] Donna T. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1991.

[22] For more contemporary developments in molecular biology interfacing with transhuman values, 'reinventing the human in a molecular age,' see Helga Nowotony and Giuseppe Testa, *Naked Genes: Reinventing the Human in a Molecular Age*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.

[23] Immanuel Kant (translated by Robert B. Louden), "Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View," in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, eds Günther Zöller and Robert Louden, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 227-429; Flood, *Religion and the Philosophy of Life*, 40-41.

[24] Robert Easting (ed), *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 2002; Gavin Flood, *The Truth Within: A History of Inwardness in Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 54-61.

among others called vision literature in the middle ages. Edmund's story well illustrates the RCM. Edmund and his fellow monks and lay citizens live in a world in which there is a hierarchical fixed order, with God at the top, Christ mediating between God and lower levels, and below him angels, blessed souls, and then the suffering in Purgatory, with our material world of humans, animals, and plants, being part of this natural order. Furthermore, this is not simply a hierarchical order but an eschatological vision of the purpose of human life and the redemption of souls from sin. In other words, the moral order is deeply implicated in the very structure of the cosmos. With the rise of the GMM this understanding of the world became shattered and the cosmos itself divorced from an ethical order in the social imaginaire: morality becomes with Kant an internal, even though objective, necessity.[25] There was then, a shift from a model of participation, in which the meaning of a person or community is linked to location within a cosmological structure, to conscience, in which meaning is linked to individual goals and intentions and that, in time, became an individualistic "ethics of authenticity".[26]

This fundamental model of a hierarchical universe with different classes of being arranged along a vertical axis is common to traditional religions and there are numerous examples from Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Chinese religions, although in the latter case the cosmological hierarchy is less complex and more orientated towards the human social imagination. The point I am trying to make is that religions carry with them this implicit cosmological model into the modern world. Indeed, we might contrast what I have called the RCM with modernist social values of the humanist perspective as well as the scientific, mathematical understanding (the GMM) that in many ways are its direct opposite. Developed, technologically advanced countries such as Singapore, the USA, China, countries in Europe, and so on, are built upon cultural values and a social imaginaire that, developing in reaction against the RCM, is very different and even opposed to it. There has been a process of what Max Weber called disenchantment, and what Charles Taylor calls the great disembedding,[27] in which societies are taken out of their cosmological niche and in which there is the development of emphasis on the individual and individualism as a value along with the idea of progress (and technology). Taylor's secularisation thesis has been challenged – it is not so clear that the secularised world is completely stripped of magical or enchanted elements – although the general orientation in much of the Western world and Asia seems to be that religion plays a lesser role in the public sphere. It may be the case that most of Europe and North America is becoming post-Christian[28] although this is complex and in the light of the resistance of religion to eradication, a better description might be that modern, developed societies are 'post-secular'.[29] Indeed, modern political institutions themselves, especially democracy, arguably have religion as a pre-political condition.[30] Nevertheless, religion in a post-secular world is not the same as religion in a pre-secular world. Individualism as a value means that we no longer participate in a cosmological, hierarchical order, but rather modernity emphasises the individual, equal to other individuals in societies that articulate an ideal of equality (although whether equality is realised or not is a different matter).

In older societies religious life was bound up with social life. How we behaved, and our comportment towards others, was rooted in the cosmological visions of the religions we were born into. In medieval Europe, for example, the ordering of society was part of God's plan,[31] as in ancient

[25] Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 68-9.
[26] See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
[27] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaires*, 50.
[28] See Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
[29] Bart C. Labuschagne, "Religion and Politics in Post-Secular Society: Beyond the Public/Private Divide," in *Religion Beyond Its Private Role in Modern Society*, eds Wim Hofstee and Arie van der Kooij, Leiden: Brill, 2013, 24-7.
[30] Ibid, 17-9.
[31] Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religions and Social Thought. The Interpretation of Mary and Martha. The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ. The Orders of Society,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

and medieval India, the orders of society are part of the structure of the cosmos itself.[32] Once there was a separation of religion into the private realm away from governance in the public realm, an intellectual move that was precipitated by John Locke,[33] religion gradually lost its full participative nature and were left with a certain backward glance or nostalgia for that participative understanding of the RCM. This is arguably one reason for violence and religious conflict in developed countries, when religions such as an extremist strand of Islam or Christianity wish to assert the centrality of religion in the realm of governance; religion is not a private matter but a matter of public, social concern and the ordering of society in accordance with divine ordinance.

