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## **Another Great Awakening? International Relations Theory and Religion**

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Are international relations theorists about to awake from their long secular slumber and discover that the world has had, has, and always will have a religious dimension? There is clearly a growing interest in religion, much of it driven by its presumed association with various forms of collective violence. Yet so far international relations theorists have spent little time wondering how religion in global life might implicate their existing theories of international relations or how existing theories of international relations might help us better understand the shape, forms, and consequences of religion in world affairs.<sup>1</sup> Should IR theorists atone for their sins of omission and engage the religious world? There is certainly no harm in looking and there is good reason to anticipate that the search will be rewarded. This exploratory essay aspires to help clarify some of the ways international relations scholars might engage religion and explores some areas of potential payoff.

I organize my thoughts around three questions. Should international relations scholars find religion? The answer depends tremendously on what it is they expect to find. A new theory of international relations? Some new branches to add to the existing trees of theory? An omitted variable? A missing link? Second, how should they find religion? There is no single path to salvation and there is no single path to epistemological enlightenment. Yet we can learn much from constructivist international relations theory. As a social theory committed to an ontology that acknowledges the social realm and an epistemology that attempts to recover the

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<sup>1</sup> There is a growing literature on religion and world affairs, but very little on religion and international relations theory. For important exceptions, see Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (NY: Palgrave 2003); and Scott Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (NY: Palgrave, 2003).

meanings that actors give to their actions and the world around them, constructivism offers the social theoretic tools that are critical to the examination of religion in world affairs. Also, many of the obstacles and choices that international relations scholars are likely to confront as they engage religion will resemble those confronted by constructivist scholars in their interrogation of the social. Recovering this journey might help us identify productive paths and avoid some painful dead-ends.

Third, what happens if they find religion? Of all the possibilities, perhaps the most intriguing is the re-examination of the modern world order. To what extent does religion help to explain how the “world hangs together”?<sup>2</sup> We could examine the international order’s changing organizing principles and structures, marking the shifting place of religious authority, organizations, actors and ethics. Along these lines, IR scholars could follow the lead of sociologists of religion and consider the causes and consequences, and the varieties and vagaries, of the secularization of the world. One formulation of the secularization thesis, though, should be resisted: the assumption that the world can be neatly categorized into binaries such as religious and secularism and that the ascendance of one comes at the immediate expense of the other. Treating these spheres as distinct, indeed as rivals for supremacy, risks neglecting how the two can be co-constitutive and discursively related, how the secular might create the religious, how the religious might underpin the secular, and how our liberal international order has a religious dimension.

In order to ground my thoughts I draw selectively from the relationship between religion, humanitarianism, and world order. The history of humanitarianism very quickly challenges the current association of religion with conflict, violence, and instability. Religion is frequently portrayed in IR scholarship as the source of considerable evil – and secularism as its great antidote. The discipline’s founding historical moment is when the wars of religion in Europe are

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<sup>2</sup> John Ruggie “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge.” *International Organization*. 52, 4, 1998, pp. 855-885.

pacified by the presumed separation of the Church and the State and the creation of a secularized sovereignty in 1648. Today the mere mention of religion is likely to connote religious fanatics creating protective barricades and producing suicide bombers. Yet religious discourses have their “kinder, gentler” dimensions, nicely captured by the history of humanitarianism. Religious beliefs and organizations, most notably those influenced by Christian theology and ethics, helped to create modern humanitarianism in the early nineteenth century and have shaped its expanding scale, scope, and significance ever since. Today faith-based agencies are scattered throughout the world and involved in various kinds of projects, enterprises, and programs; evangelicals from megachurches in California are running HIV/AIDS treatments centers in Rwanda and Islamic agencies based in London are running pediatric clinics in Egypt. A presumption in the literature on humanitarianism is that faith matters, yet exactly how, and how would we know? Exploring how faith matters reveals some of the challenges that IR scholars will and should confront as they try to identify how religion matters in world affairs. Lastly, the history of faith-based humanitarianism forces us to reconsider three dimensions of the modern world order: religion’s place in European expansion; international community in a world of diversity; and the religious dimensions of global ethics, cosmopolitanism, and the current liberal international order.

### **Should International Relations Theorists Find Religion?**

The answer is hardly obvious and partly depends on what IR theorists are hoping to find. At least three possibilities exist. One is a theistic theory of international relations. Such theories are not hard to find, present in fundamentalist, eschatological, and millenarian doctrines. Presumably our theories of international relations are secular because they are premised on social science methods and not a divine plan that cannot be immediately known to us, revelation, or scripture. I say presumably because vestiges of the religious might be

unknowingly part of our theories. The revival of classical realism has included a re-examination of the importance and influence of Reinhold Niebuhr; his religious beliefs shaped his theory of world politics.<sup>3</sup> Rear Admiral Arthur Thayer Mahan's writings on American expansion and the importance of sea power in geopolitics were motivated by a belief that the United States had a divine mission and central role to play in the global expansion of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Neoliberal institutionalism has connections to welfare economics, and welfare economics, in turn, has roots in evangelical social and economic thought.<sup>5</sup>

IR scholars will be more likely to try and find religion if they believe it is causally consequential for understanding major events, patterns, and outcomes in world affairs. There are schools of thought that dismiss religion's autonomy and thus its casual significance, notably materialist theories such as hard-core Realism and Marxism. Neither has much patience for religious claims on the grounds that they are epiphenomenal or superstructural; the international distribution of power and states, and the economic structure and classes, are all we need to know. Labeling a state Islamic or Christian does not do any meaningful explanatory work; a state is a state is a state. Marxists have argued that economic forces explain the rise and success of the anti-slavery movement.<sup>6</sup> Some observers claim that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinajad is motivated by an eschatological branch of Islam; therefore, this "irrational" actor

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<sup>3</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires: A Study of Recurring Patterns and Problems of the Political Order in Relation to the Unique Problems of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959); *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952); *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940); and *A Nation So Conceived: Reflections on the History of America from Its Early Visions to Its Present Power* (with Alan Heimert) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> R. N. Leslie, Jr. "Christianity and the Evangelist for Sea Power: The Religion of A. T. Mahan," in *Influence of History on Mahan: The Proceedings of a Conference Marking the Centenary of Alfred Thayer Mahan's 'The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-*

<sup>5</sup> On the political economy, see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility." *American Historical Review* 90, 1985, 339–361.

cannot be deterred through standard threats and punishments.<sup>7</sup> Realists counter that he is a “rational” actor, is using Islam to legitimate a foreign policy made dangerously reckless by a surfeit of oil money and America’s misadventures abroad, and or will be constrained by external reality.

