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Dialogue and Cooperation

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

**RELIGION AS A WEAPON OF WAR:
IN THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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IN THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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Editors

Ratko Duev

Ivanna Hadzievska Angelov

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DE-ESCHATOLOGIZING WAR: NARRATIVE, TRANSCENDENCE, AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF END-TIME INTERPRETATION IN THE 2026 IRAN–ISRAEL–UNITED STATES CONFLICT

Aarón Rodríguez Sandoval¹

Abstract: *The current conflict between Israel, Iran, and the United States has revealed, on a hermeneutical level, how states can deploy eschatological interpretations of religious texts to legitimize their bellicose actions. It has been reported, for example, that the administration of Donald Trump sought to raise the morale of American troops amid confrontation with Iran by asserting that they were fighting for Jesus. In a similar vein, Benjamin Netanyahu has alluded to a Jewish eschatological construct of a messianic age in relation to developments involving Iran. Ali Khamenei, on the same note, yet employing an end-time Mahdist grammar, has framed conflict against Israel and the United States as a preparatory necessity for the advent of the Mahdi.*

This form of discourse-building mobilizes prophecy and eschatology as discursive frameworks through which the war is framed as sacredly necessary. Read through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of narrative and interpretation, these eschatological narratives can be understood as structuring distinct symbolic worlds within which political action acquires transcendence. Through a qualitative discourse analysis of political communications, this paper argues that the eschatological narratives employed by Israel, the United States, and Iran function as ideological frameworks, rendering geopolitical conflict divinely sanctioned within distinct Abrahamic interpretive worlds, while also shaping how these narratives mirror, respond to, and reconfigure one another.

Drawing on a selective textual analysis of relevant eschatological traditions, it will further situate these narratives within their primary transmission contexts, examining their historical development and how they contribute to the persistence of conflict. In doing so, the paper seeks to provide an alternative analytical framework to the politicization of eschatology by foregrounding understanding over political moralization, hence opening processes of de-eschatologization through the critical and humane reinterpretation of eschatological claims, with a view toward the sanctity of human life, critical reflection, and intercultural understanding.

Keywords: *eschatology; Iran; Israel; United States; Mahdi; Jesus; geopolitics.*

¹ Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's student in *Religious Diversity in a Global Context* at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands and the University of Córdoba in Spain, h.a.rodriguez.sandoval@student.rug.nl

GEOPOLITICS OF IDENTITY: RELIGION AS A HYBRID WEAPON AND TOOL OF LEGITIMACY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Aleksandar Ivanov¹

Abstract: *In the era of multipolarity, religion is no longer perceived exclusively as a theological category, but as a vital “operating system” for projecting geopolitical power. Historically, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have functioned not merely as faiths, but as institutions, identities, and norms that organize politics, law, and legitimacy. This paper explores the instrumentalization of religion as a hybrid weapon and an infrastructure of influence in the contemporary competition for global dominance, where it is frequently misused for political purposes and to support wars.*

Through a case study of contemporary Neo-Ottomanism, the paper analyzes how desecularization and the rehabilitation of religious symbols represent a conscious integration of religious energy into national power. State-sponsored religious institutions, such as the Turkish Diyanet, are examined as a layered network of soft power that prepares the ground for political agendas, transforming religion into a non-traditional domain of competitive influence. Furthermore, the clash of competing value systems in the Global South—where Islam carries significant geopolitical weight—is analyzed as a direct test of European normative legitimacy. In response to this trend, the paper proposes the strategic doctrine of “Real Constructivism”. In a world where conflicts are fundamentally clashes over models of legitimacy, countering militarized religion requires a synthesis: the constructivist ability to define pacifying norms, backed by the realpolitik material capacities (security, infrastructure) necessary to sustain them. To prevent religion from being weaponized as an asymmetric tool, Europe and the West must transition from passive guardians of values into their active guarantors, projecting strategic autonomy and normative cohesion.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Religion, Hybrid Threats, Real Constructivism, Desecularization, Multipolarity*

¹ Faculty of Security- Skopje, St.Kliment Ohridski University of Bitola, North Macedonia. Aleksandar.ivanov@uklo.edu.mk

ORDER OF NINE ANGLES: BETWEEN LEGALLY PERMISSIBLE ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY, RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM

Aleksandar Matković¹

Abstract: *This paper explores the ideology and activities of the new religious movement the Order of Nine Angles with a specific emphasis on its potential for criminal, terrorist, and other forms of extremist conduct. In the first part, alongside an overview of the group's origins and history, a sociological and anthropological analysis of its doctrine and practical functioning is provided. Subsequently, the focus shifts to a criminological and security studies analysis of the unlawful activities attributed to this group. In this regard, it is observed that, contrary to the widespread perception of the Order of Nine Angles' extremism as being purely religiously founded, the extremist actions of its members are frequently shown to be generated primarily by political factors, thereby falling predominantly within the domain of political extremism. As a framework for assessing the security-endangering potential of the Order of Nine Angles, the paper adopts the established classification of security-undermining factors into security challenges, risks, and threats. Building upon this gradation of detrimental factors, the study concludes that certain activities of members or sympathisers of the Order of Nine Angles can be designated as direct security threats of various types, while different aspects of the group's operations can be characterised as security risks of a specific form and degree. Simultaneously, the paper highlights the necessity for caution when conducting such assessments and in the practical conduct of competent authorities; this is essential both for maintaining an objective approach and respecting the principles of freedom of religion, religious equality, and religious tolerance, as well as for ensuring a more functional social response to those harmful phenomena whose existence has been undisputedly established.*

Keywords: *Order of Nine Angles, new religious movements, religious extremism, political extremism, security.*

¹ Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkić, Novi Sad; Union University, Belgrade; Serbia; e-mail: al.matkovic@gmail.com

THE EVOLUTION OF THE EARLY ALFĀRĀBĪ INTO THE LATER ALFĀRĀBĪ'S VIEW ON THE RELIGION AS A WAR'S WEAPON

Aliasghar Ahmadi¹

Abstract: *A broad spectrum of images -from bellicose to pacific- exists in theology. This paper examines al-Fārābī's intellectual evolution on the issue of religion as a weapon of war. In his early work Fuṣūl Muntaza'a ("Selected Aphorisms"), al-Fārābī lists many kinds of war. Variant manuscripts and opaque phrasing make an exact tally difficult. However, he identifies roughly seven wars as just and four as "unjust war." Of the seven just wars, one is defensive and six are offensive. For the early al-Fārābī, offensive war for the purposes stated (al-Ghāyāt) in this work is justified. Moreover, the First Ruler of the Virtuous City (Prophet) and his successors act as "a single soul." Thus, the early al-Fārābī allows that offensive wars can be waged by the leadership of the Virtuous City -meaning religion can be used as a weapon. This bellicose view changes significantly in the later al-Fārābī. In his penultimate book, Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila (Principles of the Views of the Citizens of the Perfect City), he assigns defensive war only to the "peaceful city" -a non-virtuous city- and only in a state of necessity. All other wars are ascribed to other non-virtuous cities. In his final book, al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya (The Political Regime), he continues this trend. He now attributes offensive wars to non-virtuous cities and makes no mention of defensive war at all too. The Virtuous City no longer wages war. Additionally, contextual hermeneutic supports this textual hermeneutic. Al-Fārābī's father was a military officer. A significant proportion of his examples in his early text books are military. Yet at the end of his life, he is depicted at the court of Sayf al-Dawla as an ascetic with a Sufi-like appearance -that mean he was peaceful at the end. This outward evolution mirrors his intellectual shift away from justifying war through religious authority to no longer wages religion as a weapon war. Thus, the later al-Fārābī no longer sees religion as a weapon of war. Instead, later al-Fārābī restricts war to non-virtuous cities and, at most, allows only a purely defensive necessity -with no religious justification for offensive war.*

Keywords: *Peace Theology, al-Fārābī, religion as a weapon, just war, virtuous city*

¹ Researcher at Pooyafekr Research Institute, Tehran, Iran. 700ali@gmail.com

THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AS A POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TOOL IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Anna Mateo Roca¹

Abstract: *The rise of Christian Nationalism has become evident with the return of Donald J. Trump to the White House. Some may mistake it as a spiritual revival, with newer generations becoming closer to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but the phenomenon, that began as a political movement and is now shaping the democracy of the US, cannot be studied if it's not considered a political communication tool the same as propaganda. With a Constitution that is over 200 years old and the oldest still in force today, the United States has seen its First Amendment challenged and overturned by all the Executive Orders signed by Trump during the first 15 days of his second term. The creation of the White House Office of Faith, led by televangelist Pastor Paula M. White-Cain, is one of many maneuvers by the Trump administration and the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement to gradually eliminate the separation between church and state. The investigation into the success of the Christian Nationalist movement as a political tool aims to analyze the impact and evolution of the agenda of this religious movement, which throughout history has applied certain theological principles to influence the representative chambers of the State. It will be necessary to go back to the origin of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom, and understand its application by the Founding Fathers. In this we will also analyze how Christian Nationalism intends to institute itself as the official religion of a State where the legislative system operates to its benefit, acting as a lobby in the political framework with an increasing moralistic thinking and a divisive agenda, both at the social level and in the churches. This research aims to significant differences between their agenda and the fundamental theological principles of the early Christian church. The new Administration presides in front of an extremely polarized population, which operates under different frameworks of thought, even within Christianity. New executive laws have been signed perpetuated the division with a political language, evident in the current hostility that the country is facing. Using Christianity as a communication tool of nationalism and political extremism has occurred previously throughout history but in the current era of Fake News, we are faced with a Western society that is increasingly skeptical of traditional communication sources and specialized research agents of historical prestige. Donald Trump, a figure with a highly mediatic profile, has been able to communicate to the religious communities starting a new chapter in the World Order. Following Donald J. Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2025, global politics, and especially that of the United States of America, have taken a considerable turn. The new administration presides over an extremely polarized population, which operates under different frameworks of thought, even within*

¹ Doctoral researcher, Doctoral program in Communication Blanquerna Faculty of Communication and International Relations Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona, Spain. annamr4@blanquerna.url.edu

*Christianity. New executive orders have been signed from the White House with the intention of undoing civil laws that have been in force for decades. These laws on foreign policy, national security, citizens' rights and freedoms, the economy, and social policies have a strong conservative and religious basis. The division is perpetuated in political language and is evident in the current hostility between blue states and red states. It is important to reflect on the need to study this phenomenon and its religious roots. We must understand why it is growing, when it began, and with what intention. The use of Christianity as a tool for nationalism and political extremism has occurred before by ultra-conservative sectors throughout history and in much of the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian, warned in 1937 in his book *Nachfolge* about the dangers of theocratic extremism. Bonhoeffer was referring to Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany, but he pointed out how the early Christians operated in a world where the emperor would never have legalized the movement started by Jesus of Nazareth, nor would he have made it the official religion of the Empire. The MAGA movement, backed by Christian Nationalism, shares with Nazism the belief in its leader as savior, and as its acronym indicates, it calls for the nation's return to a specific point in history prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In the wake of the technological revolution and in the era of fake news, we are faced with a Western society that is increasingly skeptical of traditional sources of communication and specialized research agents with historical prestige. Donald Trump, a highly media-savvy figure, has been able to communicate to certain sectors a political discourse with strong foundations in economic liberalism and extreme conservative religiosity, which has enabled him to win elections and begin a new chapter in the world order. In order to investigate this trend, it is essential to understand the actual theological foundations from which political initiatives arise, in order to understand how they come to be modified and become decisive points in the electoral programs of the US presidential elections.*

RETHINKING SECULARIZATION: LIVED SPIRITUALITY IN CZECH SOCIETY

Anna Vostruhová¹

Jiří Buriánek²

Abstract: *Czech society is frequently described as one of the most secularized in Europe, often based on conventional measures such as religious affiliation or declared belief. However, such indicators risk overlooking ongoing transformations in how individuals relate to spirituality, meaning, and transcendence. This paper addresses these challenges by exploring “lived spirituality” in a post-secular context, emphasizing forms of religiosity and transcendence beyond institutional frameworks.*

The study introduces a newly developed instrument for measuring spiritual and transcendental orientations, tested in the Czech context—a society historically shaped by state-enforced atheism. In contemporary Czech society, identification as “non-religious” often functions as a cultural label rather than reflecting an absence of spiritual needs.

Empirical findings are based on a pilot survey of a representative sample of the Czech population (N = 811). Results indicate strong internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, and reveal diverse patterns of lived spirituality among individuals classified as secular under conventional measures.

Building on these findings, the paper proposes a multidimensional framework of religiosity, moving beyond the traditional one-dimensional continuum between religion and atheism. This approach enables a more nuanced typology of belief, practice, and meaning-making, capturing the coexistence of secular self-identification with various forms of spirituality.

The study contributes to debates on post-secularism, social transformation, and the changing landscape of religiosity. It also highlights the potential for more meaningful dialogue between different spiritual and religious orientations by providing tools to better understand overlapping and evolving spiritual needs in highly secular contexts.