So, for effective dialogue, we therefore need to appreciate the force of traditional cosmological models and the force of the sense of participation in an order greater than the individual. This can be a wrench for communities as they move into the twenty-first century and there is some degree of paradox in Islamic State or Daesh advocating an ideology that harks back to the early middle ages while using the latest technologies to promote its values.[34] The situation is complex. Traditional religions often seek to be rooted in the past – a feature of fundamentalism and literal interpretations of scripture that deny the very idea of interpretation – whilst using modernity to promote that view, as Alami Musa has observed.[35] I might suggest two important reasons for religious violence (although there will be others): firstly, that the conflict between values of modernity that emphasise individualism, egalitarianism and progress sharply contrast with traditional values of the RCM that emphasise participation, hierarchy, and the need for salvation; secondly, that those who promote religious violence do not appreciate the historical depth and sophistication of their traditions, as they implicitly and explicitly reject the notion of interpretation. Let us look a little more deeply at these ideas in relation to modernity.

## Modernity

If the values of modernity include individualism, equality, and progress,[36] then these potentially conflict with traditional religious values of participation, hierarchy, and salvation that we find in the RCM. But there is not necessarily a conflict here in that people can hold on to religious values in their personal life while still participating as a citizen in the wider cultural values of modernity. Indeed, this is a feature of being religious in the modern nation state.[37] To understand such values, we need to inquire into the fundamental dynamics of developed societies and make some generalisations that help us locate contemporary religions and the issue of conflict. Modern societies can be understood as containing two important axes central to their functioning: firstly they have legal systems, there is a legal axis in modern societies and a developed legislature,[38] and secondly, they have systems of centralisation, modes of governance and bureaucracies in which there is variable centralisation of

[32] Brian K. Smith, "Classifying the Universe: Ancient Indian Cosmogonies and the Varna System," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23.2 (1989): 241-60.
[33] Paul Griffiths, *The Problems of Religious Diversity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 102-08.
[34] Truls Hallberg Tonnessen, "Islamic State and Technology," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11.6 (2017): 101-11.
[35] Mohammad Alami Musa, "When Modernity Helps Fuel Fundamentalism," *RSIS Commentary*, 14 February 2018.
[36] The topic of cultural values in modernity is a contested field. The structural anthropologist Louis Dumont analysed modernity in terms of the development of individualism and equality; see Louis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986. His argument follows from the work of Mauss for whom the notion of the individual was a triumph of western civilization, although widely contested; see Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Lukes (eds), *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
[37] Labuschagne, "Religion and Politics in Post-Secular Society."
[38] Lynn Mather, "Law and Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed Robert E. Goodin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 289-304; Franz Neumann, *The Rule of Law: Political Theory and the Legal System in Modern Society*, Learnington Spa: Dover, 1986.

power and functions, in different degrees at different times.[39] While of course the system of law has power, it is conceptually distinct from direct governance and the centralisation of power. The legislature might develop independently of governance, and governance might not have a developed legislature. If we examine these two axes, legal framework and centralisation of power, then we can see the extent to which traditional religious values can fit into the modern state. Indeed, modern states might be mapped onto this kind of structure in which the two axes generate different kinds of political ideology. Thus, a strong legal system or legislature in combination with strong centralisation generates a more authoritarian political system whereas its opposite, a weak legislature and weak or no centralisation generates the opposite political system, namely anarchy (see Peter Kropotkin's perhaps overly optimistic view of human nature as characterised by solidarity[40]). A strong legislature but weaker centralisation generates the kind of democracies that exist in Europe with varying degrees of centralisation, while strong centralisation and weak law generates dictatorships, where the will of the dictator is greater than the power of the legislature, as we have in North Korea and perhaps some African countries (Figure 1). This is simply a model or heuristic device, a typology that offers us a way of understanding the place of traditional religions in the modern state and there is no necessary value judgement contained within it. Thus, a religion with a strong legal dimension – such as Jewish law or Islamic Sharia, or even Catholic canon law – might, and does, conflict with secular law. Strong centralisation in combination with a strong legal framework within a religion, as in Roman Catholicism, might also conflict with the secular state, as we find with Catholicism regarding abortion, in Ireland recently for example, and divorce. In countries such as Iran there is a mapping of religious ordering of society onto secular governance. A strong legal framework is not entirely separate from religious legalism and clerics have a lot of power to influence how the society conducts itself.