Other theories recognize that international relations has a social dimension and thus will be open to the possibility that religion “matters.” Although constructivists have not made religion a specific concern, there are moments when they and sympathetic scholars have used constructivist insights to illuminate the significance of religion in world affairs. Students of transnationalism and principled actors have highlighted the importance of religious motives (even though they frequently treat the resulting normative dimension as “secular”). Religion can help constitute the national identity and national interests. The U.S.’s self-image as a “shining city on a hill” has a religious basis, Britain’s idea of a white man’s burden had a decidedly Christian beat, and Saudi Arabia’s Islamic identity affects its foreign policy practices. Religion can play an important role in the evolving international structure. A master narrative of international relations is the slow but steady secularization of the world. The importance of the Peace of Westphalia, according to most IR theorists, is that it signaled the rise of secular over religious authority, the establishment of the modern, sovereign state, and globalized the differentiation of the world of God and the world of Caesar. Scholars influenced by various forms of liberal international relations theory also have explored the importance of religion. Regime type might matter. A theocracy will act in ways that a secular government will not. Religious communities can form interest groups to shape the state’s foreign policy. indeed, even some

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lewis, “Does Iran Have Something in Store,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2006 ; and Daniel Pipes, “The Mystical Menace of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,” *New York Sun*, January 10, 2006.

realists have argued that religious-based organizations can cause the world's most powerful country to operate against its "objective national interest."<sup>8</sup>

Third, international relations theorists might examine how religious discourse helps to give meaning and significance to the world around them. Following Max Weber's insight that "we are cultural beings with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude toward the world and to lend it significance," constructivists and others following an interpretive tradition attempt to recover the meanings that actors give to their practices and the objects that they construct. The meanings that actors lend to their activities derive not from private beliefs but rather from society or culture. In the United States a religious haze helped to define the meaning and significance of the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Some religious figures posited that the attacks were divine retribution or a wake-up call to a dangerously irreligious country. The very framing of the attacks and the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> climate as "good vs. evil" drew from Christian discourse. Many other orienting concepts, which give meaning to events and inspire responses, also have religious foundations. Sin. Redemption. Sacrifice. Atonement. Forgiveness. These concepts are loaded with Christian meaning and can help legitimate foreign policy or even motivate it. In general, if IR scholars look they are likely to find religion.

### **How Might International Relations Theorists Find Religion?**

Recent scholarship on religion and international relations has been as methodologically and epistemologically diverse as the field of international relations. This secularist attitude toward the study of religion should be encouraged. Yet the recent history of constructivism provides several cautionary lessons regarding some dangers that lurk when attempting to study the social dimension of world affairs. Four stand out as particularly important.

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<sup>8</sup> John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby* (NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

### *Don't Essentialize*

Social kinds do not have an essence. Instead they are social constructs whose meaning is historically and culturally situated in relationship to other discursively kinds. There is no essence to gender, man, or woman. There is no essence of any religion. Critics might try and identify an essence, as will fundamentalists. But social scientists should know better. Islam does not have an essence and those that try to find it, whether they are critics wondering whether the world would be better without Islam or fundamentalists who believe that Islam has an eternal meaning, are practicing their own forms of orientalism.<sup>9</sup> Religious discourse, like all cultures, is fractured; consequently, scholars need to trace these ever shifting and never stable cultural and religious fault lines. If a religious discourse appears to have an essence or be fixed meaning, then this is a result of politics and the job of the scholar is to understand how this appearance was achieved. For instance, Hurd expertly examines how various societal actors attempt to establish the meaning of the secular in relationship to the religious, and do so for various politically motivated reasons.<sup>10</sup>

### *Beware of Binaries*

In order for constructivists to make headway in the study of the social character of international politics they had to overcome several hegemonic social theoretic binaries, including interests/norms, rationality/irrationality, and power/ethics. These binaries were an artifact of the dominant position of realism (or at least the Waltzian version) and individualism and made it difficult for IR scholars to recognize that international relations, like all social relations, have a social character. In response, constructivists argued that interests are socially constructed and are constituted by norms; that there is an important distinction between instrumental and subjective rationality and that too many scholars influenced by rational choice

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<sup>9</sup> Graham Fuller, "A World Without Islam," *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2008, 46-53.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Shenkman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

failed to recognize how rationality makes no claim regarding the preferences of actors; and that power is not limited to its material forms and instead some of the most enduring forms of power are found in discourse, ideas, and other ordering elements that direct action and shape self-understanding.<sup>11</sup>

IR scholars should fight against binaries such as interests/religious values, rational/religious, and power/values because they undervalue the significance, both causal and phenomenological, of religion. Instead of asking how religion influences interests, we will assume that interests are material and that those who act in ways that seemingly goes against their material interests will be viewed as irrational (or acting under forms of false consciousness). Fundamentalist Christians in Kansas and Wahabis in Saudi Arabia have much in common because they are willing to sacrifice their material interests for religion and fail to understand their true preferences.<sup>12</sup> The nation becomes part of the “national interest” while religious motivations become part of some ill-defined and amorphous community; patriots rationally sacrifice for the nation but suicide bombers are irrationally driven by visions of virgins. Such binaries can lead to ontological dead ends and alleviate analysts from the demand of having to understand actors in terms of their own interpretations of their actions and their constructed world.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Avoid Variable-centrism*