Keywords: *post-secular spirituality, lived religiosity, social transformation, secularization, Czech society*

¹ Charles university, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology, Czech Republic, anna.vostruhova@ff.cuni.cz

² Charles university, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology, Czech Republic, jiri.burianek@ff.cuni.cz

FROM WEAPONISED RELIGION TO HEALING DIALOGISM: ANGLOPHONE FICTION AND THE “NOTYETTOLD” THIRD NARRATIVE OF ISLAM–WEST CONFLICT

Ayman Abu-Shomar¹

Abstract: *This paper interrogates how religion becomes a symbolic weapon of war, and how it can instead ground practices of peace, by drawing on the emerging “third narrative” in Islam–West relations. Moving beyond the familiar binary of “clash of civilisations” versus liberal “compatibility,” the study mobilises Bakhtin’s moral dialogism, theories of creolisation and translational culture to conceptualise faith not as a fixed civilisational essence but as a contested, mobile practice. Focusing on four Anglophone novels—Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* (1999) and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* (2017), and Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* (2011)—it traces how weaponised religious imaginaries circulate through everyday speech, media discourse and security policy from the colonial past to the post9/11 present. At the same time, these fictions stage polyphonic encounters in which Muslim and Western characters listen, misrecognise and gradually reorient ethically toward the religious “Other,” generating what I call healing dialogic spaces. The paper argues that such narrative microdynamics prefigure nonbinary models of coexistence in which religious traditions retain their distinctiveness without hardening into civilisational battlelines. It concludes by outlining how this “notyettold” third story can inform interfaith praxis, peacebuilding education and digitally mediated dialogue initiatives addressing current and future religiously framed conflicts*

¹ Department of Languages and Literature United Arab Emirates University ashomar@uaeu.ac.ae
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0916-6819>

MAKING A CASE FOR NON-DENOMINATIONAL RELIGIOUS LITERACY COMPONENTS IN AFRICAN CONSTITUTIONS: AN AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063-BASED APPROACH

Azizat O. Amoloye-Adebayo¹

Abstract: *There is a strong interplay of strong religious identities and diversity of expressions across African countries. Peaceful coexistence across religious diversity, therefore, necessitates that while religious adherents desire religious observance, they must not threaten the interreligious solidarity they enjoy with non-adherents and religious-other co-citizens. This is only possible where the citizens have a strong sense of religious literacy, namely the appropriate use of religion and religious language as well as methodologies for safe interreligious discussions and engagements. Based on preliminary investigation of the provisions of the constitutions of selected African countries, this work argues that religious literacy component is either non-existent or perfunctory. What exists are constitutional provisions that do not appropriately instruct citizens on religious literacy. Thus, while some constitutions (for instance Nigeria, Kenya and Botswana) romanticize with the idea of secular laws, some others (such as Egypt and Algeria) declare religion as part of national laws. However, both constitutional models seemingly ignore the need for different religious people to agree on the interpretative methodologies for shared human values and principles which is the essence of religious literacy. This work suggests ways going forward towards constitutional provisions on religious literacy, informed by an analysis of the realistic provisions on religion in the African Union Agenda 2063.*

Keywords: *Religion, Religious literacy, Constitutions, Africa, Agenda 2063.*

¹ Department of Islamic Law, Faculty of Law, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. azizatamoloye.adebayo@gmail.com; azizatamoloye@unilorin.edu.ng.

THE CENTRALITY OF PEACE IN RELIGIONS

Balázs M. Mezei¹

Abstract: *War is one of the fundamental characteristics of the human condition. However, since human beings are free, every war is bound up with this freedom. Freedom is not a “false consciousness” but the very essence of humanity. Freedom is inherently positive, meaning it is fundamentally oriented toward good—that is, toward human cooperation, mutual trust, and mutual aid. This freedom is limited by humanity’s radical tendency toward evil. Classical religions were established to abolish this limitation and restore humanity to its state of positive freedom. Though some religions consider physical and armed violence permissible, this is peripheral to the classical religions. Therefore, applying religious content to violence goes against the essence of religion and distorts it by encouraging physical and armed violence. – Throughout Western history, numerous developments have viewed violence as a necessary consequence of religion. Indeed, in the case of just war, for example, religion cannot be separated from passive or defensive violence. However, religion’s central teaching is not the theory of war but the doctrine of peace—the cooperation of people for the sake of the common, transcendent good. A characteristic of our time is the use of religious ideologies to justify the most horrendous acts of violence. Religious leaders must speak out against this.*

¹Corvinus University Budapest Collegium Professorum Hungarorum balazs.m.mezei@uni-corvinus.hu

SECURITY PLANNING AND RISK ASSESSMENT IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE R. N. MACEDONIA: A REVIEW OF THE MOC-OA

Boban Mitevski¹

Abstract: *The structure of Macedonian society is complex and diverse. Since religion plays a significant role in it, given that a large part of the population is religiously oriented, religious communities are an integral part of the social structure of the R. N. Macedonia. Given the increased security threats in the world, such as terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism, the need for security planning and security assessments becomes essential and indispensable, "because no organization is without risk". As an important factor in public life, the risks associated with religious communities are actually challenges for society as well.*

This paper focuses on research and assessment of risks among religious communities in the R. N. Macedonia, in conditions of intensified contemporary security challenges, on the need for systematic security planning, on establishing preventive security measures within religious communities, on the role of institutions in this process...

Special attention is paid to the MOC-OA, as a dominant religious institution with a wide network of facilities and a significant social role, while considering existing security practices, their effectiveness and opportunities for improvement. In the context of this religious community, security risk can be defined as the likelihood of threats that can cause damage to physical infrastructure, clergy, believers and digital resources. Key categories of threats include physical threats (vandalism, theft and attacks on religious buildings), terrorist threats (extremist attacks on religious gatherings), cyber threats (hacking of websites, spreading disinformation and misuse of data), as well as risks related to interreligious and ethnic tensions, as well as political identification, which can escalate into provocations and incidents.

The results indicate the need for an integrated approach that includes the development of standardized risk assessment models, strengthening institutional coordination, staff education, and the introduction of modern technological solutions for monitoring and early warning. In addition, the importance of proactive risk management and building the resilience of religious communities is emphasized. The paper contributes to a better understanding of the security dimension of religious institutions and offers practical guidelines for improving their protection in a national and broader regional context.

Keywords: *security planning, risk assessment, religious communities, Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric, security threats, physical security, cybersecurity, terrorism, interfaith relations, protection of cultural heritage, institutional coordination, resilience.*

¹ Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne, o.mitevskiboban@gmail.com

RELIGION, THE CAUSE OF WARS AND THE BUILDER OF PEACE IN THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Carmen Gabriela Lăzăreanu¹

Vlad Leontie²

Abstract: *Interhuman relations since the beginning of humanity have been marked by conflicts, by wars.*

1.1 Wars in the past

A brief journey through the history of wars highlights the fact that the oldest was the Trojan War in the 13th century BC, extended over a period of ten years, citing love as a cause (Paris' love for Helen of Troy), the Peloponnesian War for holding hegemony in the Greek world, the War of the Roses having family as a cause, the 100 Years' War with the dynastic inheritance of the English throne and the wars continued with multiple causes, religious, confessional, democratic, of national freedom, emancipation from foreign domination, expansion of power and sphere of influence, revenge after defeat, the fight for resources

At first glance, wars were fought in the name of ideas, values, principles according to war propaganda that became more refined, actually hiding the desire of nations or peoples less and more the desire of ruling elites, political factors and military groups to seize power.

1.2 Periods of war and peace among Romanians

Romania has participated willingly or unwillingly in wars since its founding as a state, which is why an old Romanian proverb said "the Romanian has one hand on the plow and the other on the sword". However, the Romanians were not the ones who wanted or provoked wars, being considered even cowards, too often conforming to the proverb "the head bowed, the sword does not cut it". In order to survive as a people, they alternated periods of conciliation with those of resistance, or in other words, peace negotiations with the fight (resistance). The wars with the Turks, peace negotiations with the payment of tribute, were well known. During these times, the Church was also a support for the people. The revolts were when the people could no longer endure, so when tolerance was low either to rule or to war (too long periods that affected the harvests in general and the obtaining of bread). Under these conditions, the country's rulers began peace negotiations. The main objective of the people was to preserve the country's autonomy and maintain the Christian and earthly principalities with the institutions of the State and the Church, preserving the Christian orders of the land. Most of the rulers, after the

¹ Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Iași, Romania, Cloșca Street, Iași RO-700066, gabrielalazareanu@yahoo.com

² Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration 700057 Iași, Romania, ORCID: ID/ 0000-0002-1103-5503, vlad.leontie@student.uaic.ro

armed confrontation in which numerous people died, whether they were victories or defeats, the Romanians brought offerings to God through the country's rulers and metropolitans and erected places of worship decorated with biblical scenes, which have endured over time.

1.3.The modern period and the wars of the Romanians

The modern period was marked by revolts, wars, military alliances, towards which the Romanians had different positions. In 1883, King Carol I secretly decided to ally the country with Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, when the country's interest was the act of the same king and declared neutrality. Ferdinand I in 1916 concluded negotiations with the Entente, Romania concluding a separate peace in 1917 never ratified by Parliament. In World War II, the Antonescu Government led Romania into an alliance with Germany, and in August 1944, a year before the collapse of the Central Powers, Romania joined the United Nations through the Royal House.

In 1939, August 23, Stalin (USSR) concluded a secret treaty of alliance with Hitler (Germany) and the two powers divided Europe. On June 22, 1941, Hitler ordered Operation "Barbarossa", that is, attack the USSR, an action similar to that ordered by Putin who declared that the Russian Federation would not attack Ukraine, and a few days later the attack appeared with full force. Such sudden changes in decisions occur frequently throughout history but when they occur in the case of great powers they are called "force repulsions", "Adaptations to the situation" respecting the interests of nations" but in the case of small states they are considered betrayals. The Romanians, although they did not have brilliance in their "silent history", did not live but survived especially in known areas such as those south of the Danube, the Carpathians and the Dniester. Currently, the life of the Romanian is threatened again by the crisis of war and other crises.

1.4.Religion and war among some peoples

Regarding religion, it was used to motivate the population to fight, promising divine rewards as in the case of the "holy war".

In modern conflicts such as the one in Ukraine. Religion is used to manipulate public opinion and justify the invasion. In these conditions, Orthodoxy is used as a state instrument. Mostly currently there is a tendency to present current conflicts as "clash of civilizations" (e.g. Judeo-Christianity, Islamic World) Most of the time religion can be instrumentalized to radicalize groups by transforming faith into an excuse for violence.

In conclusion, religion, although theoretically generally focused on peace, has its objective frequently hijacked to become a devastating weapon .Use the arrows to see the full translation. transforming territorial conflicts into "holy wars".

**RELIGION AND CONFLICT: FROM HISTORICAL SCARS TO THE TAI JI MEN
CASE IN TAIWAN**

Cheng Yun-Hao¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the paradox that religion, commonly understood as a sanctuary for peace, has repeatedly been transformed into a potential instrument of conflict. While the core of faith affirms creation and compassion, religious dogma has often been misused as a pretext for aggression, mobilizing communities by elevating religious identity above broader human values. The paper asks whether this weaponization of faith reflects an inherent flaw within religion itself or a deeper failure of human conscience. It proposes that awakening conscience and cultivating a culture of peace offer practical pathways to mitigate religious conflict and prevent the instrumentalization of belief. As a contemporary case study, the paper analyzes the experience of Tai Ji Men in Taiwan, focusing on how state authorities have used legal and fiscal mechanisms against a spiritual community. This example illustrates how conflicts involving religion or belief may arise not only from overt hostility but also from administrative and institutional practices. The paper concludes by considering how feasible solutions may be developed to address such situations, emphasizing the role of conscience and peaceful engagement in correcting systemic distortions and reducing the risk of religious or spiritual communities becoming targets of state power.*

¹ Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy, Taipei, Taiwan, kenny.jeng560608@gmail.com

RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN THE BALKANS AND BEYOND: A PHENOMENON RESHAPED

Danica Igrutinović¹

Abstract: *The 'Orthobros' meme that has recently been gaining steam does point towards an actual intriguing trend in the USA – mass migration of believers to (frequently Russian) Eastern Orthodoxy, mostly from the ranks of disenchanted Evangelicals. The link itself is hardly new: during the Cold War, it was Evangelical missionaries from the USA that proselytized among the Soviets, eventually aiding a religious reawakening associated with a desecularization regime, which was certainly at least also partly a geostrategic maneuver. This paper will argue that what currently connects USA Evangelicalism and Russian Orthodoxy is a specific brand of religious nationalism featuring a built-in easy mobilization for conflict amid rising geopolitical tensions. Purporting to defend family values, with clear mutual ideological enemies defined in terms of sexuality and gender, and publicly espoused by such figureheads as Trump and Putin, this ideological system could also be more precisely categorized as religio-sexual nationalism. Religious nationalism of this sort has frequently been viewed as a relic of the past, at least with regard to the Western world, which had allegedly moved on to more civilized versions of nationalism, and discussion of it was frequently limited to topics such as the 'religious' wars accompanying the dissolution of Yugoslavia. This paper will argue that lessons learned in the Balkans could prove useful for the future of the rest of the world. Finally, the position of high dignitaries in the Serbian Orthodox Church on recent matters, revealing interesting new developments in this geopolitically liminal space and its own brand of religious nationalism, will be addressed.*

Keywords: *religious nationalism, Balkans, USA, Russia, Serbian Orthodox Church.*

¹Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade. danica.igrutinovic@fmk.edu.rs

ONE NATION UNDER GOD: A CRITICAL REEXAMINATION OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Daniel Bramer¹