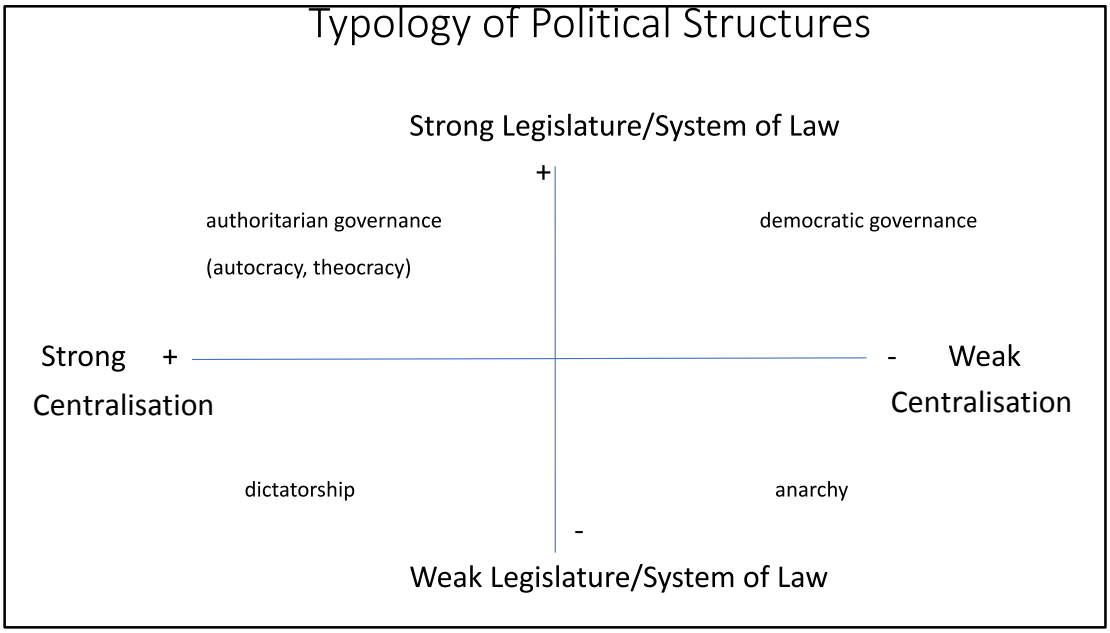


*Figure 1: Typology of Political Structures*

[39] The concept of centralisation has not played that great a place in general theories of governance but has been important in particular regional and historical studies and in Business Studies. Centralisation refers to the state in which power is located principally in a 'centre' – probably an actual place as well – that makes major decisions of governance and distributes power and responsibility to regions. The federal state of Germany would be a good example 'with a strong and increasingly unitarian character' (*aber mit starker und zunehmender unitarischer Prägung*). See Horst Zimmermann, "Eine Einladung zur Zentralisierung," *Perspektiven der Wirtschaftspolitik* 19.3 (2018): 200-09, 200.

[40] Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Morality," in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed Roger N. Baldwin, New York, Dover, 1970, 80-113.