The very desire to demonstrate that religion “matters” might lead IR scholars to assume that religion must be transformed into a variable. We cannot and should not avoid thinking in terms of variables (and even many critical theorists who rail against positivist approaches will operate in a variable-lite format). Yet a variable-centered world might omit three important

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<sup>11</sup> One of the normatively desirable consequences of rationalist approaches is that they foreclosed the possibility of the most pernicious forms of ethnocentrism.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Harper Perennial 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombers* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).

features of many good explanations. First, it can lead scholars to fail to consider how actors make meaningful and significant their actions and the world around them.. Good explanations not only refer to interests but also to reasons, and the reasons that actors give for their actions provide important insights into how make meaningful their world and understand their activities.

Second, it neglects social constitution. Constitution is not mere description but is explanatory theory, of a particular sort. There are *‘why’* and *‘how’* questions. Standard causal analysis asks *‘why’* questions as it treats independent and dependent variables as unrelated entities. Constitutive theories ask *‘how’* questions. It explores how structures constitute social kinds and make possible certain tendencies. Sovereignty does not cause states to act in certain ways; it helps to constitute them and endow them with certain capacities that make possible certain kinds of action. Being a sovereign state, after all, means that states have certain rights and privileges that other actors in world politics do not. To what extent were/are Western states Christian states and how does this identity make possible certain kinds of action? What does it mean to be an “Islamic” state? What kinds of historically-situated social capacities does an Islamic state possess?

Third, variable-oriented analysis neglects discursive formations. We must be attentive to how historically and contingently produced discourses shape the subjectivities of actors and how systems of knowledge and discursive shape categories of meaning and significance. Although some variable-oriented scholars turn gender into a variable that is reducible to biological categories – leading to questions of whether the world would be peaceful if women ruled the world, scholars that understand that gender is socially constructed and a discourse are attentive to its historically-situated meaning.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, a variable-centered world might be tempted to ask if the world would be more peaceful if Islam no longer existed or if Mike

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<sup>14</sup> The debate over gender raises the need to note that the study of religion does not need any special epistemology.

Hukabees ruled the world. The modern category of “religious” is defined historically and in relationship to the category of “secular”; in some respects the secular is an invented term to help construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from the “religious.” Consequently, we can speak not of secularism but rather of secularisms.<sup>15</sup>

I want to explore further the necessity of following these epistemological do’s and don’t’s in the context of faith-based humanitarianism. The assumption, of course, is that the modifier matters. Yet exactly how? How do faith and secular organizations differ? Do they act differently when they are in the field? How does the footprint of religious organizations differ from the footprint of secular organizations? In fact, we actually know very little about the connection between religious identity and the organization’s structure, where it is willing act, who it willing to help, and what kinds of assistance it is willing to provide and under what conditions. In order to sort out the difference that faith makes future research will have to pay attention to three kinds of variations that are premised on recognizing the historically-situated meaning of faith.

To begin, how do faith traditions vary in their understanding of the relationship between their religious beliefs and humanitarian action? Among Christian agencies, some are evangelical, others are “rice bowl Christians,” and still others arguably are professionalized agencies that are nearly indistinguishable from their secular brethren. Different religious branches might produce different assistance portfolios, as is hypothesized in the cases of fundamentalist and mainline evangelical Protestants.<sup>16</sup> Analysts in the West have become quite comfortable speaking in monolithic terms of “Islamic” aid agencies but in fact there is a rich variation. For instance, while many of Islamic Relief’s most prominent field offices are in Islamic and Arab communities, it is not clear how, if at all, an Islamic identity affects its activities. The

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<sup>15</sup> Jose Casanova, “Secular, secularizations, secularism.”

[http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent\\_frame/2007/10/25/secular-secularizations-secularisms/](http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2007/10/25/secular-secularizations-secularisms/)

<sup>16</sup> Francis Fitzgerald, “The Evangelical Surprise,” *New York Review of Books*, 54, 7, April 26, 2007; Laura Theit, “Christianity and Humanitarianism: A Taxonomy,” unpublished paper.

Islamic world appears to be moving from “charity” to “philanthropy,” roughly paralleling the shift among Western aid agencies from relief to root causes. If so, is this shift being caused by the same forces, is it because they are subjected to the same environment, and do these changes have the same meaning as in the Western context?

Second, how do different religious traditions vary in terms of their understanding of humanitarian action? Much of what we think we know about faith-based agencies derives from Christian organizations; we have very little knowledge about religiously-inspired organizations outside of Christianity. This ignorance is especially noteworthy in the cases of Islamic charitable and philanthropic organizations.<sup>17</sup> The general presumption is that Islamic aid agencies differ from their Western and Christian counterparts, but this observation seems largely based on speculation and suspicion and not on hard-boiled evidence. What about Jewish traditions, most notably the growing popularity of “tikkun olam”? What do we know of Hindu traditions of relief, charity, and giving? Do different religions differ in their motivations? In their interpretations of the significance and meaning of giving? In the kinds of obligations they impose on their followers and the recipients of aid? How do different religious traditions conceptualize the relationship between “humanitarianism” and “politics”?