Abstract: *The concept of Christian nationalism has circulated in limited scholarly circles for some time but has only recently gained mainstream attention, at least in the United States. This attention has largely been fueled by political activist rhetoric on all sides of the spectrum, to the point where the term itself is in danger of becoming meaningless and, to this degree, far more dangerous as a tool for leveraging vitriol. Christian nationalism, at least in the US, tends to follow one or more of three main lines of rhetoric: (a) an assumption of divine privilege (“God has given us a special place and thus we are better than others”), (b) claims of divine imperialist mandate (“We are obligated to expand and dominate the world according to the Great Commission”) and (c) the idolization of political figures as divinely appointed vicars of Christ or some otherwise messianic role or authority (“Candidate X is doing the Lord’s work. (S)he will lead us to victory against the forces of darkness.” It should be clear that such rhetoric can lead not only to questionable political activity and outcomes, but to actual violence, both within and without the country. This paper will trace the development of Christian nationalism in the United States and will attempt to explore the question of whether or not there is any legitimate place for it.*

¹ Holy Family University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA dbramer@holyfamilly.edu

GOD KNOWS HIS OWN: THE LOGIC OF VIOLENCE IN THE WESTERN CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

Daniel Bramer¹

Abstract: *Western Christian history is littered with acts of violence committed against individuals, factions, societies, nations, and belief systems, all under the alleged auspices of Divine nonchalance, blessing, will, and even mandate. Typically such acts are in the modern context dismissed outright as ignorant, barbaric, twisted, and otherwise out of keeping with true faith. But are these criticisms fair? Is there a place for violence in the Kingdom of God? This paper will examine arguments for and against the use of violence, from isolated and localized religious persecutions to large scale militaristic campaigns, within Western Christianity. Special attention will be given to the rhetorical and often political strategies employed by each side, including appeals to scripture, tradition, papal and civil authority, theology, and philosophy, to either support or decry the idea that violence may not only be permissible, nor even meritorious, but in some cases mandatory. Additional attention will be given to the ways in which these arguments and debates (and the aftermath of any violence that ensued) gave shape to further developments in Christian theology, practice, worship, and social teaching. Finally, this paper will reflect on how the history of violence within Western Christianity may offer new perspective on developing crises in the world surrounding the broad domain of religion, especially as it relates to political activism.*

¹ Holy Family University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA dbramer@holyfamily.edu

FROM INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM TO STATE WEAPON: INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS AND THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHOS IN ARMED CONFLICTS

Efimija Zajkovska¹

Abstract: *In an era of profound global polarization, one of the most critical points of conflict between law and politics is the protection of authentic religious discourse from its instrumentalization for militant purposes. This challenge becomes particularly acute within complex political systems, where the boundary between free religious expression and the abuse of religion to legitimize violence is strategically blurred. In this environment of legal ambiguity, an essential question arises: does the state genuinely protect authentic religious rights and freedoms, or does it use religion as an ideological “shield” for its own geopolitical interests? The answer to this dilemma necessitates an urgent need, through the lens of international legal standards - primarily Article 9 of the ECHR and Article 18 of the ICCPR - to demystify the mechanisms by which the state apparatus codifies religious discourse for the needs of military mobilization.*

Following this line of analysis, the paper explores how contemporary authoritarian contexts systematically „securitize“ religion, marginalizing peaceful religious discourse in order to establish an absolute monopoly over the theological narrative. This phenomenon is elaborated in detail through the paradigm of the Russo-Ukrainian war, where there is a clash between state-sponsored theology of aggression and the peace efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This sharp conflict clearly illustrates how the original Christian ethos becomes subject to state repression the moment its message ceases to serve the ruling ideology.

Ultimately, the concluding findings suggest that adhering to the international legal framework is not merely a matter of protecting individual faith and conscience, but also represents a strategic security imperative. For it is only through the consistent protection of religious pluralism that the transformation of religious identity into an ideological weapon for contemporary geopolitical conflicts can be prevented.

Keywords: *Religious freedom, International legal standards, Instrumentalization of religion, Securitization, Ecumenical Patriarchate, Russo-Ukrainian war.*

¹Iustinianus Primus Faculty of Law, Skopje (Department of Political System), Orthodox nun at the Monastery of Saint George the Triumphant, Debar, North Macedonia. Email: efimija981@gmail.com; ORCID ID: 0009-0005-3758-2766

SACRED ALLIANCE OR BIOPOLITICAL ALIGNMENT? THE ENTANGLEMENT OF ANTI-BORTION DISCOURSES OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE RUSSIAN STATE AFTER 2022

Ekaterina Ivlieva¹

Abstract: *Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the position of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) within the Russian political system appears to have undergone a transformation. Prior to the invasion, despite the demonstratively pro-Orthodox rhetoric of certain state representatives, the Church possessed limited political agency. It largely functioned as a convenient source of ideological language while remaining constrained in its capacity to influence policy or initiate political action.*

In the aftermath of the invasion, however, this configuration appears to have shifted. Having openly supported the war, the Church seems to have transitioned from a subordinate and occasionally dispensable ally into a more consequential political partner, thereby gaining influence within the policy-making sphere. While this development may appear to reflect a long-sought elevation of the Church to a dominant position within Church–state relations, this paper argues that the relationship is better understood as a form of strategic “companionship,” in which converging historical circumstances have aligned the interests of both institutions. This alignment is particularly visible in the domain of biopolitics. Legislative restrictions on abortion, long advocated by the ROC on religious grounds, have gained renewed traction as they intersect with the state's demographic concerns in the context of a protracted war. Rather than representing the unilateral imposition of religious norms, this convergence may reflect a broader entanglement of ecclesiastical and political priorities.

The objective of this paper is to examine how this alignment is discursively produced and maintained. Methodologically, it employs critical discourse analysis of sermons and public statements by Patriarch of Moscow Kirill and official communications by the President of Russia Vladimir Putin from 2022 to 2026, demonstrating how religious and political discourses overlap, reinforce one another, and reshape their respective normative boundaries.

Keywords: *Church-state relations, Russia, biopolitics, religious rhetoric*

¹ Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at KU Leuven, Belgium, ekaterina.ivlieva@kuleuven.be

**WHO IS THE WOMAN WHO DESIRES LIFE?
ISRAELI FEMALE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CRAFT LITURGY FOR JEWISH-ARAB
PEACE IN WARTIME**

Elazar Ben-Lulu¹

Abstract: *The Israel-Hamas War, which erupted with the horrifying events of October 7th 2023, stands as one of the pivotal breaking points in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since its inception. Both sides have been left battered, pained, and devoid of any trust or hope for peace. Among the local immediate social grassroots responses to repairing the fractured relationship was the production of a special prayer booklet focused on coexistence and shared life liturgy produced by the Reform Movement in Israel, a non-Orthodox Jewish community.*

In this talk, I analyze four prayers for peace included in this booklet, written by Israeli female religious leaders. I examine how these women crafted prayers to promote a message of peace. The texts establish a maternal dialogue to foster a space of trust and security and reveal an attempt to invoke and engage with a feminine divinity, aiming to replace the exclusive focus on the God of Israel with a deity encompassing all nations. Through these liturgical creations, the authors challenge both the Israeli Orthodox establishment, which excludes non-Orthodox identities and expressions, and the hegemonic national order, which suppresses discussions of coexistence during times of conflict and marginalizes women's political involvement. Therefore, I conclude that the creators of these prayers emerge as significant gendered political actors in an era marked by distrust, anger, hostility, and fear. They demonstrate that a message of coexistence can resonate within the religious sphere.

Keywords: *Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Swords of Iron War; Non-Orthodox Jewish Liturgy; Coexistence; Religious Feminine Leadership*

¹ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ariel University, Israel elazar.benlulu@gmail.com

MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY AS A PUBLIC HEALTH IMPERATIVE IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Eric Roux¹

Abstract: *This paper critically examines media accountability within the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention, specifically addressing its role in escalating discrimination and physical violence against religious minorities. Drawing on the foundational work of the World Health Organization and the epidemiological model advanced by Gary Slutkin, this presentation posits that violence, including that targeting religious groups, behaves as a contagious disease, with media narratives acting as potent vectors for its transmission. Academic research demonstrates that the “othering” and stigmatization of minority groups through media discourse constitute a form of epistemic violence, serving as a documented precursor to physical harm. As Slutkin and colleagues assert, the brain processes dehumanizing “scripts” into “unconscious social expectations,” leading to the “transmission to subsequent person(s) or groups.” Sensationalist media content can romanticize or normalize violence, thereby altering social norms and legitimizing aggression against perceived “Others.” This process is evident in global patterns where hostile media narratives have fueled persecution, doxxing, economic exclusion, and state repression against religious minorities, transforming abstract bias into tangible threats. This presentation will advocate for the urgent establishment of mechanisms to monitor and address media bias that contributes to the stigmatization of religious minorities. By recognizing media-driven “othering” as a critical risk factor and a vector in the contagion of violence, we can implement public health interventions—such as counter-narratives and accountability frameworks—to interrupt this transmission. Such proactive measures are essential not only for protecting freedom of expression and religion but also for fostering genuine religious dialogue and cooperation, thereby safeguarding vulnerable communities from media-fueled discrimination and violence.*

¹ President, European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EIFRF), Brussels, Belgium, eric-roux75@gmail.com

SUBVERTING RELIGION: DIGITAL RESISTANCE AND SYMBOLIC ACTS IN IRANIAN ACTIVISM

Farinaz Basmechi¹

Abstract: *This paper examines how religion is mobilized both as a tool of oppression and as a site of resistance in contemporary Iran. The state's use of religious justification to enforce authoritarian laws—such as the mandatory hijab—and to legitimize violent crackdowns on protests illustrates how religion can function as a weapon to maintain political control. In response, Iranian activists have creatively repurposed religious and cultural symbols as acts of defiance, turning them into tools of solidarity and collective resistance.*

Digital platforms, particularly social media, have become essential spaces for these practices. Women cutting their hair in protest or dancing at funerals—rituals historically embedded in Islamic mourning—are shared widely online, transforming private grief into collective narratives of resistance. These digitally mediated acts subvert the religious authority used by the state, enabling communities to challenge the moral and political legitimacy of oppressive systems while fostering social cohesion and political engagement.

Through the lens of digital storytelling and social media analysis, this study demonstrates how embodied cultural and religious practices are reinterpreted in online spaces to confront structural violence. By documenting these interventions, the paper highlights the dual role of religion as both a tool of control and a resource for resilience and mobilization. This research contributes to interdisciplinary discussions on religion, political power, and digital media in conflict contexts, illustrating how immersive and online infrastructures can amplify dissent, preserve collective memory, and transform acts of mourning into politically meaningful and therapeutic engagement.

¹ Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies Ottawa Faculty of Social Sciences fbasmech@uottawa.ca

GLOBALIZATION AND THE ISLAMIC RELIGION A CLASH OR AN INTERACTION

Fatmir Zaimi¹

Abstract: *The phenomenon of globalization and its processes in the modern world affect the religious changes as well as all developments that are currently popular in the modern societies. Those processes refer to the political, economic, cultural and religious life in every modern society.*

Therefore, religion in the globalized world provides a great opportunity for interreligious dialogue and cooperation, but also danger of closing in its frames of self-availability.

The main purpose of this paper is to show how religion as a social phenomenon is of great importance, and simultaneously being an important aspect of globalization. The study of religion in the aspect of globalization has been a neglected topic so far, starting from the fact that religion is based on tradition, the close relationship between regional culture and tradition. The influence of the theory of secularization has been stated by many social scientists who considered religion as unimportant sociological phenomenon in the modern world. However, the globalization affects all aspects of social life. Therefore, the consequences of globalization are new experiences in society, the process of internationalization and trans-nationalization. The relationship between religion and globalization poses many questions that theologians, sociologists and others are trying to answer authentically. Although the two terms are contradictory to each other, however they are closely related. Therefore, they are going to provide analysis of their relationship in this paper. Those processes relate to the political, economic, cultural and religious life in every modern society.

Keywords: *Islamic religion, globalization, religious organizations, dialogue , values.*

¹ Mother Teresa University in Skopje , North Macedoni. f_zaimi@hotmail.com

THE DOVE OF PEACE BECOMES IMPATIENT RELIGION AS A WEAPON OF PEACE

Gerard Kester¹

Abstract: *Peace must be more than a period of truce between wars, waiting for yet another tragedy to happen. The art of peace lies in laying the foundation for lasting peace. Decisions on war and peace are not the exclusive right of governments, diplomats and secret services, they must be anchored in the social and in the human, they must be rooted in fertile cross-cultural grounds. Achieving lasting peace is about connecting cultures, interwoven by religions, whose relation to war and peace has always been ambivalent. Delving deeper into religions' views of war that have shaped different cultures can help to find the path of lasting peace.*

In this paper the controversial phenomenon jihad will be discussed. Jihad occupies a central place in the current debate about religion and war, yet the word jihad is usually misunderstood in the Western world. The greater jihad is moral self-discipline and contribution to a stable and serene community: the jihad of the heart. The lesser jihad is the duty to defend own territory and faith – the jihad of the sword. The latter jihad is strictly regulated and primarily defensive, it is not about forced conversion but about protecting the community when under attack. Here lies the crux of much of current misery: for centuries Islam has felt attacked, misunderstood and despised.

Cultural peace is a condition for lasting peace, it demands investment in connecting cultures rather than in armament races. In our globalising world society must be redesigned, a vision is needed as a beacon for how a society with sustainable peace can be created. Religions can play a historic role in that, as a weapon of peace, not of war.