The second thing to observe is that we can separate out power from authority. Thus power, the ability to influence others and cause them to act, is important in the state, but citizens, while they acknowledge state power and conform to it, might revere a different authority, namely the authority of tradition and scripture which itself is believed to articulate a higher authority.[41] Secular states from Singapore to the UK demand weak *power* of tradition – religions cannot dictate policy in our countries – but accept strong *authority* of scripture or tradition so long as it is restricted to the private realm or to smaller communities and does not interfere with governance. Sometimes these conflict as when one interpretation of authoritative scripture conflicts with secular law, as was a case two years ago when a couple in the West Country in the UK refused to allow a gay couple to take a room in their hotel on the grounds that homosexual marriage went against their Christian faith; they were fined by secular law for discrimination.[42] Religions with weak centralised authority and weak canonical authority, such as Buddhist meditation traditions or modern Paganism, sit well with secular states. One would have thought that Falun Gong would be in this category, but because of its direct confrontation with the Chinese state, it is considered a threat.[43] Traditions with strong centralised authority and strong canonical authority, such as Catholicism, potentially conflict with the secular state, although with strong centralisation in the religious or religiously informed state such as Saudi Arabia, religious and secular authorities are more aligned. Islam clearly has strong canonical authority but its degree of centralisation varies and is probably weaker than Catholicism. So, the clash with the secular state comes when secular law conflicts with religious law. While we must recognise that this is a generalisation because Catholicism, and indeed Islam, is not a homogenous reality, universally strong on centralisation and authority – liberation theology, for example, challenged Church authority[44]– but the orthodox, doctrinal position is clear that ecclesial authority lies with the Church in a centralised way. Thus, all of the models of the Church described by Avery Dulles are centrally authoritative in varying degrees.[45]

Transposing our model on to religion itself (Figure 2), we might say that if there is a distinction between religious law and authority, which might include an institution, a sacred text, or the charismatic authority of a teacher, then some religions are orientated more towards religious law and others towards authority. Thus, traditions such as Orthodox Judaism emphasise religious law; some traditions have a strong sense of law and a strong sense of scriptural authority, such as Catholicism and Islam; some religions will have very little emphasis on law but strong emphasis on authority, such as traditions that rely heavily on the charismatic authority of the teacher or master, where the teachings of the guru are sacrosanct, such as the Sant tradition in northern India; and some religions will have no law and little authority, like the DIY religions of late modernity such as modern Paganism or the New Age religions.[46]

Conflict between the state and religion comes when religions that embody the older cosmological model, the RCM, articulated through religious law and authority, conflict with the modern state that embodies values of individualism, equality and progress, as outlined above. Religious violence can result in the clash of values entailed. If this is a first reason for religious conflict and

[41] This is close to the power/status distinction that Louis Dumont has drawn our attention to in the Indian context where power in the hands of the ruling class is distinct from the high status of the non-ruling, priestly class. See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System,* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
[42] Gravetye, "Hotel Owners Who Banned Gay Couple are Fined," *Caterer and Hotel Keeper* 203.4806 (2013).
[43] Stephen Noakes and Caylan Ford, "Managing Political Opposition Groups in China: The Continuing Anti-Falun Gong Campaign," *The China Quarterly* 223 (2015): 658-79.
[44] Phillip E. Berryman, "Latin American Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies* 34.3 (1973): 357-95.
[45] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, New York, NY: Doubleday, 2002.
[46] Any introductory survey book will present the overall dimensions and dynamics of these traditions. For a text that includes contemporary non-traditional religions, see Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge and Hiroko Kawanami (eds), *Religion in the Modern World*, Third Edition, Oxford, Routledge, 2016.

violence, then a second reason is the lack of the idea of interpretation in fundamentalist traditions. There is a strong sense in which the sacred scriptures do not need interpretation, that scripture is self-interpreting and that in fact interpretation is a human projection onto the revealed word. We see this anti-hermeneutical position within some forms of Protestantism and Islam and religious violence is often perpetrated through scriptural sanction. Of course, the idea of *sola scriptura*, the scripture alone interprets itself, is a keystone of Luther's Protestant reform, but even he recognised the importance of the Church in bearing witness to the text.[47] But in the modern world, this doctrine or its equivalent can have dangerous consequences, especially because those who reject the idea of the interpretation of scripture do not understand that that view too is an interpretation.