Third, how do different faith traditions evolve in their humanitarian practices? Many of the today’s faith-based agencies are shadows of their former, religious, selves. In the nineteenth century many religious agencies, especially those with a missionary component, desired to save souls; by the end of the century, though, some downplayed this dimension in preference of saving lives and changing societies. World Vision International is still an evangelical

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<sup>17</sup> However, see Carlo Benedetti, “Islamic and Christian Inspired Relief NGOs: Between Tactical Collaboration and Strategic Diffidence?” *Journal of International Development*, 18, 6, 2006, 849-859; Jeremy Benthall, “[The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Islamic Societies, with Special Reference to Jordan](#),” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1997; M. Cizakca, *A History of Philanthropic Foundations: The Islamic World from the Seventh Century to the Present Day* (Istanbul : Bogazici University Press, 2000); Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

organization, but it no longer runs church revivals. One of the potential explanations for this observed isomorphism is bureaucratization, rationalization, and professionalization. Many of the largest faith-based agencies have become more bureaucratic and professional over time. Has value rationality yielded to technical rationality? Where is the faith in the machine? Relatedly, faith-based and secular agencies might begin to resemble each other as they compete for the same resources and are affected by the same external environment. Both secular and faith-based agencies are exhibiting a shift in their ethical metrics, from deontological or duty-based ethics to consequentialist ethics. Part of this development is driven by a desire to find objective measures of outcomes, effectiveness, and success. But does the elevation of outcome variables lead to a diminution of religiously-motivated ethics?

Lastly, does the very differentiation between “faith” and “secular” lead scholars to assume that those who staff “secular” agencies are without religious commitment or spiritual beliefs? Supposition and evidence suggests otherwise. Those motivated to join humanitarian agencies frequently do so because of “principled commitments.” They frequently want to do “good,” to express a spirituality, and to help transcend the world. If so, how do faith and secular organizations differ? Are they similar in their expression of a unity of the community (however defined) that transcends territorial states and in their desire to alter social relations in transcendental ways? The staff of World Vision International described by Deborah Blorstein in her *Spirits of Development* resemble the staff of Amnesty International as described by Stephen Hopgood in his *Keepers of the Flame*. Would the staff of these organizations find some commonality in terms of their religious commitments and desire to see a world transformed, and, if so, what does this tell us about how we should study religion in world affairs?

### **Religion and Modern World Order**

Do we live in a religious world? Most IR theorists would probably answer, “yes.” Does the modern international order have a religious foundation? Most would probably say, “no.” Consider the English School, which has been highly attentive to the European origins of international society and speculated about the different ontologies of global order. English School scholars have relatively little to say about religion in general or Christianity in specific. They, like other IR scholars, note how the central organizing principle of the international system – sovereignty – is a testimony to the secularization of international politics. They acknowledge how Christianity became fused with civilizing processes during the nineteenth century, but, for them, religion seems to have disappeared with the London Missionary Society and been overtaken by other (secular) institutions of modern international society. They write of a Kantian world order in which peoples are unified by basic Enlightenment principles and forms of solidarity that have a rationalized basis. In other words, even when English School scholars speculate about the possibility of forms of cosmopolitanism, it is always in a secular register. Yet are the religious and the secular truly on different dimensions? There are various ways in which we might recover the religious dimensions of the modern world order, but in the following pages I want to briefly and selectively explore various themes in European expansion and the institutionalization of global ethics with a specific grounding in humanitarian action.

One of the signature conclusions of much of the literature on European expansion is that the religious was inextricably interwoven on various dimensions. Certainly European countries were motivated by power and profit, but there also was a strong element of purpose – religious purpose. This religious dimension was most closely connected to a civilizing mission; in other words, for national elites European expansion could and would be a civilizing dimension, and this civilizing dimension was understood in Christian discourse. Missionary activity was the central

embodiment of the cultural and religious expansion of Europe.<sup>18</sup> Although missionary movements accompanied the spread of the West and were increasingly visible in outposts in the new world, missionary activity entered a new, vigorous, and more sustained chapter in the early nineteenth century. Evangelicalism was a major reason for this new energy. Now that it was conceivable for individuals to elect to escape eternal damnation, evangelicals believed that they had a mission to spread the gospel and give all non-believers the choice.<sup>19</sup> Adopting militaristic language like a crusade against idolatry and war for salvation, missionaries spread out across the world hoping to give individuals the opportunity to restore a right relationship with God.<sup>20</sup> Toward that end, missionaries preached and proselytized, and attempted to express their religious commitments through activities that were designed to instill moral sobriety and create a civilized society through religious institutions and the introduction of modern schools and modern advances in health, science, and technology.<sup>21</sup>

Yet it is important to get beyond the standard view that missionaries and colonialism had a hand-in-glove relationship. Missionary activity had a more complicated relationship to colonialism and economic imperialism than the rumor has it. There were positive relationships. For many the “West” was “Christian” – it had a religious dimension even if it was absent all of

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<sup>18</sup> C. Peter Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church: A Study in Victorian Missionary Strategy* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1990). For general overviews of missionary movements, see Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Leicester, England: Apollos Press, 1990); Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1990); Sister Mary Casilda Renwald, *Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy*, especially chapters 2-4.

<sup>19</sup> Porter, *Religion versus Empire?* 32-38; Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, England: Apollos Press, 1990), 63, 161; Sister Mary, *Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy*, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 63-64.

<sup>21</sup> Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, 32-38; Paul Varg, “Motives in Protestant Missions, 1890-1917,” *Church History*, 23, 1, March, 1954, 75-78.

the formal trappings. Colonialism gave missionaries a sense of confidence and the ability to move into once inhospitable lands. In fact, the failure to respond to these new opportunities could trigger feelings of guilt and remorse.<sup>22</sup> After all, Britain=s fortunes were a sign of God=s grace, giving Britain and evangelicals special responsibilities for helping the backward races.<sup>23</sup> Commerce and Christianity also developed a close association. For many evangelicals and missionaries, commerce was not an end in itself but rather a means to an end. For some it would help eliminate the slave trade, which many considered evil; for others it would allow individuals to pursue their own wants outside of cruel political forces, and for others, drawing on the moral economics of Adam Smith and others, commerce and morality were compatible.<sup>24</sup> Missionaries, foreign capitalists, and colonial administrators could share the urge to civilize the colonial peoples, to transform them and their societies so that they resembled European states. While the missionaries might not have had the explicit goal of helping further the interests of the administrators and foreign capitalists, many of their activities had the effect of helping to make the local population more susceptible to outside control.<sup>25</sup> In general, for many missionaries the debate was not whether there should and could be a positive relationship between missionary work and colonialism but rather their causal relationships.<sup>26</sup>

Yet missionaries often collided with colonial administrators and foreign capitalists who pursued power and profits and not God.<sup>27</sup> Missionaries and colonial authorities did not always

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<sup>22</sup> Porter, *Religion versus Empire?* 39-44.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 68-69.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 70-74.