And that is urgent – the dove of peace is getting impatient.....

Keywords: *religion, jihad of the heart, jihad of the sword, peace-making, intercultural relations*

¹ Emeritus, International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands. gerardkester@ziggo.nl

CIVILIZATION AS A RELIGIOUS COMBAT UNIT? - 30 YEARS LATER

Haimo Schulz Meinen¹

Abstract: *The unified world civilization – not considering several as Samuel Huntington did – the eight billion people industrialized society extending around the globe can be described as combat unit successfully having defeated and continues to defeat competing subsistence modes, particularly of less populated and foraging cultures. Hunters and gatherers, pastoralists and shifting cultivators once were dominating all areas where humans have lived.*

The different parts of society are coordinated and aligned to achieve that aim by power, force and violence. Thus, a pronatalist combat unit is formed. The achieved result, similar to the strategy of Donald Trump and Steve Bannon, flooding the zone with shit, here flooding the earth with humans, is a victory for generations as these eight billion won't disappear quickly and make it impossible for competing subsistence modes requiring low population densities for a sustainable lifestyle to exist decently.

The superstructure making this possible is described either in religious terms (reason, mind, property, free will, nationhood, freedom, family, and so on) or as an ideology. The conference about RELIGION AS A WEAPON OF WAR: IN THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTUR gives the chance to have a fresh look at the 1996 assumption and research question: Civilization as a religious combat unit? Students of two university terms (1995-96) examined at the University of Hannover (Germany) that question – before smartphone, social media and today's forms of the internet. The results are discussed. What new aspects have come up to reply to the question: Should and can a world civilization be seen as a religious combat unit?

The regime extends three-dimensionally on earth, in the air and space, below surface and in all the oceans and waters. It encloses living animals and plants, particularly enslaved farmed crops and cattle where much of the necessary energy is harvested from. (300 words)

Keywords: *civilization, religion, industrial regime, defeating competing subsistence modes*

¹ Germany, University of Hannover, Department of Sociology H_SchulzMeinen@gmx.de

**THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE JEWISH-"INDIAN" TRIBE IN ISRAEL:
RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL ALTERNATIVES AS AN ANSWER TO CONFLICT**

Idan Edut¹

Abstract: *In the final decades of the 20th century, the phenomenon of individuals and groups in Europe and elsewhere seeking to adopt the imagined persona of the 'Native-American' expanded significantly. Increasing numbers of people are embracing a fantasized primitivism, recognizing it either as an alternative to a conflict-ridden modernity or as an act of rebellion against it. In Israel, this phenomenon assumed a distinctive form through the emergence of the "Jewish-Indian" tribe - people who adopt a lifestyle inspired by Native-American cultures. This cultural adoption (regarded as peaceful in Israel) enables a deliberate "bypassing" of local conflictive political and geographical issues and questions of indigeneity, in favor of a romanticized, globally oriented alternative. As reality - particularly in Israel - becomes increasingly conflictual and strife becomes ever more present in everyday life, those who adopt the practices and belief systems associated with "Native American" culture tend to distance themselves from this unrest. In this sense, the alternative local identity operates as a mechanism of disengagement or suspension of conflict, while simultaneously producing an alternative religious-spiritual discourse that centers on connection to a shared earth, healing practices, and reciprocal solidarity. This talk seeks to examine how "Native Americanness" is situated within the space of Israeli identity, and to open a window onto questions concerning the ways in which global religious spiritual alternatives function as resources for coping with local conflict. It will address the role of alternative religiosity in national-political conflicts, its potential to serve as a healing and mediating force, as well as issues of interreligious encounter, cultural importation, processes of cultural translation and local adaptation, and formation of interreligious and intercultural spaces.*

Keywords: Native-American, Indigeneity, alternative, cultural adoption, coping

¹ Department of General History at the University of Haifa. idanedut@gmail.com

THE MIAMI INTERFAITH MODEL FOR JEWISH-MUSLIM DIALOGUE POST-OCTOBER 7TH: REIMAGINING AMERICAN INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Iqbal Akhtar¹

Abstract: *The October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and subsequent Gaza conflict have fundamentally disrupted Jewish-Muslim interfaith dialogue across the United States, revealing deep-seated tensions and the fragility of existing dialogue frameworks. This article presents the Miami Interfaith Model as an innovative approach to Jewish-Muslim dialogue that has successfully navigated post-October 7th challenges while fostering genuine understanding and cooperation. Through an analysis of thirteen key principles developed over eighteen months of sustained dialogue, this model offers a replicable framework for American Jewish and Muslim communities seeking to rebuild interfaith relations. The Miami model emphasizes small-group intimacy, intergenerational participation, home-based meetings, theological grounding, and sustained commitment to difficult conversations. This research contributes to the growing literature on interfaith dialogue methodology while addressing the urgent need for new approaches to Jewish-Muslim relations in contemporary America.*

Keywords: *Interfaith dialogue, Jewish-Muslim relations, October 7th, American pluralism, community building*

¹ Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs. Florida International University, USA.
iakhtar@fiu.edu

POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISATION OF THE „KINGDOM OF GOD“ CONCEPT

Iva Mršić Felbar¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the political instrumentalisation of the “Kingdom of God” concept by contrasting its meaning in the teachings of Jesus with the interpretations of his contemporaries. In the Synoptic Gospels, the Kingdom of God is presented not as a territorial or political entity, but as a transformative, eschatological reality grounded in divine sovereignty, ethical renewal, and radical inclusivity. Jesus’ proclamation resists reduction to nationalist or revolutionary agendas; instead, it challenges prevailing social, religious, and political hierarchies through a vision centered on justice, mercy, and inner conversion.*

However, many of Jesus’ contemporaries – particularly within the context of Roman occupation – understood or appropriated the concept in more explicitly political terms. For some groups, the Kingdom of God symbolized the anticipated overthrow of Roman rule and the restoration of Israel’s political autonomy. In such readings, the concept became a vehicle for resistance, at times aligning with broader messianic expectations that fused religious hope with political liberation. This divergence in interpretation reveals how theological ideas can be reshaped by socio-political pressures and aspirations.

The paper further argues that similar patterns of instrumentalisation persist in contemporary contexts. Religious language, including notions of divine rule or sacred authority, continues to be employed within political discourse, often projecting human ambitions onto transcendent concepts. Such usage risks distorting theological meanings and legitimizing ideological agendas under the guise of divine sanction. By critically examining both ancient and modern appropriations, this study highlights the need for careful hermeneutics that preserve the distinctiveness of religious concepts while remaining attentive to their potential misuse in political spheres.

Keywords: *Kingdom of God, political instrumentalization, Jesus, religious language, theology*

¹Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb, Croatia iva.mrsicfelbar@gmail.com

ESCHATOLOGY OF SILICON VALLEY: TESCREAL IDEOLOGY AS A NEW FORM OF 'HOLY WAR' FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

Ivica Kelam¹

Abstract: Computer scientist Timnit Gebru and philosopher Émile P. Torres coined the acronym TESCREAL to describe the intertwined set of ideologies dominating Silicon Valley: transhumanism, extropianism, singularitarianism, cosmism, rationalism, effective altruism, and longtermism. This ideological 'bundle' serves as an intellectual foundation for projects such as space colonisation, life extension, and the development of artificial general intelligence (AGI). In this presentation, we will critically analyse the TESCREAL ideological conglomerate, which currently functions as the dominant metaphysical framework within the technological elite of Silicon Valley. The central hypothesis of the presentation is that TESCREAL as an 'ideological bundle' does not merely represent technical optimism but operates as a full-fledged secular religion that instrumentalises eschatological fear of human extinction to legitimise the radical accumulation of power and capital in the hands of technological billionaires. Through an analysis of the discourse of leading accelerationists, it explores how the threat of 'misaligned' artificial general intelligence (AGI) is used as a moral cover for deregulation and marginalisation of contemporary social priorities in the name of hypothetical trillions of future lives. Particular emphasis is placed on the 'longtermist' ethics, which, similar to historical millenarian movements, proclaims anyone who slows technological progress as a 'murderer' of humanity's potential future, as seen in Mark Andreessen's 'Techno-Optimist Manifesto'. The presentation will also examine how narratives about 'saving civilisation' establish cognitive and material hegemony, which Gebru and Torres identify as a modern continuation of eugenic ambitions under the guise of universal beneficence. In the context of the conference theme, the presentation argues that TESCREAL-ism represents an evolution of religion as a weapon, where the 'holy war' is no longer fought for physical spaces but for dominance over the process of evolution and the cognitive sovereignty of humankind, while simultaneously justifying growing material inequality. We will point out how Silicon Valley is not only building software but also shaping a global theocratic narrative in which algorithmic singularity assumes the role of divine providence.

Keywords: TESCREAL, secular eschatology, AGI, longtermism, technological hegemony, eugenics.

¹ Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. Croatia. ke-lamivica@gmail.com

GERMANY VS FRANCE: MUTUAL PROTESTANT EXCOMMUNICATION

James Kay¹

Abstract: *This paper focuses on a specific moment during World War I when German and French Protestants debated over who is responsible for the War. Both Germans and French accusations of the other reflected their shared chauvinism and their demonization of the “other.” This match illustrates in a way, Nietzsche’s point: good and evil are not eternal realities, they are contextually manufactured to fit a historical moment.*

¹ Joe R. Engle Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics Emeritus, and Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs Emeritus, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA. jfkay@gmail.com

GRASSROOT INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AS LIVED EXPERIENCES: USING THE CASE OF RAINDROP

Juyan Zhang¹

Sara DeTurk²

Kassandra Luna³

Lauren Hochman⁴

Abstract: *In this research, we use the San Antonio branch of the Hizmet Movement, the Raindrop Foundation, as a case study to analyze the participants' lived experiences within the organization's interfaith dialogue events. Through a series of interviews, and with the assistance of LLM in the analysis of transcripts, the research reveals rich, diverse, and layered experiences of interfaith dialogue. The findings are represented in a three-dimensional model: personal and interpersonal experiences serve the foundation; organizational, social and political experiences comprise the mid-tier; and the ontological reflections form the summit. The results demonstrate that interfaith dialogue indeed has significant, transformative impacts on the participants. This research contributes to the literature on interfaith dialogue by systematically mapping lived-experiences, offering a contrast to earlier models that largely approach the subject from macro-level or theological vantage points. Additionally, the research contributes to the growing body of literature regarding the use of LLMs to assist in qualitative research.*

Keywords: *interfaith dialogue, Raindrop, Islam, religion, Hizmet*

¹ University of Texas at San Antonio. Juyan.zhang@utsa.edu

² University of Texas at San Antonio sara.deturk@utsa.edu orcid.org/0000-0003-0661-5762

³ kassyhope1@gmail.com

⁴ University of Texas at San Antonio lauren.hochman@my.utsa.edu

THE “AMSTERDAM NEIGHBORS CONTACT”: DUTCH FEMALE VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTING ISOLATED WOMEN WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND THROUGH LANGUAGE EMPOWERMENT

Maite Hes¹

Abstract: *This paper looks at the “Amsterdam Neighbors Contact” (Amsterdamse Buurvrouwen Contact, ABC) project, a peer-to-peer buddy program in which Dutch female volunteers are connected to isolated women with a migration background. In weekly meetings, the volunteer and the participant meet for an informal Dutch language class, which is shaped by the interests and personal situation of the participant. The focus on language within this project creates a direct possibility for the participants to boost their self-reliance. In addition, the buddy trajectories bring a variety of mutual learning moments, in which both the participant and the volunteer learn about the life, culture and religion of their buddy. The ABC-project, which has been running for more than 20 years in the city of Amsterdam, has repeatedly proven to be successful. Furthermore, over the past years the applications have been rising both among participants and volunteers. Within the larger context of the rising radical-right political environment in the Netherlands, this is remarkable. Therefore, this paper aims to comprehend why this project works. After distilling the key aspects that make the ABC-project valuable and sustainable, the findings are translated into a practical set of recommendations. These are specifically directed towards Dutch municipalities and other local political entities, to inspire future projects in the area of migration and social inclusion.*

Keywords: *peer-to-peer volunteer work, community-based social inclusion, empowerment through language*

¹ Faculty of Theology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, maitehes@gmail.com

THE AGGRESSIVE RHETORIC OF THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE TOWARDS THE PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH'S SUBORDINATION TO THE AIMS OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Marcin Składanowski¹

Abstract: *This paper analyses the unprecedented incorporation of harsh religious discourse into the official narrative of the Russian secret services. The Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR) increasingly refers to religious issues in its official statements, employing explicitly theological language. The aim of this presentation is to examine the mechanisms, forms, and geopolitical consequences of these actions.*

First, the language of the SVR's communications will be analysed. Particular attention will be paid to personal attacks on Patriarch Bartholomew, whom Russia's official state institutions describe as the 'Antichrist' or the 'false prophet'. Russian intelligence constructs a conspiracy narrative in which the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been reduced to the role of a tool in the hands of Western intelligence services, primarily British and American. The purpose of this alleged cooperation is said to be the deliberate weakening of the ideology of the 'Russian world' (Russkiy mir).

Second, the territorial dimensions of this conflict will be presented. The SVR's allegations concerning Constantinople's supposed interference in the affairs of local Churches will be discussed. The following case studies will be examined: tensions surrounding the leadership of the Orthodox Church in Georgia, accusations of fomenting division within Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and alleged anti-Russian activities in the Baltic states and the Balkans. These examples illustrate how the Russian authorities view the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as hostile operations aimed at Russian state interests.