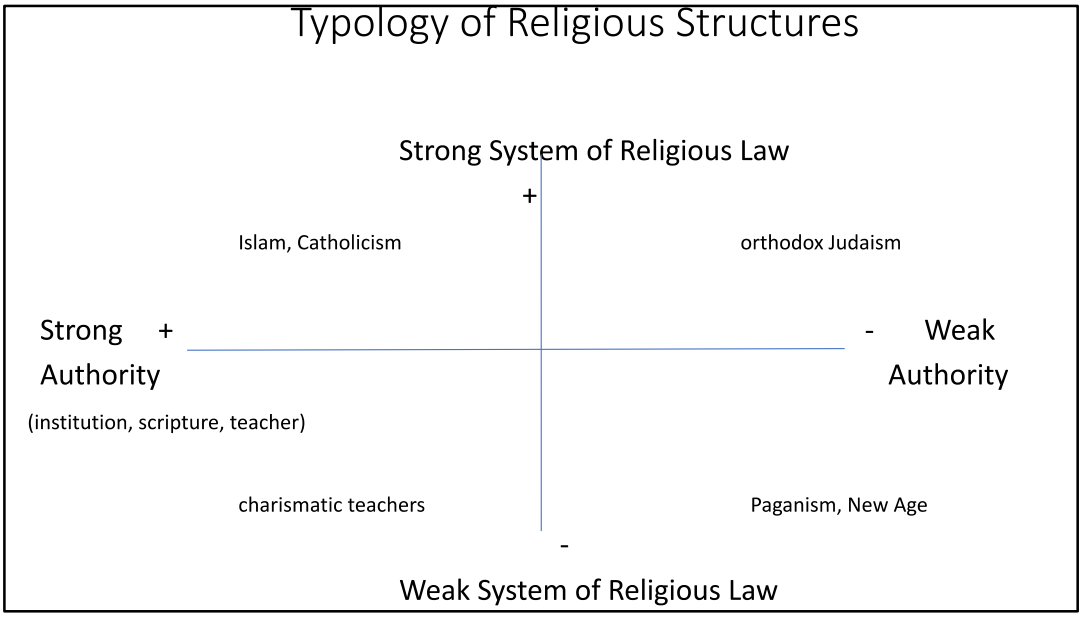


*Figure 2: Typology of Religious Structures*

Such a plea for the importance of interpretation or hermeneutics is not saying that only philological or text-historical study of religious sources is important, but also that traditions themselves must promote a more robust defence of interpretation against fundamentalist detractors within the tradition. Religions can do more to police their boundary against the misinterpretation of scripture in the belief that it is returning to the original intention of God. Islam, for example, has a strong hermeneutical tradition and some contemporary Islamic philosophers such as Abdolkarim Soroush refer to their own work as hermeneutics and promote engagement with modernity through the interpretation of scripture.[48] Beyond analysing why religious violence happens, we also need religions themselves to counter extremism through challenging literalist interpretations of scripture through education and bringing into the modern world the depth and sophistication of traditional theological hermeneutics, be it in Christianity, Islam, Judaism or even Hinduism.

## Dialogue

Now what has all this got to do with dialogue? I think these ideas about types of tradition in relation to types of contemporary state are central in reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of

[47] Diarmaid McCullogh, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, New York, NY: Viking, 2009, 619-20.
[48] Ashk P. Dahlén, *Islamic Law, Epistemology and Modernity: Legal Philosophy in Contemporary Iran*, London: Routledge, 2003.

dialogue and dialogue's effectiveness in producing outcomes. Religions need to engage with each other at more than simply a superficial level, as Paul Hedges has pointed out, especially in relation to Muslim-Christian dialogue[49], beyond merely gaining knowledge of each other (although even that is important). In my view, for effective dialogue in the modern world to take place, at least four conditions have to be fulfilled.