<sup>25</sup> Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism, and Public Health* (NY: Palgrave, 2005); Douglas Haynes, *Imperial Medicine: Patrick Monson and the Conquest of Tropical Disease* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Porter, *Religion versus Empire?* 92-115; Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*.

<sup>27</sup> Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, p. 92.

see eye-to-eye. Humanitarians and missionaries want to convert and civilize, and while colonial authorities were not necessarily opposed to such missions they often privileged security and commercial interests. For instance, the British population's desire to stamp out the slave trade led to the ill-fated British expedition to the Sudan in 1882, opposed on strategic grounds by prime minister William Gladstone.<sup>28</sup> Colonial administrators frequently had little interest in civilizing the population, especially if it might complicate colonial rule or cause political rebellion, and could engage in all kinds of exploitation that missionaries found gravely irreligious.

Missionaries and foreign capitalists also clashed at various moments. Missionaries looked suspiciously on foreign capitalists that seemed to be willing to do anything to make a profit, who hardly comported themselves along Christian principles, and who desired to transform individuals into consumers, promoting not righteousness but rather hedonism.<sup>29</sup> Missionaries frequently saw their job as not only converting the local population but also reminding their compatriots about the temptations of sin and what happens when individuals find salvation in material goods and not in the gospel.<sup>30</sup>

Foreign capitalists, in turn, often viewed missionaries as meddlesome busy-bodies, ready to incite unrest among the population, an accusation previously leveled by slave owners.<sup>31</sup> For instance, during the nineteenth century British missionaries advocated the

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<sup>28</sup> See P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 32-44; and Robin Neilands, *The Dervish Wars: Gordon and Kitchner in the Sudan* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1996), 23-34.

<sup>29</sup> Varg, *Motives in Protestant Missions, 1890-1917*, @ 73; Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley, *Bible and the Flag*, 78-83; Sister Mary, *Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy*, chap. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Sister Mary, *Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy*, chap. 6; Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, p. 90; Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Claire McLisky *Due Observance of Justice, and the Protection of their Rights* =: Philanthropy, Humanitarianism, and

abolition of the Indian suttee, the practice of the self-immolation of widows. The initial position by the East Indian Company was one of indifference to all dimensions of Indian society, an indifference that translated into a 1772 company policy of non-interference concerning religion and local institutions. Utilitarian rather than principled factors drove this policy: it believed that any move that might be interpreted by the local population as proselytization could trigger a rebellion, hardly good for business. Before the governor-general would consider suspending this policy, then, he had to calculate that it would not gravely damage the company's financial and political health. Ultimately he decided to take the risk because of a desire to convey to the British public of an enlightened rule, to show by example good governance and progress - and the superiority of the Western civilization.<sup>32</sup>

Although missionaries had a well-earned reputation for viewing derisively the habits and customs of the local populations and treating them as less than fully human, at times the encounter forced them to re-evaluate their own identities, values, and understanding of self in relationship to the colonial "other."<sup>33</sup> An interesting development of the nineteenth century was the subtle but significant shift from the goal of destroying other cultures and religions to trying to

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Moral Purpose in the Aborigines Protection Society circa 1837 and its portrayal in Australian Historiography, 1883-2003, *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 11, 2005, 57-66.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy Cassels, 'Bentinck: Humanitarian and Imperialist-The Abolition of Suttee', *The Journal of British Studies*, 5, 1, November, 1965, 77-87; Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 41-43; Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Frederik Cooper and Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); A. Lester, 'Reformulating Identities: British Settlers in Early Nineteenth-century South Africa', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 23, 1998, 515-531; A. Lester, 'Settlers, the State and Colonial Power: The Colonization of Queen Adelaide Province, 1834-37', *Journal of African History*, 39, 1998, 221-246; A. Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth Century South Africa and Britain*, (London, Routledge, 1991); David Lambert, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography*, 28, 3, 2004, 320-341.

create the social conditions that would improve their well-being.<sup>34</sup> This development had various, related, sources, including growing critical self-reflection in response to the accusation that they were paternalistic and imperialistic and a growing influence of new interpretations of social gospel that highlighted equality, justice, and solidarity.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes this self-reflection could lead to partial reforms and contradictory practices. As one set of 1873 missionary instructions commanded: "Do not ANGLICISE YOUR CONVERTS. Remember that the people are foreigners. Let them continue as such. Let their foreign individuality be maintained. Build upon it, so far as it is sound and good; and Christianize, but do not needlessly change it. Do not seek to make the people Englishmen. Seek to develop and mould a pure, refined Christian character, native to the soil."<sup>36</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century many American missionaries viewed charitable institutions, such as clinics, orphanages, and schools, not necessarily as magnets for possible converts but instead as places that could help save societies.

These various world order issues of expansion, community, and diversity are captured by the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910, a highly self-conscious and scientific effort to consider how best to Christianize the world.<sup>37</sup> In preparation

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<sup>34</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, p. 75; Varg, "Motives in the Protestant Missions," 75-78.

<sup>35</sup> Amanda Porterfield, "Protestant Missionaries: Pioneers of American Philanthropy," in Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64-65; also see Emily Rosenberg, "Missions to the World," in Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245.