Third, attention will be drawn to a paradigm shift in Kremlin policy. The direct involvement of civilian intelligence in theological and ecclesiastical disputes demonstrates that the Russian Orthodox Church is now positioned not as a religious institution, but as a matter of national security and raison d'état for the Russian Federation. This constitutes an example of the extreme securitisation of Russian Orthodoxy.

¹ Department of Political Systems and International Communication, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Centre for International Security and Economic Strategy, London, UK, marcin.skladanowski@kul.pl

**WHEN A MENPAI MEETS THE STATE: CATEGORICAL MISFIT AND
INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE IN THE TAI JI MEN CASE**

María Vardé¹

Abstract: *This paper analyzes the Tai Ji Men case in Taiwan through the lens of state classification, arguing that the conflict cannot be understood solely as a matter of tax abuse or religious discrimination. Tai Ji Men is commonly described as a menpai devoted to qigong, martial arts, selfcultivation, and a masterdisciple lineage. Yet its decades-long legal struggle reveals what occurs when a hybrid spiritual community encounters administrative and judicial systems built around rigid categories such as “cram school,” “association,” “business,” or conventional “religion.” Drawing on legal anthropology, the paper conceptualizes the controversy as a form of institutional violence produced through forced translation. When state agencies confront groups that do not fit their classificatory grid, they do not merely mislabel them but actively reshape them into administratively actionable forms. This process flattens relationships, distorts practices, and renders alternative spiritual lifeworlds vulnerable to legal and fiscal intervention. The Tai Ji Men case thus illustrates a broader dynamic relevant to minority religions globally: conflicts arise not only from prejudice or hostility but from the classificatory power of the state itself. The paper argues that categorical misfit helps explain how peaceful spiritual movements become entangled in prolonged institutional disputes, and why legal vindication alone may be insufficient when the underlying classificatory framework remains unexamined.*

¹ University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, mariavardeh@gmail.com

BEYOND THE LEADER: GUILT BY ASSOCIATION AND STIGMA IN CHRISTIAN GOSPEL MISSION

María Vardé¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the forms of social condemnation, discrimination, and hostility experienced by ordinary members of Christian Gospel Mission (Providence) following the conviction of the movement's leader. Rather than revisiting the criminal case itself, it asks what happens to a religious community when the accusation or punishment of a single individual is transformed into a generalized mark attached to all those connected with the group. Conceptually, the paper proposes that guilt by association functions as a recurrent mechanism through which stigma is produced and extended beyond the individual publicly identified as suspect or criminal. Drawing on Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan's influential 2001 framework "Conceptualizing Stigma," it argues that the leader's legal and public situation becomes socially converted into a discrediting marker attached to ordinary members. This activates processes of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination under conditions of unequal power. In this dynamic, affiliation with Providence becomes a stigmatizing social sign through which members are recast as suspicious, manipulated, morally tainted, or presumptive victims, regardless of their own actions, biographies, or expressed views. Based on media materials, public discourse, and exploratory testimonies from individuals linked to the movement, the presentation analyzes how this associative stigma travels across different social arenas—including workplaces, educational settings, family relations, and public visibility—and how it may enable harassment and broader forms of symbolic and social violence. By foregrounding guilt by association as an analytical mechanism, the paper contributes to the study of stigma in controversies involving minority religions and demonstrates how the social effects of accusation and punishment can be extended far beyond the targeted individual, producing informal but powerful extensions of condemnation.*

¹ University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, mariavardeh@gmail.com

IMPOSED VICTIMHOOD: MEDIA, ANTI-CULT REPERTOIRES, AND THE POLITICS OF PROTECTION

María Vardé¹

Abstract: *This paper examines a recurring paradox in criminal cases involving groups labeled as “cults”: individuals who deny having been abused, exploited, or manipulated are nonetheless publicly and institutionally constituted as victims. Drawing on judicial and public documents, media coverage, and exploratory interviews, I focus on how anti-cult repertoires intersect with psychologized theories of coercion and anti-trafficking languages to impose victimhood on actors who explicitly reject that status. I argue that the label of “victim” functions here not only as a “protective category” but as a classificatory intervention that fixes certain actors in a position of presumed vulnerability while weakening the legitimacy of their own claims to agency, consent, and commitment. At the same time, this operation undermines their authority to define the meaning of their own religious or spiritual experience, replacing their interpretations with external readings in terms of coercion, dependency, and abuse. Once this mechanism is in place, denials of harm are no longer heard as credible accounts. Furthermore, those labeled as “victims” are pushed to seek alternative spaces in which to be heard, while also being exposed to stigma, discrimination, and enduring public suspicion. More broadly, the paper suggests that the imposition of victimhood can be understood as a contemporary mechanism through which certain religious or spiritual commitments are publicly delegitimized and rendered governable in the name of protection. The paper contributes to a broader anthropological analysis of consent, subjectivity, and state power.*

¹ University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, mariavardeh@gmail.com

HOMO RELIGIOSUS AS HOMO BELLIGERANS: CONCEPTS AND MECHANISMS OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Marija Todorovska¹

Abstract: *The presentation will focus on the innate aggressiveness within religious narratives and cultic behaviour. The presentation will attempt to situate the inherent social coercion of religion and its narrative and cultic mechanisms of violence within the broader framework of collective religious sentiment and identity formation. The underlying concepts of violent ontological conflict in myth will be explored as motifs in cosmogony; the rules governing the preservation of the sacred-profane dichotomy, necessary for the structure and the functioning of the negative cult, will be examined as typical mechanisms of enforcement within the religious community; and Girardian ideas on violence and the sacred will be briefly addressed. The notion of homo religiosus as homo belligerans (touching also upon homo necans) will be considered through mechanisms of scapegoating; through concepts of religious and epic violence in narratives of war structured around heroes and villains; and through the metaphysical framework of ontological and moral dualism characteristic of the warfare worldview. These elements will be approached as recurring structures through which religious systems articulate affirmation of identity and communal belonging. Particular attention will be given to the ways mythic and cultic frameworks encode violence into collective models of religious narrative and behaviour.*

¹ Institute for philosophy, Faculty of philosophy University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" marija.todorovska@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

A PATH TO INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT: UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN GOSPEL MISSION'S THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE "30 LESSONS"

Márk Nemes¹

Abstract: *This paper presents preliminary findings by Márk Nemes and Anatolii Tokmantcev on a study of the Korean new religious movement, Christian Gospel Mission (Providence). Established in Korea in 1978 by Pastor Jung Myung-seok and based in Wolmyeongdong, this religion is a stigmatized, persecuted contemporary religious minority in Korea, with followers facing significant obstacles in openly practicing their faith both domestically and internationally. At present, the church has established a presence in 70 countries. Despite the leader's incarceration, the movement continues to expand both domestically and internationally, offering an essential existential and ontological safety-net for its followers. In researching this movement, the authors employed a mixed-methods approach, combining fieldwork (visiting Wolmyeongdong in late 2025) and unstructured interviews conducted while attending the so-called "30 Lessons" course offered online by Christian Gospel Mission's Taiwanese branch. These sessions cover CGM's dogmatic, social, and ethical dimensions – in terms of Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religion, focusing on the church's core theology, eschatology, Trinitology, and soteriology, along with CGM's unique cosmology, interpretational methods for Scripture, and practical topics such as marriage, sex, and gender, as well as recommended behaviors and desirable life paths. Based on the information provided, the authors interpret the movement through the lens of contemporary Protestant and Catholic dogma, highlighting its distinctive textual literalism. This approach goes beyond simple Bible reading and interpretation, encompassing verbal dogma closely linked to the spiritual experiences of the movement's founder. This paper will focus on three key topics discussed during these lessons: salvation, soteriology, and Trinitology, aiming to provide a more solid foundation for understanding this stigmatized religious movement's complex theology. Furthermore, the authors seek to provide a more contextual introduction to the unique cosmology of the CGM and to explore potential paths and challenges for meaningful interfaith engagement. These topics also examine how dogmatic particularities influence the religious lives of individuals affiliated with CGM and how their ontological self-understanding as lived experience affects their own religiosity.*

¹ Hungarian Academy of Arts, Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology, Budapest, Hungary, nemesmark1995@gmail.com

BETWEEN THE WEAPON OF AŠŠUR AND THE YOKE OF AŠŠUR: SOME ASPECTS OF SELECTED IDEOLOGICAL MECHANISMS AS RELIGIOUS INCENTIVES OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN IMPERIAL DOMINATION

Marko Taborsky¹

Abstract: *By exploring the annalistic tradition of Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, this study problematizes the theological underpinnings of imperial expansion and cohesion through the dual conceptual framework of the “Weapon of Aššur” and the “Yoke of Aššur”, examining how specific ideological mechanisms functioned as intrinsic religious incentives for military-political domination of the “Land of Aššur”. Annalistic texts emphasize the divine vocation of the king, portraying him as a chosen representative and blessed instrument of the chief national god Aššur, tasked with restoring and maintaining sacred cosmic order by expanding the borders of the “Land of Aššur” against the perceived chaos of unsubdued foreign nations, thereby framing military campaigns as divinely mandated missions aimed at rectifying the disordered outside world. In this context, the “Weapon of Aššur” as metaphysical might represents sacralized agency of the conquest itself, transforming extreme cruelty and brutality into juridical act of divine punishment, whereas the imposition of the “Yoke of Aššur” as submission symbol concurrently denotes not only political subjugation and economic exploitation, but also religious integration of the chaotic periphery into the god-ordained socio-political system of the center. Within this by the military instrument and the administrative result established framework, any resistance or rebellion against the empire was considered not merely as political dissent, but as sacrilegious transgression against the supreme deity. As complementary phases, these foundational constructs demonstrate that the Assyrians pioneered the ruthless use of religion as an all-encompassing weapon of war—one that morally justified both initial aggression of the conquest and subsequent oppression of the conquered. This model of kingship and warfare ideologies provides a primary archetype for understanding how large-scale propagandistic narratives have historically served as crucial instigations for weaponization of religion and sacralization of war, offering a blueprint for legitimizing totalitarian state violence as just execution and fulfillment of divine will.*

Keywords: *Weapon of Aššur, Yoke of Aššur, Neo-Assyrian Empire, Imperial Ideology, Imperial Domination*

¹ Faculty of Biblical Sciences and Archaeology (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum), Jerusalem, State of Israel; E-mail: marko.taborsky@gmail.com

RELIGION AS A TOOL FOR GAINING POLITICAL INFLUENCE TODAY

Márton Tamás Csanády¹

Abstract: The turn of the millennium's religious sociology discourse was dominated by secularization theories. It is a fact that, despite earlier optimism, secularization has also intensified in the former socialist countries of Europe in recent decades. Secularization theories basically saw Max Weber's theory of rationalization and disenchantment as justified. The anti-vaccination movements made it clear that this was not the case. Religion has once again become a central element of the political struggles of the post-COVID crisis period. As J. Cassanova clearly stated, the Russian aggression against Ukraine is a war of religion, an attempt to regain the power of the Russkiy Mir. Although American political fault lines are very complex, they also have a fairly identifiable religious dimension. The American illiberal right has not only exported political innovations, but also the introduction and use of religion as a tool in the political struggle. The problem of American innovations and the Orthodox church organization used as a tool for Russian expansion (Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Hilarion) has both encountered the still insufficiently clarified and investigated recruitment practices of communist state security organizations in the former socialist countries. The goal is for the churches to once again serve as ideological transmission belts to convey the political messages of the illiberal state. The results of the Hungarian elections of April 12, 2026, which can safely be called a kind of youth generational revolution, indicate that this experiment failed. In my presentation, I will present the above processes in detail and explore the most important dimensions that led to the failure. In my presentation, I will illuminate the connections with the help of statistical data and data from a representative sociological research I conducted.