Firstly, there needs to a degree of political stability within states that is not based on authoritarianism but rather in which power is distributed over a range – or at least two – institutions, such as a presidency, parliament, judiciary and so on, which provides checks and balances. There needs to be distributive power in a state providing checks and balances against a single source of dictatorial authority.[50] Secondly, dialogue necessarily entails the idea of the shared public sphere, an idea that developed originally in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. John Locke was important here but so was Kant in his understanding of Enlightenment as autonomy or self-rule, rather than heteronomy or rule by others. The idea of the public sphere has been developed in modernity by Jürgen Habermas and Taylor, as a "space of reasoned communicative strategies" to use Habermas' phrase[51] in which members of a society can meet through the communicative media of print (newspapers, magazine, journals, books), electronic media (Twitter, Facebook and so on), face-to-face encounters in meetings, and institutions such as the university that incorporates all of these modes. Dialogue in the modern state entails the use of these media and so entails the shared, public sphere that has been developing over the last few hundred years. Within the public sphere people can form a common opinion about something and what we might call a dialogical community emerges through the use of media while accepting certain shared values of open communication, desire for progress through social action, and genuine desire to understand and learn from others. The philosopher Armando Salvatore calls this public realm a third sphere alongside economics and the political system.[52] The shared public sphere allows the development of the language of dialogue.

To engage in dialogue, religious practitioners need to speak the same language, or share a language of understanding that draws on cultural values that both parties agree to, namely a framework ensured by the modern, secular state and developed within a framework of human rights. When tradition argues against human rights in favour of reverting to the RCM model, while we can understand this as an antidote to the wrongs of modernity, we nevertheless have to be cautious. When a theologian such as John Milbank argues against human rights,[53] we can see that this is a critique of secularism and the ills of the modern world that have produced colonialism, the breakdown of the family, and social inequity, arguing that rather notions of right order and distributive justice are greater safeguards of human dignity than the language of rights. But the language of human rights has been won through long struggle at international level and we need to be cautious about abandoning it as this might be the only secular buffer against injustice given that a return to a cosmological, participative understanding of human existence is unlikely on a wide scale.

Third, for dialogue to be effective, the participants need to acknowledge distinctive cultural and religious values and this recognition of distinctive cultural values in other traditions and other people, or rather more especially recognising the legitimacy of other values, entails a degree of critical distance from one's own values and tradition. Recognising the legitimacy of the values, beliefs, and

[49] See Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*¸ London: SCM, 2010 and Paul Hedges, *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters: developments, diversity, and dialogue*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
[50] M.P. Dube (ed), Social Justice: Distributive Principles and Beyond, New York, NY: Rawat Publications, 2017.
[51] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (translated by Thomas Burger), Cambridge: Polity, 1989.
[52] Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
[53] John Milbank, "Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1.1 (2012): 203-34.

practices of others entails the ability to put ourselves in their position, to see the world from a different perspective, and to have empathy. Dialogue requires openness to the other and the willingness to learn. Examples of this are Francis Clooney's comparative theology[54] or Peter Ochs' scriptural reasoning.[55] For Clooney, comparative theology involves reading texts across traditions. So, if "theology" is faith-seeking understanding, that understanding comes from the outside, from another tradition. We need other traditions to gain fresh insight into our own. Ochs' scriptural reasoning in which Jews, Muslims and Christians read each other's scriptures together in small groups over long periods of time, thereby forming friendships as crucial to the process, is a good example of interfaith dialogue, but dependent upon support by secular educational institutions such as the University of Virginia and Cambridge University. This involves not only my willingness to engage with someone else and another tradition, but their willingness to engage with me and my tradition. Indeed, there might well be limits to dialogue, and the areas in which dialogue is most needed are the areas that are most difficult, and where conflict and violence are the norm. Interreligious dialogue at an intellectual, university level with people such as Clooney or Ochs is intellectually challenging but there is no real risk. But where dialogue is most important is in areas of conflict with fundamentalist traditions, although that term is contested,[56] especially those which wish to impose their will on others through violence. In other words, where dialogue is most needed is where it is most difficult to achieve. There is little point in dialogue discussing metaphysical abstractions, such as Muslim theologians arguing for the oneness of God against Christian theologians arguing for God as a trinity; these fundamental doctrines are not negotiable having been arrived at often through centuries of reflection and discussion. But areas of ethics in contemporary contexts, what human goods are, how we can achieve a better world, are clearly areas in which constructive dialogue could occur.[57] And rather than open-ended dialogue without a specific goal, a particular dialogical focus with a measurable result would be preferable. For example, interfaith dialogue concerning the content of a particular Religious Education syllabus in a particular school, or ideally dialogue that would result in the alleviating of political tensions such as between the Buddhist and Rohingya communities in Myanmar.