<sup>36</sup> Cited from Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire*, p. 328.

<sup>37</sup> See the work by Brian Stanley: "Defining the boundaries of Christendom: the two worlds of the World Missionary Conference, 1910," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30:4 (Oct. 2006): 171-6; 'Africa through European Christian eyes: the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910' in Klaus Korschörke (ed.), *African Identities and Global Christianity in the Twentieth Century* (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005): 165-80; 'Twentieth-century world Christianity: a

for the meeting, the conference planners created several committees on several critical themes, including relations with political power and how to prepare the missionary. It is difficult to exaggerate the ambition and the accomplishment. The organizing committee wanted their discussions to be informed by empirical analysis and not guesswork; this “scientific” turn was a natural outgrowth of the development of a professional field of missology – the application of scientific methods to assess missionary practices, a movement led by the American evangelist A.T. Pierson.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the committee surveyed hundreds of missionaries, who, in many respects, were the anthropologists of their day, having lived for years among the “natives” and observed their cultural and religious practices; the vast majority of the missionaries responded, and many with lengthy, detailed, handwritten reports. The committee then summarized the findings in a set of reports that were organized around the general question of how to best extend the missionary project.<sup>39</sup>

Many western political, and economic, and religious elites did not see missionary activity as a separate and distinct feature of Western expansion but rather as a critical element of it. Consequently, in attendance were some of the most important religious, political, and economic figures of the period. The presiding officer was Lord Balfour, who opened the conference with a

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perspective from the history of missions' in Donald M. Lewis, ed., *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth-Century* (Eerdmans, 2004): 52-83; 'Church, State, and the hierarchy of "civilization": the making of the Commission VII report, "Missions and Governments" Edinburgh, 1910', in Andrew N. Porter, ed., "The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1840-1914: The Interplay of Representation and Experience," (Eerdmans, 2003): 58-84; 'Edinburgh 1910 and the Oikumene', in Anthony Cross, ed., *Ecumenism and History* (Paternoster Press, 2002): 89-105. Also see W.H.T. Gairdner, *Echos from Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Gairdner Press, 2007); Charles Clayton Morrison, "The World Missionary Conference," *Christian Century*, July 7, 1910.

<sup>38</sup> Dana Robert, *Occupy Until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 199x).

<sup>39</sup> For constructivists interested in the life cycle of norms and normative diffusion the conference in particular and missionary activity represents a fascinating and understudied topic; one that potentially demonstrates various features of normative diffusion, including its altered meaning as it becomes localized and institutionalized in the context of existing cultural practices.

warm statement from the King of England. The American delegation included Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan; William Jennings Bryan; John Mott, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and one of the best known evangelical ministers of the period; and Seth Low, the former mayor of New York City and President of Columbia University. Theodore Roosevelt could not attend, but sent a very warm letter of congratulations and reflected on the conference's importance to the Western international order.

Second, their concern with how to most effectively and efficiently promote the missionary movement led them to try and understand the conditions under which a society would be receptive to the message of the gospel. Toward that end, and following the fashion of the times, they created a hierarchy of civilizations, arraying societies in terms of whether they were fell on a civilizational scale. Being closer to civilization was no guarantee that a society would be more receptive to the gospel; by their accounts, Japan was nearly civilized but missionaries could hardly penetrate Japanese society and Korea was farther down the ladder but appeared open to conversion. Strikingly, the conference spent a considerable amount of time worrying about "Mohammedism." Many missionaries reported considerable difficulty penetrating Islamic societies and that Christianity was losing ground to Islam for the souls of nonmonotheistic peoples in places like sub-Saharan Africa. Sounding alarmed and anxious, the conference highlighted the urgency of the task of confronting Islam, limiting its gains, and, if at all possible, sending it back to Arabia.

The WEC also dwelled on the complicated relationship between missionaries and political power. The conference participants acknowledged that the colonialism of the Christian powers provided an unprecedented opportunity for spreading the word, and they were brimming with the confidence of the period (little did they know, though, that this meeting was occurring at the twilight of imperial era). National governments were not simply pursuing a secularized "national interest"; instead, they were helping to make possible a Christian world order.

Consequently, while those in attendance could be chauvinists and nationalists, they believed that the power of the state could be and should be used to spread a Christian civilization. The duty of governments, as they put it, is “to restrain evil and promote good” and “both missions and governments are interested in the welfare of nations.”

The conference reflected on how missionaries should best interact with the colonial powers, and identified a set of rules that resemble contemporary humanitarian principles. They expressed a principle of humanity, that all individuals had the right to hear the gospel and have the opportunity to convert. They expressed a principle of neutrality, as missionaries were discouraged from confronting the colonial government because doing so might jeopardize access to populations in “need.” Following the maxim of “rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s,” they attempted to maintain a line between themselves and politics. Matters of governance were the domain of the state and matters of religion were the domain of the Church, and both the government and the Church needed to recognize each other’s sphere of authority. In addition, missionaries must not engage in “political agitation” and have a duty to teach and practice obedience to “settled government.”

Yet missionaries could only tolerate so much - they had a duty to “exercise their influence for the removal of gross oppression and injustice, particularly where the government is in the hands of men of their own race...provided that in so doing they keep clear of association with any political movement.” Much like many contemporary relief organizations of today, missionaries were “rights based” movements that wanted to protect certain fundamental rights of the population but to do so in a way that was apolitical, defining the apolitical in ways that resemble nonpartisan. The conference singled out three activities for opprobrium: opium and liquor traffic and enforced labor. Opiates and alcohol were particularly pernicious because they numbed the masses and were conduits of evil. Ever since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning

with the abolitionist movement, missionaries had viewed slavery as a major evil. Importantly, though, while missionaries might take a “demand” approach to these problems (encouraging natives to find Christ and “just say no”) colonial governments and foreign capitalists also had to be confronted because, in many cases, they had introduced and profited from these evils.