¹ Budapest Metropolitan University Institute of Social Sciences and International Studies, Hungary, marton@csanady.hu

THE REPRESSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND THE TAI JI MEN CASE IN TAIWAN: PARALLELS AND DIFFERENCES

Massimo Introvigne¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the Tai Ji Men case as part of a longer historical continuum of state–religion relations in Taiwan, arguing that contemporary bureaucratic repression cannot be understood without reference to earlier patterns of authoritarian control. To illuminate this continuity, the analysis begins not with Tai Ji Men itself but with the persecution of the New Testament Church in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Kuomintang regime targeted independent spiritual movements as potential threats to political stability. The state’s actions against Mount Zion—invalidating household registrations, conducting raids, demolishing homes, and inflicting severe physical violence—demonstrate how legal instruments were manipulated to suppress religious autonomy. Although Taiwan democratized after 1987, the Tai Ji Men case reveals the persistence of similar logics. Despite a 2007 Supreme Court ruling affirming the innocence of Tai Ji Men’s leader and members, tax authorities continued to pursue unfounded claims, culminating in the 2020 seizure and auction of sacred land. This paper argues that both Mount Zion and Tai Ji Men were targeted not for criminal acts but for their independence from political power. By comparing overt authoritarian violence with contemporary bureaucratic harassment, the study highlights how state mechanisms of control adapt over time while preserving underlying assumptions about spiritual autonomy and legitimacy.*

¹ CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions), Turin, Italy, maxintrovigne@gmail.com

THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL MISSION: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Massimo Introvigne¹

Abstract: *The Korean Christian new religious movement Providence—also known as Christian Gospel Mission (CGM)—has attracted sustained public attention due to the controversial biography of its founder, Jung Myung-seok. Twice convicted and imprisoned, Jung was widely expected by opponents, journalists, and some scholars to become the catalyst for the movement’s collapse. Instead, Providence demonstrated a remarkable capacity for organizational resilience, doctrinal continuity, and international expansion. This paper offers a comprehensive introduction to CGM, beginning with a critical overview of Jung Myung-seok’s life, early ministry, and the theological system he developed, including its distinctive Christological and eschatological elements. It traces the historical evolution of the movement from its origins in South Korea to its global diffusion, highlighting the internal structures, missionary strategies, and cultural adaptations that have enabled its survival. The paper also reviews the major controversies surrounding Providence, including media narratives, legal disputes, and the role of anti-cult activism. It situates these within broader scholarly debates on the trajectories of new religious movements whose leaders face criminal prosecution. Drawing on classic theories such as Festinger’s “when prophecy fails,” it argues that a parallel dynamic—“when the leader is convicted”—can similarly produce counterintuitive outcomes. Rather than disintegration, some movements respond with consolidation, reinterpretation, and renewed commitment. By examining Providence as a case study, the paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how new religious movements navigate crises of legitimacy and how external pressures may inadvertently reinforce internal cohesion.*

¹ CESNUR, Torino, Italy, maxintrovigne@gmail.com

THE MEDIA, MINORITIES, AND VIOLENCE: FROM RWANDA'S GENOCIDE OF THE TUTSI TO ANTI-CULT CAMPAIGNS

Massimo Introvigne¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the central role of media—particularly radio and print—in preparing and executing the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. It argues that extremist outlets created a “soundtrack to genocide” by systematically dehumanizing the Tutsi population, conditioning the Hutu majority to accept mass violence, and coordinating killings in real time. Beginning in 1990, newspapers such as Kangura and later RTLM radio (Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines) normalized the idea that Tutsis were “cockroaches” to be exterminated, promoted the “Hutu Ten Commandments,” and fabricated existential threats to justify violence as selfdefense. As the genocide approached, these media identified targets, predicted political events, and used coded language such as “work” to signal the need for killing. After the assassination of President Habyarimana, RTLM shifted from incitement to direct operational guidance, naming individuals, giving locations, and coordinating roadblocks. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda later confirmed that media leaders bore responsibility for the genocide. The paper concludes by comparing this dynamic to the dehumanization of new religious movements labeled as “cults,” noting that while the scale is not comparable, similar mechanisms of stigmatization have contributed to discrimination and, in several documented cases, to violent attacks against groups such as the Unification Church, New Acropolis, Scientology, and the Christian Gospel Mission.*

¹ CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions), Turin, Italy, maxintrovigne@gmail.com

JESUS THE WARRIOR KING? THE LANGUAGE OF NATION AND INCARNATION

Matthew Drever¹

Abstract: *Scholars have noted that religious nationalism coincides with the rise of modern secularism. Such coincidence, however, does not signal complementarity, but rather that they compete on the same playing field, that is, within an ideological paradigm where religious nationalism seeks to sacralize and secularism desacralize the historical and temporal world as a primary domain that carries meaning (truth) and value (ethics). In this talk I will focus on one facet of this debate, namely, how American Protestant Christian nationalist models of Christ and their accompanying claims on ethics and spirituality are employed against the perceived threat of secularism. Here we will see that such models upend and undermine the traditional Christian balance between the polarities or boundaries of the finite/ infinite and historical/ eschatological, and have dangerous spiritual and ethical consequences. Drawing on an Augustinian framework developed in tandem with Emmanuel Levinas and René Girard, who help highlight the ethical and social significance of these polarities, I will articulate a critical response amidst a resurgent American Christian nationalism and its theological claim that the nation is a, or the, locus and mediator of Christianity.*

¹ Anglican and Ecumenical Studies, University of Tulsa, matthew-drever@utulsa.edu

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ORTHODOX SOCIETY IN BULGARIA

Mihaela Bozadzhina¹

Abstract: *Modernism in the new era, the current reality, among other things, such as different attitudes and values, brings with it (depending on your point of view and your threshold of tolerance) various positive aspects and positive consequences for the inclusion of young people in the Orthodox society in Bulgaria, but we can rather say that we do not need to limit our thesis solely to them, but on the contrary to different generations in this society. Here we focus on observations from both minors and people over the age of 65. What connects them all is the convenience of being informed about the topics that interest them at a click away, thanks to their mobile devices, and especially through the social media they use. Here we can focus on media such as Facebook for people over 65 years of age, as well as Instagram for the younger population, who prefer this platform according to their interests. Of course, we are not limited to these social media and these age groups here. The interesting detail actually comes when, in keeping with the times, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, led by its new patriarch (elected in 2024), takes a step towards a more innovative and easier approach to connecting and informing the public through the use of social media, namely. And here comes to symbiosis in communication between the two sides on the topic of a more contemporary and new, I think, way for the church.*

Keywords: *Bulgaria, Orthodox society, social media*

¹ Department of Sociology, South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, bozadzhina1996@gmail.com

**INNER STRUGGLE - OUTER PEACE
PERSPECTIVE ON THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF RELIGION**

**Naum Ilievski¹
Angelina Ilievska²**

Abstract: *Throughout history, religion has functioned not only as a system of belief and moral guidance, but also as a powerful instrument in the justification and mobilization of war. This paper explores the distinction between the authentic spiritual foundations of Christianity and the instrumentalization of religion in the context of conflict and violence.*

The methodological framework integrates the principles of the Ascetic–hesychastic tradition of Christian Patristic with concepts derived from the contemporary theory of personality Transactional Analysis, providing both a theological and psychological perspective.

The findings indicate a fundamental divergence between two paradigms: one oriented toward inner transformation and peace, and the other toward external mobilization and conflict. Mechanisms such as moral absolutism, identity polarization, and the construction of the “other” are identified as key drivers in the process of religious instrumentalization.

The use of religion as a tool of conflict arises not from its core theological principles, but from its strategic exploitation within structures of power. From a Christian perspective, the path toward sustainable peace lies in the restoration of the inner spiritual struggle, through which the individual becomes a bearer of reconciliation, unity, and peace. In contrast, the weaponization of religion represents a deviation from this spiritual path, where religious narratives are selectively interpreted and employed for political, ideological, and territorial objectives.

Keywords: *Religion, Conflict, Hesychasm, Transactional Analysis, Peacebuilding*

¹ International Slavic University “G. R. Derzhavin,” Sveti Nikole, Republic of North Macedonia, otec-naum@t.mk

² Private Practice, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, angelina_imk@yahoo.com

INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF RELIGION AS IDEOLOGICAL MASK OF WAR

Nonka Bogomilova¹

Abstract: *In the report, they are formulated and commented on in relation to the contemporary context a few theses regarding the use of religion as an ideological façade of conflicts and wars. Special emphasis is placed on contemporary interstate wars as an inevitable consequence of the nature of modern production and the economic development of large countries experiencing a constant hunger for new territories and resources; the need for the rulers to hide this reason behind an acceptable ideological mask (struggle for own religion, for democracy, for eternal peace) to motivate the masses, future soldiers, to patriotism and sacrifice (Immanuel Kant). The relevance of these ideas to the philosophical understanding of the contemporary conflicts and general human disasters is commented and analyzed. The opposition between apparent (religious motivation) and the real (economic and political interests) is emphasized. The ideas on the issue of some classical and modern authors are commented.*

Keywords: *religion, war, ideological mask, hunger for resources, contemporary conflicts.*

¹ Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, nonka_bogomilova@mail.bg

IMAGINING THE OTHER. WESTERN REPRESENTATIONS OF ISLAM IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY

Pablo Argárate¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the transformation of Western Christian perceptions of Islam during the critical period between the Fall of Constantinople and the Fall of Granada. It argues that this era marks a transition from inherited polemical representations of Islam toward more complex, and occasionally dialogical, approaches.*

For centuries, Islam had been largely misunderstood in Western Christendom, often framed as a Christian heresy or even a form of paganism, supported by distorted or fabricated accounts. The persistence of such images was reinforced by political conflict, including the Crusades, and by the lack of direct engagement with authentic Islamic sources. However, the geopolitical shock of 1453 intensified the need for a more systematic theological and intellectual response.

The paper analyzes three representative figures: John of Segovia, Nicholas of Cusa, and Pope Pius II. While all operated within inherited frameworks of Christian superiority, their approaches diverged significantly. John of Segovia advocated peaceful disputation and even interreligious congresses; Nicholas of Cusa developed a visionary theology of religious concord grounded in the unity of divine truth; and Pius II, though still embedded in crusading logic, experimented with rhetorical persuasion, notably in his letter to Mehmed II.

By situating these thinkers within broader intellectual currents—such as the translation of the Qur'an, the rise of scholastic rationality, and early humanism—the paper highlights the emergence of dialogue as a novel, though limited, paradigm. It concludes that late medieval Christian reflections on Islam, despite their constraints, anticipate key elements of modern interreligious dialogue and remain relevant for contemporary theological engagement.

Keywords: *Islam, Medieval Western Christianity, Representations, Dialogue*

¹ Professor, Head of the Institute for Ecumenical Theology, Eastern Orthodoxy and Patristics. Faculty of Theology. University of Graz, Austria (UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue for South-East Europe) pablo.argarate@uni-graz.at

WAR, RELIGION, AND SECULARIZATION: EPISTEMIC RUPTURE AND CYCLES OF RELIGIOUS REORIENTATION

Patience Otitoju Olawumi¹

Abstract: *This paper reconsiders dominant narratives of secularization by examining the role of war and crisis in reshaping systems of meaning. Classical secularization theory has often portrayed the emergence of secular societies as a gradual outcome of modernization, rationalization, and scientific development, implying a relatively linear transition from religious to secular worldviews. However, many of the historical transformations associated with the rise of secular political and intellectual orders occurred during periods of profound social rupture. Drawing on historical moments often associated with the formation of secular orders, such as the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, this paper proposes an alternative conceptual framework based on two processes: epistemic rupture and epistemic reorientation. Epistemic rupture refers to historical moments in which dominant frameworks for interpreting reality, fail to adequately account for widespread suffering, political instability, or war, and consequently lose their societal authority. In response, societies undergo epistemic reorientation, reorganizing their systems of meaning, authority, and legitimacy. Secularization can thus be understood not as the inevitable product of intellectual progress but as one historically contingent outcome of such reorientations. By reframing secularization as a response to crisis rather than a linear developmental trajectory, this model highlights the role of war and political upheaval in generating new epistemic orders. The paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of this framework for analyzing contemporary transformations in religion and secularity.*

¹ Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa. potit072@uottawa.ca

BELLUM SACRUM REVISITED: RITUAL AUTHORITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF CONFLICT

Ratko Duev¹

Abstract: War does not become sacred by its nature, but through the authority of those who interpret it. This perspective allows for a re-reading of ancient sources in which the sacred emerges not as a cause of conflict, but as its interpretative frame. In the ancient Mediterranean world, war was closely connected with ritual practice, divination, and the protection of sanctuaries, yet it was not inherently conceived as “sacred.” Rather, its sacral character developed in specific contexts in which conflict was understood and articulated through religious categories. Greek traditions, particularly those related to the Delphic (Amphictyonic) Sacred Wars and the notion of *ἱερὸς πόλεμος*, illustrate this dynamic. In these cases, priests, seers, and oracles did not initiate war; instead, they provided the interpretative frameworks through which it acquired meaning and legitimacy. Such patterns suggest that the sacred dimension of war does not lie in the act of violence itself, but in the processes through which it is interpreted, ritualized, and integrated into a broader cultural and religious order. This interpretative role of religious authority becomes more explicitly articulated in Roman thought, especially in the concept of *bellum iustum*, where religious sanction is closely linked with normative and moral reasoning. What remains embedded in ritual practice and interpretation in the Greek world is in Rome reformulated in more stable and normative terms.

Seen from this perspective, the relationship between religion and conflict cannot be reduced to simple causal explanations. Instead, religion functions as a symbolic and interpretative framework through which conflicts are understood, justified, and communicated. Without presupposing direct continuity, similar patterns may be observed in later and even modern contexts, where religious authority and textual interpretation continue to shape the language of conflict.

Keywords: sacred war; *ἱερὸς πόλεμος*; Delphi; Amphictyonic Wars; *bellum iustum*; priests; interpretation; ritual; doctrine.

¹ Faculty of Philosophy SS. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje ratko@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

THE THREE GREAT PRINCIPLES: TOLERANCE, TRUTH & PEACE The perspective for the Age of Knowledge

Rita Santillán¹

Abstract: *Principles are central to a cluster of widely held doctrines and theories. They are the starting point from which laws emanate: they cannot be derived from other sources, but it is possible to derive laws and rules from them. They are often appealed to, so embedded are they in the basic conceptual resources of thinkers. Serge Raynaud de la Ferrière (1916-1962) sets out three Great Principles: Tolerance, Truth, and Peace for the Age of Knowledge. To be interested in all doctrines is the most beautiful example of tolerance. In such a way one could have the faith of a Christian, the virtues of a Hindu, the integrity of a Buddhist, the wisdom of a Taoist, the discipline and control of a Muslim, and make from all these concepts a SYNTHESIS.*

The Principle of Tolerance regulates the principle of Truth. He highlights that Truth is neither beautiful nor repulsive, just as God is neither good nor evil and Light is neither into a religion nor in occultism. Truth should be sought as an unlimited eternal rather than in a teaching, a doctrine, a school, a concept or in intellectuality, in art, or science. All of these are profiles which outline the Road, they are steps helping to be on the Path.