Religious violence, it seems to me, most often takes place in fundamentalist traditions where there is a high degree of patriarchal authority,[58] often charismatic authority of a particular teacher who offers a particular interpretation of the tradition and the law. We saw this with Osama Bin Laden and later his son, highly charismatic figures who interpret religious law to suit their own authoritarian agenda and the lack of constructive leadership among Sunni communities.[59] At a different level, dialogue between Buddhists and Rohingyas, to use this example again, is crucial for stability in the region and the flourishing of those communities. However, the Buddhists as the dominant group need to shift attitudes to accept diverse cultural values.

Returning to our diagram, dialogue needs to function in the secular state in which there is a strong legislature or legal framework that ensures human rights. While a religion might desire to return to the safe boundaries of the RCM, as fundamentalists do, dialogue about this can only happen in politically stable conditions in which there is a strong legal framework ensuring the rights of others, including the right to form opinions counter to the cultural values of the wider society. Now there are views, not only actions, that some secular states deem to be so dangerous and counter to the state's cultural values that they are illegal and punishable through the courts, such as Holocaust denial in

[54] Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
[55] David F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold (eds), *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.
[56] Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 4-5.
[57] See Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue*, and Catherine Cornille (ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
[58] Martin Riesebrodt, "Fundamentalism and the Resurgence of Religion," *Numen* 47.3 (2000): 266-87, 279-81.
[59] Tamara Sonn, "Continuity and Change in Religious Authority Among Sunni Arabs," *Sociology of Islam* 6.2 (2018): 141-64.

Germany or racist views in the UK. The point is, that dialogue can only take place within a legal framework that limits ideology and that allows the cultivation of good will towards the other.

Fourthly and lastly, there are policy implications of dialogue in the need for education about cultural and religious values (therefore the need for Religious Studies in order to have a religiously-educated population). As Bowker has repeatedly observed, so few politicians have read Religious Studies at university that they do not appreciate the importance of religion in conflict and violence and the centrality of religion in the history of civilisations.[60]

## Conclusion

Effective dialogue entails knowledge and understanding of who we are dialoguing with, and such knowledge can effectively be generated through education. This entails investment in the Humanities.[61]

The need for dialogue to function within a framework of the secular state with legal safeguards for human rights and the rights to have a range of opinions while operating within a shared framework of cultural values, or social imaginaire, might be called religious humanism. Religious humanism is not a contradiction but the idea that people committed religiously in one way or another can act and reflect within the public sphere in a thoughtful and considered way that intellectually engages with the other in dialogue. Religious humanism lays emphasis on humanity and the diversity of human experience while advocating certain enlightenment values of reasoned debate and tolerance of others' views. So the best we can say is that the perspective of religious humanism is fundamentally against religious violence and conflict, and while it has no solution in itself, it does claim that change has to come from the transformation of religions into forms that necessarily modify attachment to the RCM – the Religious Cosmological Model – to absorption of contemporary knowledge about the world gained through science, acceptance of the values of the public sphere of truth speaking, and acceptance of diversity. Religious humanism does not mean that everybody should become more like us, but that people can be very different from oneself while also participating in the public sphere of dialogue. I do not wish to disparage the RCM but on the contrary, to recognise its insight that we are part of a wider cosmos. However, the cosmos we now inhabit is informed by contemporary Physics, Biology, Genetics and other sciences and we cannot retreat to the illusional safety of the RCM. While we cannot go back to Edmund's worldview, we nevertheless need to take the insight implicit in his vision that human life has meaning in a much broader, cosmological context and that the journey of life is one in which all the different stories of which we are a part become knitted together as we move into an unknown, but exciting, and hopeful, future.

[60] Bowker, *Religion Hurts*, 13.

[61] Abdullah Saeed, "Living in a Religiously Plural Society: A Muslim Perspective on Being Inclusive Today", *Interreligious Relations* 2 (March 2019).

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