The World Missionary Conference also discussed the tension between community in a world of diversity. Although missionaries were intent on spreading the gospel, they nevertheless, at times, expressed an interest in recognizing the dignity of other peoples and the possibility that Christianity might be spread without necessarily transforming all aspects of society. The problem, though, was that Christianity was not just an acceptance of Christ but intended to affect human conduct in all spheres. In many respects this position was consistent with a longstanding strategy of indigenization – the desire to create “self-governing” Churches that were rooted in the local communities and no longer needed external support.

Although missionaries are perhaps the most vivid example of the relationship between the secular and the religious in the creation of the modern world order, faith-based action also was instrumental in creating the very international institutions, law, and ethics that are frequently treated, at least today by those in the West, as quintessentially secular.<sup>40</sup> Consider the ICRC. The founders of the ICRC initially saw themselves as part of a civilizing mission - but one that worked within the existing boundaries of civilized society, that is, Christian Europe. Reflecting the religious and moral assumptions of the nineteenth century European bourgeoisie...They had naturally assumed that mercy and compassion were uniquely Christian values. The first task for the Red Cross, they believed, was to propagate these virtues more widely within Christendom itself, especially among the common people whose weak moral sense seemed to

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<sup>40</sup> Jennifer Beard, *The Political Economy of Desire: International Law, Development, and the Nation State* (NY: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007).

them to need careful nurture.<sup>41</sup> The issue was not simply a matter of getting their priorities right - it also concerned whether and how these laws of war might apply to those outside of Europe. Consistent with the variegated notions of humanity that prevailed at the time, the ICRC believed that while European Christians could comprehend and honor the red cross principles, those outside these boundaries probably could not. ICRC was surprised, therefore, when in 1865 the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire communicated his willingness to accept the Geneva conventions; it could not believe that the Ottoman Empire, a Muslim state, understood or was prepared to honor these conventions. The controversy continued when the Ottoman Empire notified Geneva that it would not adopt the symbol of the cross. While it is quite likely that the delegates to the Congress had selected the cross because of its association with Christian charity and aspirations for a universal, enlightened humanitarianism (and not as a tribute to Switzerland), they nevertheless treated the symbol as sectarian and could not imagine how it gave offense.<sup>42</sup> After considerable discussion, though, ICRC authorized the Ottoman Empire to use the Islamic-based crescent.

This episode caused the ICRC to rethink its mission and entertain the possibility of a civilizing mission beyond its borders. As one founder stated in a newsletter in 1873 in the context of ICRC's discussions with Japan: While it would be unwise to expect the savages and barbarians, who are still singularly numerous on the face of the globe, to follow this example [of Japan], there is the possibility that there are races which possess a civilization, albeit one different from ours that desire closer relations with Europe and might be brought into civilized society through the red cross societies.<sup>43</sup> Red Cross societies began to expand across the

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<sup>41</sup> John Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 203.

<sup>42</sup> Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity*, p. 204; also see Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross* (London: Carroll & Graf Pub, 1999), p. 122.

globe. For a dedicated colonialist like Gustave Moynier, ICRC could help perform a civilizing mission that would “humanize” the “savage peoples” by rescuing them from their “brute instincts.”<sup>44</sup> As ICRC looked at the speed in which they did, it imagined not only the universalization of the laws of war but also the expansion of Christian notions of charity.

The contemporary association of the ICRC with international humanitarian and human rights law, indeed, this organization’s representation of a universalized humanity raises the possibility that the contemporary liberal order has a religious dimension. For many this is impossible because of the binary of religious/secular and the presumption that the liberal is secular. But there are three important reasons to raise this possibility – reasons that hint that modern liberalism might be religious. The first reason is offered by Elizabeth Shenkman Hurd, who provocatively and persuasively argues that the modern secular order itself rests on a religious foundation. She argues that there are “two trajectories of secularism, or two strategies for managing the relationship between religion and politics.” The first is laicism, “a separatist narrative in which religion is expelled from politics.” The second is Judeo-Christian secularism, which is an accommodationist narrative to the extent that the Judeo-Christian tradition does not attempt to expel religion but rather sees it as very much part of cultural life and, in fact, can help to constitute modern secular life. Citing Samuel Huntington, Hurd argues that in this strategy religion is the common ground for Western democracy. Secularism, therefore, is a core value of a Judeo-Christian order and basic liberal institutions are themselves shaped by, if not made possible by, Christian-Judeo values.<sup>45</sup> In this view, then, religion becomes either an element of the Western secularism or makes Western secularism possible; in either case, the religious is part of the secular.

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<sup>44</sup> Rony Brauman, 45-47.

<sup>45</sup> Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, pp. 5-6.

A second possibility is offered by Charles Taylor. One of the critical distinctions he offers for understanding religion in our secular age is between the imminent and transcendental:

The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of the “imminent” involved denying – or at least isolating a perhaps problematizing – any form of interpenetration between the things of Nature, on the one hand, and the “supernatural” on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces or whatever.<sup>46</sup>

For Taylor, then, the question is whether individuals seek or recognize “something beyond or transcendent to their lives.” Religion, then, becomes a belief in the transcendent. It can become attached to meanings and activities that extend beyond “human flourishing” to include an attempt to understand humanity in relationship to something that, quite literally, transcends and gives meaning to human existence.

Consequently, according to Taylor, there can be a much more complex, multilayered, and co-constitutive relationship between the imminent and the transcendental in our secular age. Taylor finds evidence of the transcendental in the imminent in various areas of life. British and American patriotism always projected a sense of the divine, or at least operated under the belief that they were helping to further a civilizing process that was part of God’s plan.