“Truth may walk through the world unarmed,” says a Bedouin Proverb. The Principle of Truth regulates the Principle of Peace. The human being has oscillated between one limitation or another, hardly noticing. It is alright to believe in an idea as long as it can provide us peace. But is the world really at peace?

Keywords: *R. de la Ferrière, Truth, Tolerance, Peace.*

¹ University of British Columbia, Canada, rita.santillan@ubc.ca

INTRODUCTION: TAI JI MEN, CONSCIENCE, AND RESILIENCE

Rosita Šorytė¹

Abstract: *This introduction frames the Tai Ji Men case through the movement's central teaching of the "priority of conscience," a principle that emphasizes moral clarity, selfcultivation, and peaceful conflict resolution. The presentation will briefly outline the history and values of Tai Ji Men, situating them within ongoing debates about religious liberty in Taiwan, where the movement's longrunning legal struggle continues to raise questions about administrative power, minority rights, and the boundaries of spiritual autonomy. The introduction will also present the Tai Ji Men-produced short film *Children from Heaven*, which offers a complementary perspective on the origins of human conflict. Rather than attributing discord solely to political structures or institutional failures, the film highlights the internal forces—fear, prejudice, anger, and greed—that many spiritual traditions describe as the "five poisons" of human nature. By juxtaposing the external pressures faced by Tai Ji Men with the film's exploration of inner transformation, the introduction proposes a dual lens for understanding conflict: one that recognizes both systemic injustices and the ethical work required to cultivate peace. This framing sets the stage for a broader discussion on conscience, resilience, and the role of spiritual communities in fostering social harmony.*

¹ FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief), Rome and Turin, Italy, director@orlir.org

DEPROGRAMMED APOSTATES AND ATROCITY STORIES ABOUT KOREAN AND JAPANESE “CULTS”: A COMPARISON BETWEEN LIZ CAMERON AND SAYURI OGAWA

Rosita Šorytė¹

Abstract: *In the study of new religious movements, “apostates” constitute a specific and analytically significant category: former members who become active opponents of the groups they once belonged to. While they represent a minority of ex-members, their testimonies often dominate media coverage and public policy debates. Recent scholarship has suggested that apostate narratives deserve renewed attention, particularly when they concern individuals raised within minority religions rather than adult converts. This paper critically examines two contemporary and influential apostate figures: “Sayuri Ogawa,” a Japanese woman raised in the Unification Church who has become a prominent critic of the movement, and Liz Cameron, a former member of Christian Gospel Mission (Providence) who underwent deprogramming and now collaborates with American deprogrammer Rick Ross. Both women have produced vivid atrocity stories—accounts of extreme harm, manipulation, or abuse—that have circulated widely in national and international media. Through a comparative analysis, the paper argues that these cases illustrate why scholars have historically approached apostate testimonies with caution. It highlights the role of deprogramming, activist networks, and media amplification in shaping narratives that may blend personal grievance, ideological framing, and external influence. It also considers the political contexts in Japan and South Korea, where anti-cult campaigns and legislative agendas have created incentives for certain types of testimony. By situating these narratives within the broader literature on apostasy, memory, and social construction, the paper contends that the methodological concerns identified by earlier scholars remain relevant. The cases of Ogawa and Cameron demonstrate the need for critical scrutiny of atrocity stories, especially when they become tools in public controversies, legal disputes, or state interventions targeting minority religions.*

¹ International Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB), Turin and Rome, director@orlir.org

THE MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF VICTIMS: APPLE TV'S "TWISTED YOGA" DOCUMENTARY

Rosita Šorytė¹

Abstract: *This paper analyzes the Apple TV documentary Twisted Yoga, which portrays the Romanian spiritual movement MISA and its founder, Gregorian Bivolaru. The articles demonstrate that the documentary selectively reproduces anticult narratives while omitting court decisions, historical context, and contradictory evidence. Regarding the origins of MISA, Twisted Yoga uncritically relies on Securitate files from Ceaușescu's regime, ignoring the 2011 Romanian court ruling that rehabilitated Bivolaru and documented the political fabrication of charges against him. The documentary also relies on information supplied by Hugues Gascan, a marginal anticult activist whose personal conflicts, prior criminal conviction, and shifting claims nonetheless shaped the French investigation into MISA. The paper then evaluates testimonies of "apostate" exmembers featured in the documentary, noting inconsistencies, prior media careers, and the absence of corroboration in Romanian court proceedings. Finally, the paper highlights the documentary's reliance on the discredited theory of "brainwashing," contrasting it with the testimonies of the women allegedly "rescued" in the 2023 French raids—none of whom considered themselves victims and many of whom later filed complaints against the police. Twisted Yoga exemplifies how sensationalist media can distort minority religions through selective evidence, ideological framing, and reliance on anticult stereotypes.*

¹ FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief), Rome and Turin, Italy, director@orlir.org

EDUCATION IN SILENT CONFLICT: NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AGAINST RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN LEBANON

Rui Lobo Correia¹

Abstract: *Lebanon's confessional architecture, built upon 17 officially recognised religious communities, has historically made it both a laboratory for interreligious coexistence and a ground where religion can be instrumentalised for political and military ends. The notion of "silent conflict", an undeclared form of warfare marked by systemic repression, intermittent violence, and the gradual erosion of civic life, captures the particular nature of this fragility, in which religious identity oscillates between a resource for solidarity and a vector for extremism and social fragmentation.*

This paper draws on doctoral research conducted in Lebanon to examine how non-formal education and interfaith dialogue can counter the use of religion as a driver of conflict. Through a qualitative case study of Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation (DLR), a Lebanese NGO operating across confessional lines, the study analyses semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with religious leaders, educators, and young beneficiaries in April 2024 — during a period of presidential vacuum and escalating sociopolitical tensions, between Hezbollah and IDF.

Findings reveal that extremist discourse thrives at the intersection of political corruption, structural discrimination, and digital radicalisation. The study argues that non-formal, community-based educational spaces — precisely because they operate outside state-imposed curricula and sectarian institutional structures — create conditions for interfaith engagement and reconciliation that formal education struggles to replicate in Lebanon's fragmented confessional system.

Keywords: *Non-Formal Education, Interfaith Dialogue, Silent Conflict, Religious Extremism, Peacebuilding, Lebanon*

¹ PhD in Education | Universidade da Beira Interior, Portugal | ruicorreia84@live.com.pt |
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8220-9646>

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS COEXISTENCE IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM JORDAN AND THE LEVANT

Saad Twaissi¹

Abstract: *The rise of Islam in the seventh century CE is frequently framed within narratives of conquest and religious conflict. In a conference dedicated to examining religion as a weapon of war, this paper offers a different perspective by exploring material evidence for coexistence between Christian and Muslim communities during the early Islamic period (7th–9th centuries CE) in Jordan and the broader Levant. Rather than relying solely on textual sources—often shaped by theological and political agendas—this study foregrounds archaeological data, including church continuity, mosque construction, shared urban spaces, inscriptions, and burial practices.*

Excavations at key sites such as Jerash, Umm al-Rasas, and Pella reveal patterns of gradual transformation rather than abrupt rupture. Evidence indicates the continued use and even renovation of churches well into the Umayyad period, alongside the emergence of early Islamic architectural forms. Urban layouts demonstrate shared economic and social infrastructures, suggesting pragmatic accommodation rather than systematic suppression.

By situating archaeological findings within broader socio-political developments under the Umayyad Caliphate, this paper argues that early Islamic rule in the region was characterized by administrative continuity and negotiated coexistence. Religion, while central to identity formation, did not uniformly function as an instrument of violence at the local level. Instead, the material record reflects adaptive strategies, economic interdependence, and communal resilience.

This reassessment contributes to ongoing debates about religion and conflict by demonstrating how archaeological perspectives complicate assumptions of inevitable sectarian hostility in periods of political transformation.

¹ Department of Tourism and Heritage, United Arab Emirates University, UAE saad.twaissi@uaeu.ac.ae

A SAFE SPACE FOR COLLABORATION IN A CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS– POLITICAL CLEAVAGE

Sahar Abu Ganim¹

Rachel Erhard²

Abstract: *Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, about 20% of the population, face significant disadvantages rooted in government policy. Despite internal diversity - primarily Muslim (≈85%) alongside Christian, Druze, and Bedouin minorities - the Jewish–Arab divide spans religion, culture, territory, economic resources, and politics. These groups maintain distinct identities and separate education systems, reinforcing disparities; as a result, their first meaningful encounters often occur only at university.*

In recent years, the proportion of Arab students in Israeli universities has grown, with undergraduate representation nearing their share of the population. However, gaps persist: representation declines in master's programs, is particularly low in doctoral studies, and is nearly absent among academic faculty.

In response, a group of Jewish and Arab women scholars from Women Professors in Israel Forum established a program for doctoral Arab women students. Grounded in principles of justice, equality, and gender equity, the program creates a safe space for collaboration and dialogue. It aims to strengthen participants' sense of competence and belonging while developing academic and professional skills. Participants reflect on their identities as scholars, women, and members of a minority, using the secure space to process marginality and explore issues of identity, belonging, and integration within a system that often reproduces exclusion.

After three cohorts, the program's conference presentation will share both its vision and implementation. Such initiatives highlight the potential to transform religious identity-based conflict into opportunities for empowerment, connection, and dialogue—contributing not only to individual success flourishing but also to social cohesion and broader interreligious and intercultural understanding.

¹ Faculty of Humanities, Tel Aviv University, Israel saharlod@gmail.com

² School of Education. Tel Aviv University, Israel; erhardr@tauex.tau.ac.il

RELIGION, FAITH AND SPORT: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AMONG YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS AGED 9–12

Sofija Georgievska¹
Natasa Stanojkovska Trajkovska²

Abstract: *Sport represents an important environment for the physical, psychological, and social development of children. Alongside athletic training and competition, many young athletes develop personal beliefs and practices that help them cope with challenges, pressure, and uncertainty. Among these, religion and spirituality may serve as important sources of comfort, confidence, and emotional support. However, research exploring the role of religion in children's sporting experiences remains limited.*

This paper presents findings from a study conducted among 80 young football players aged 9 to 12 years in North Macedonia. The research aimed to examine the significance of religious beliefs and practices in the lives of young athletes and to explore how faith is integrated into their sporting experiences. Particular attention was given to children's religious affiliation, frequency of prayer, religious practices before competitions, and perceptions of faith as a source of support during matches and training.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically designed for young football players. The findings indicate that religion occupies an important place in the lives of many participants. A substantial proportion of children reported believing in God, praying before matches, and turning to faith in moments of uncertainty, nervousness, or anticipation of important competitions. For many participants, prayer was associated with feelings of calmness, confidence, protection, and hope for positive outcomes.

The results suggest that religion and spirituality may represent meaningful psychological resources for young athletes, contributing to emotional regulation and resilience in competitive sport settings. The study highlights the need for a more holistic understanding of child development in sport, acknowledging not only physical and psychological dimensions but also spiritual aspects of young athletes' lives.

Keywords: *religion, spirituality, youth sport, football players, children, faith, prayer, sport psychology.*

¹ Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, e-mail: sofija.arnaudova@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

² Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, e-mail: natasa.stanojkovska@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

FROM INTRA-RELIGIOUS INTRACTABLE CONFLICT TO AN ACADEMIC COLLABORATION

Tehila Gado¹

Rachel Erhar²

Abstract: *An intense intractable conflict is deepening the rift within the State of Israel between the Haredi (Ultra-orthodox) population – constituting approximately 15% of the population – and the rest of society. The religious belief underlying this escalating struggle has evolved into a political, social, physical, and economic confrontation, further intensifying polarization between the groups. The religion functions not merely as a private system of belief, but as a cultural framework of identity, symbolic boundaries, a source of collective authority, and a focal point of suspicion and exclusion. In the Israeli context, relations between Haredim and other groups are particularly charged, as they are intertwined with struggles over public identity, financial resources, moral authority, the boundaries of belonging, and the place of religion in the public sphere. These tensions are further exacerbated both by the deliberate separatism of the Haredi community and by longstanding crises that have intensified in recent years.*

Against this backdrop, this paper presents a case study of an initiative operating within the conflict rather than outside it: a collaboration between the Israeli Professors Forum and a NGO dedicated to fostering cooperation between Haredi and non-Haredi communities. The dialogue initiative focuses on Haredi women doctoral students who face significant religious, social, familial, economic, and academic barriers. The central argument is that such a program engages with “boundary women” creates a respectful, safe, inclusive, and empowering dialogical space. Dialogue is made possible through the identification and strengthening of shared foundations: a commitment to learning, knowledge, academic excellence, and social engagement. From these shared values emerges the possibility of productive encounters between distinct social and religious worlds – even when they are embedded in an ongoing, high-intensity conflict.

Thus, Cultural-religious identity can function not only as a source of polarization, but also as a resource for mediation, dialogue, and trust-building in conflict settings.