The sense of superiority, originally religious in essence, can and does undergo a ‘secularization’, as the sense of civilizational superiority becomes detached from Providence, and attributed to race, or Enlightenment, or even some combination of the two. But the point of identifying here this sense of order is that it provides an other niche, as it were, in which God can be present in our lives, or in our social imaginary; not just as the author of the Design which defines our political identity, but also of the Design which defines civilizational order.<sup>47</sup>

He also writes of our secular world: “[This] new ethic of order could be detached from its theistic anchoring. It could be inscribed in nature (Jacobins), and then later as what our instincts and intuitions as they have developed in civilization suggest to us....Even today, our sense of this

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 15-16.

<sup>47</sup> *A Secular Age*, p. 456.

liberal order of equality, rights, and democracy is sustained by what Rawls called an 'overlapping consensus,' in which people support the same principles for a host of different reasons, Kantian, utilitarian, but also theological...[On] our (modern liberal) side of the river, 'political theology' has never been wholly absent, and has often been very prominent."<sup>48</sup> Taylor is positing, in other words, that there might not only be an elective affinity of the secular and the religious but also a where secular and liberal discourses are constituted in part by specific religious discourses.

The association of the religious with the transcendental that need not pivot around God is briefly developed by Craig Calhoun in the context of a discussion of Taylor's *The Secular Age*. There is the notion of transcendence that is built into the very idea of self-transformation. Following directly on Taylor's argument in his *The Sources of Self*, Calhoun argues that we can want to remake ourselves as we attempt to achieve a higher good; in other words, the aspiration is to transcend the condition as we found it and in the process transform ourselves. This notion of transcendence is particularly prominent in various meanings associated with humanity and the very possibility that we might transform ourselves through noninstrumental social relationships.<sup>49</sup>

Hurd, Taylor, and Calhoun are suggesting that some the preferred forms of the secular have a religious dimension, though only if we are willing to suspend our traditional distinction between the religious and the secular. For Hurd what makes possible the secular might be a Judeo-Christian order that privileges at least in the modern age, liberalism, and Christianity had an immense influence on the emergence of a sovereign and consenting self.<sup>50</sup> Taylor is properly suggesting that modern liberalism can have a transcendental character; liberalism is not merely about individualism, as so many IR theorists would have it, but rather has a social

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Taylor, "Two Books, Yoked Together," [http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent\\_frame/2008/01/24/two-books-oddly-yoked-together/](http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2008/01/24/two-books-oddly-yoked-together/).

<sup>49</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Going Beyond,"

<sup>50</sup> Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, p. 31.

dimension that is closely interconnected to the transcendental. Modern day liberalism, this secularized liberalism, has a religious content because of its relationship to the transcendental.<sup>51</sup> If Hurd and Taylor are correct, then our modern liberal international order is not about the triumph of secularism, as most IR theorists would understand it, but rather the ascendance of a particular brand of secularism that itself has a strong religious content. And, following Calhoun's lead, much of modern international ethics has a religious dimension to the extent that it is involved in some form of the transcendental, at least as understood by those who are actively engaged in the attempt to remake the world.

This resituating of the religious and the secular in our modern liberal international order recasts the origins and evolution of modern international ethics. The international ethics of protection and the relief of suffering might have an interdenominational and intercultural foundation, but there are reasons to treat this as a socially constructed development that is intimately related to a hazy distinction between the secular and the religious. Various kinds of campaigns to relieve suffering, from slavery to poverty, might have been triggered by religiously-motivated individuals and faith-based organizations, but these ethics now have a secular appearance (at least to those in the West) even as they project a transcendental character. There is ample evidence that those individuals who staff "secular" aid and rights agencies do so to enact a politics of emancipation that is tied to a concept of the cosmopolitan and the transcendental. For analysts to treat these ethics as part of the secular might mean severing their fundamental transcendental, that is, religious, character.

Yet we also should beware that these international ethics that appear to have a transcendental dimension are not nearly as universal as they seem. Consider, once again, humanitarianism. The idea of humanitarianism – the attempt to ameliorate the suffering of

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<sup>51</sup> See Nicholas Guilhot, "Secularism, Realism, and International Relations," [http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent\\_frame/2007/10/31/secularism-realism-and-international-relations/](http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2007/10/31/secularism-realism-and-international-relations/) ; Elizabeth Shenkman Hurd, "The Other Shore," [http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent\\_frame/2007/12/18/the-other-shore/](http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2007/12/18/the-other-shore/)

distant strangers – might appear to have an unambiguously universal character. Both Christian and Islamic aid agencies are inspired by religious commitments to help the poor and the suffering. Yet these different faith traditions also can understand the purpose and principles of humanitarianism in fundamentally different ways and tie them to very different understandings of a transcendental world order. For many Christian aid agencies it has been practically impossible to spread Christianity without also directly or indirectly transforming various aspects of social relationships and create new kinds of transnational relations. The same is true for many Islamic aid agencies. In other words, the desire to relieve suffering, presumably a universal good and the purest expression of a transcendental ethic, is itself reflective of the particular understanding of order.

Our contemporary world order, then, might have a religious dimension in visible and veiled ways. IR theorists have long been concerned with the production of order. A century ago that imagined order was assumed to have a Christian character, or at least most of the participants believed that it should. The steady secularization of the world and the academic community that studies it transformed the conceptualization of order as a result of rationality and the collective pursuit of interdependent interests. Indeed, not only did international order have little to do with religion but increasingly religion was viewed as a destabilizing force. IR theorists have become increasingly attentive to how order is accomplished not only by instrumental action but also by normative structures; as they have done so they have tacitly presumed that this order has a secular character. Yet the secular and religious elements of international order might not be as cleanly segregated as IR theorists presume. Religious values might be part of our international ethics and international order and have become institutionalized in the world's governing institutions, and our liberal international order might itself have a religious dimension. If so, IR theorists have much to learn about the world – and themselves.