¹ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem | Tehila.Gado@mail.huji.ac.il

² School of Education, Tel Aviv University | erhardr@tauex.tau.ac.il

BENEDICT XV'S PEACE NOTE: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE CATHOLIC PEACE MOVEMENT

Torsten Woll¹

Abstract: *On August 1917 1st, Pope Benedict XV. issued his peace note *Dès les débuts*, marking the culmination of Vatican diplomatic efforts during the First World War. Although largely rejected by the belligerent powers, the initiative resonated within Catholic milieus. This paper adopts a comparative historical approach to examine how this papal peace initiative was received and appropriated by Catholic peace movements in different national contexts: Germany (Friedensbund Deutscher Katholiken), England (The Guild of the Pope's Peace), and France, with particular attention to Marc Sangnier and the Congrès démocratique international pour la paix. The central objective of the paper is to assess to what extent Benedict XV's peace note functioned as a blueprint for Catholic peace activism. It analyzes how the document's normative principles, theological arguments, and political proposals were adopted, adapted, or strategically modified within specific national frameworks. A key focus lies on the theological argumentation employed by these movements. The paper investigates which doctrinal traditions and moral-theological concepts were mobilized in advocating peace, and how these were negotiated in relation to competing pressures of national loyalty and political alignment. By situating these processes within their broader socio-political contexts, the paper highlights both the transnational dimension of Catholic peace efforts and the constraints imposed by nationalist discourses, including those supported by parts of the Church hierarchy.*

Keywords: *Benedict XV., Dès les débuts, Catholic Peace Movement, Theological Peace Ethics*

¹ Chair of Medieval and Modern Church History JMU Würzburg, Germany, torsten.woll@uni-wuerzburg.de

RELIGION AND WAR: WORLD FOCUSES

Vladan Stanković¹

Abstract: *Every religion strives to establish harmony with man living in the world. Religion calls for the inner harmony of man with himself, and for the harmony of man with God, but it also appeals to the harmony of man with the outside world: with the entire universe, and therefore with the community in which people interact. Outside of all these flows lies power, a form of domination of man over man. Its ultimate expression is politics. Politics is the directing, or external imposition, of a certain system of values and behavior on other people. We could even say that religion and politics are opposite phenomena: they exclude each other. However, when politics and religion merge and grow into one, then the perversion of religion inevitably occurs. The ultimate expression of this perversion is religious wars. Therefore, the topic of the paper is: Religion and War in the most general sense, and the subject of research: emerging forms of religious wars. Spatial framework and time range: throughout history and today. Methods: Case study, Observation, Comparative method, Statistics... Scientific significance: filling knowledge gaps in the scientific fields of Peace Studies, International Relations, Sociology of Religion, Political Science of Religion. Social contribution: improving Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Tolerance, Interconfessional and ecumenical contributions.*

Keywords: *religion, war, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism.*

¹ Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade, Serbia, email: vladan.p.stankovic@gmail.com

WHEN LAW LOSES ITS CONSCIENCE: RULE OF LAW, CONFLICT, AND THE TAI JI MEN CASE

Wang Yu-Ran¹

Abstract: *Historically, religious wars were defined by military confrontation and direct violence. In contemporary societies that describe themselves as governed by the rule of law, however, religious conflict increasingly emerges through legal institutions, administrative procedures, and public narratives. Although these forms appear less visibly violent, they can produce longterm consequences for religious freedom and human dignity. Drawing on the dual perspective of a law student and a member of a spiritual community, this paper examines how modern legal systems may generate institutionalized forms of religious conflict. Using the Tai Ji Men case in Taiwan as a central example, the paper explores how unresolved administrative or judicial errors can shift legal and fiscal mechanisms from protecting fundamental rights to sustaining prolonged institutional disputes. It argues that conscience functions as a necessary internal boundary of the rule of law: without ethical selfcorrection, legal guarantees of religious freedom risk becoming merely textual rather than substantive. Finally, the paper suggests that religion need not become a source of conflict. Through its long-term engagement in cross-cultural dialogue, conscience education, and peace-oriented initiatives, Tai Ji Men illustrates how spiritual communities can contribute to ethical reflection and the cultivation of a culture of peace.*

¹ Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy, Taipei, Taiwan, andra200374@gmail.com

A NEW ANALYTICAL READING OF “ASHIDDĀ’ ‘ALĀ AL-KUFFĀR”: FROM INTERPRETIVE VIOLENCE TO DOCTRINAL FIRMNESS

Yahya Sabbaghchi¹
Mahdiyeh Pakravan²

Abstract: *The Qur’anic phrase “Ashiddā’ ‘alā al-Kuffār” has been subject to wide-ranging and often conflicting interpretations throughout the history of Qur’anic exegesis. A substantial strand of classical tafsīr has taken shiddah at face value and, by treating it as equivalent to ghilẓah (harshness), has read the verse as endorsing severity or aggressive conduct toward non-believers. At certain historical junctures, this reading was mobilized to legitimate militant and expansionist behaviors; however, its justificatory force derived more from the socio-political exigencies of those contexts than from the Qur’anic text itself. Using a critical, lexical-semantic method, this study re-examines the phrase and shows that the Qur’anic semantics of shiddah point not to violence but to firmness, stability, and doctrinal impermeability. A comparative survey of the Qur’anic occurrences of the root shadda, together with an analysis of contextual correlates such as ghilẓah and ‘izzah, indicates that these terms are not synonymous: while they sometimes function in parallel rhetorical positions, they delineate distinct semantic fields. On this basis, the verse describes the believers’ inner resistance and doctrinal steadfastness in the face of ideological deviation and domination, rather than prescribing outward hostility. This construal also coheres with the verse’s agrarian simile, which depicts believers as a robust, flourishing plant, emphasizing growth and resilience. Accordingly, the verse emphasizes ethical steadfastness, faith-based autonomy, and collective cohesion among believers rather than legitimizing violence. This reinterpretation advances a balanced, mercy-centered hermeneutic for contemporary reflections on faith and Muslim–non-Muslim engagement.*

Keywords: *Ashiddā’ ‘alā al-Kuffār; shiddah; ghilẓah; ‘izzah; doctrinal firmness; violence in Islam; Qur’anic exegesis; Muslim–non-Muslim relations*

¹ Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran.

² Pooyafekr Research Institute, Tehran, Iran. pakravan.vela@gmail.com

SOCIAL EXPRESSION OF BULGARIAN NEW AGEISM: VISIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Yana Fileva¹

Abstract: *This paper presents a literature review of the vision of the Bulgarian New Age concerning social change, which are: “holistic society;” “predetermined by astrology;” “new culture;” and “synarchy.” Sociological analysis revealed that with exception of the “holistic society”, the others are based on Petar Danov’s philosophical doctrine, as transmitted by his disciples. A social vision for Bulgarian society based on the idea of synarchy is presented by Ivan Tolev, a student of Danov who wrote in the 1920s, and Dimitar Kalev, a contemporary researcher of Danov. Their vision is well defined – the organization of the state system, the distribution of functions, and so on. Lyubomir Lulchev, as a royal advisor of Boris III and a student of Danov, managed to introduce certain state reforms in his time according to the Teaching. Metodi Konstantinov, also his student, Konstantin Zlatev, and Silva Doncheva, who are contemporary followers, presented their vision within the broader framework of humanity. Based on Danov’s philosophy and astrological laws, their visions are not specifically connected to the social system, although they are critical of both communism and capitalism. Alexander Milanov’s vision considered practically all aspects of the functioning of a “holistic society,” with key words being “voluntary,” “conscious,” “equal,” “service to the whole,” etc.*

Keywords: *Bulgarian New Ageism, visions for social change*

¹ South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Bulgaria, yana_fileva@yahoo.com

**FROM POLITICIZED RELIGIOUS IDENTITY TO CONSCIENCE-DRIVEN
REFORM:
A TAI JI MEN PERSPECTIVE**

Yang Ming-Sheng¹

Abstract: *This paper investigates the roots of religious conflict by questioning whether so-called “religious wars” arise from doctrinal incompatibility or from the political instrumentalization of religious identities during periods of institutional transition. Through a comparative analysis of the Balkan conflicts and the Reformation, the study argues that religious traditions possess significant interpretive elasticity: they can be mobilized either toward confrontation or toward reform depending on the interaction between political structures and human moral agency. Within this framework, the paper introduces the contemporary Tai Ji Men case in Taiwan as an example of how nonviolent forms of “institutional religious conflict” may emerge through administrative and legal mechanisms rather than open hostility. The analysis is conducted in light of Tai Ji Men’s teaching on conscience as humanity’s moral compass, emphasizing how appeals to conscience shape the movement’s responses to state pressure and contribute to broader civic discussions on legal reform and religious freedom. The paper contends that preventing religion from becoming a tool of antagonism requires institutional transparency as well as translating spiritual ethics into public discourse. Under such conditions, religion can transcend identitybased conflict and function as a constructive moral resource for social dialogue and democratic development.*

¹ Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy, Taipei, Taiwan, peteryang1225@gmail.com

**CRITICAL POINTS OF CONFLICT
BETWEEN RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATIONS IN THE WORLD**

Zoran Milosavljević¹

Vladan Stanković²

Abstract: *We are witnesses of numerous conflicts in the world. Many recent wars, as well as those that are still ongoing, had, and still have, a religious background, and some of them lead to the conclusion that these are real small Conflicts of (religious) civilizations. Therefore, it is necessary to indicate and scientifically process all the more important points of religious conflicts in the world. The Subject of this scientific work, therefore, will be focused on the hot spots of recent war conflicts around the world whose actors are: states, nations and ethnic groups that are motivated, primarily, by religious reasons. If we add to this the international religious solidarity of individual countries with the conflicting parties in military operations, then religious motivation becomes obvious, and the importance of such a topic goes beyond the scope of scientific work. The research will Aim to highlight the war spots of religious conflicts in the world: to explain the genesis of the emergence of war hotspots, the reasons for intolerance and the possibilities of reconciliation. The General hypothesis leads to the conclusion that, very often, the basis for serious armed conflicts is found at the points of contact of religious civilizations. The Scientific justification for this research lies in the need: to examine the points of religious conflicts in the world, to draw logical conclusions from the findings, to advance scientific disciplines such as: Religion and Politics, Sociology of Religion, International security, Civilization studies... Social contribution: Peace studies, pointing out the danger of religious conflicts, giving importance to interfaith dialogue... Research methods: Observation, Comparative method, Content analysis, Cross-cultural method, Case studies...*

Keywords: *Religion, Civilization, War, Conflict, Peace.*

¹ Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade, Serbia, email: bigz40@hotmail.com

² Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade, Serbia, email: vladan.p.stankovic@gmail.com

THE POLICY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF YUGOSLAVIA AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MACEDONIA TOWARD RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN MACEDONIA (1943–1946): FROM WARTIME MOBILIZATION TO POSTWAR CONTROL

Angelche Koccev, MA¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM) toward religious communities between 1943 and 1946 — the period of transition from a liberation movement to a constituted state authority. Proceeding from the thesis that this policy was pragmatic and shifted across phases, rather than a static doctrinal secularization, the paper traces its evolution alongside the consolidation of the new state. During the wartime phase (1943–1944), the party leadership pursued a cautious popular-front line: formally secular, yet oriented toward neutralizing or winning over believers and clergy at a time when religious affiliation was a contested field of loyalty among the opposing camps in an intertwined liberation and civil conflict. In the transitional and postwar phase (1945–1946), as power was consolidated, the policy shifted from accommodation to control: the separation of church and state, the agrarian reform that affected ecclesiastical and waqf properties, the reorganization of religious institutions, and the abolition of sharia courts are read as instruments for dismantling the institutional autonomy of religion. Particular attention is given to the question of an autonomous Macedonian church organization, independent of the Serbian Orthodox Church, where religious policy became directly interwoven with the nation-building of the new republic. The paper argues that, in these three years, religious communities were for the CPY and CPM simultaneously an ally to be mobilized, a rival to be subordinated, and an instrument of state-building.*

Keywords: *religious communities, Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Communist Party of Macedonia, secularization*

¹ PhD candidate in Historical Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, e-mail: angelkoccev29@yahoo.com

RELIGION AS A SHIELD: A REGIONAL-SENSITIVE APPROACH FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Máté-Tóth András¹

Abstract: *Religion is a shield that protects. The primary religion in the region is Christianity, which uses the metaphor of a shield in its sacred sources and religious hermeneutics. (Gen 15, 1; Psalm 3, 4; Psalm 119, 114; Ef 6, 16;) (Synonyms are: Guard, Protection, Defense, Cover, Safeguard, Armor, Barrier, Screen). The military metaphor of attack and defense is increasingly dominant in our age, in which our region is characterized to a significant extent by a discourse of threat. (Jodelet 2020) The interpretation of religion in this region cannot be adequate primarily along the great paradigm of secularization, but rather through the paradigm of threat and the security provided in response to it. (Máté-Tóth, Szilárdi 2023; Máté-Tóth, Povedák 2025) The religion preferred by the existing political powers is one that supports the protection of national interests. In other words, it is a shield against enemy attacks. A religion that follows a different logic, the logic of plurality and mercy, is dangerous to a policy geared towards defense and may itself become an enemy. (Máté-Tóth 2024) During every significant transformation, religious communities have redefined their own identity based on their enduring values. The big question is whether today's religious communities determine their social actions based on their own sacred sources or whether they serve the logic of political discourse.*

¹Prof. Dr. András Máté-Tóth, University of Szeged, Hungary, e-mail: matetoth@rel.u-szeged.hu