RELIGION, GREED, AND THE INSANITY OF WAR

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ABSTRACT

This article quantifies only a brief encounter with the violent intersection of religion, business, and war. It surveys war in the modern world by including the following topics: the effects of war such as environmental degradation; psychological costs, including post-traumatic stress syndrome and chronic fatigue syndrome; violence against females; children at war; costs of war; causes of war and globalization. It wonders if there is such a thing as a killer-instinct that needs an antidote. Several religions from East and West, violent and non-violent, are discussed against the backdrop of war noting the presence of warrior gods and sacrifice. Finally the economic and pseudo-creative benefits of war are summarized. Selvidge poses a final question to readers, “How can we change the direction of a world gone mad?”

Keywords: children, females, globalization, religion, war, warrior.

“And war broke out in heaven…”

Rev. 12:7 NRSV

War is gut wrenching. It tears at the insides of our hearts so much that we block it out and attempt to distance ourselves from its effects. We try to escape by searching for havens and idyllic retreats but even those spaces are shattered by extreme conflict. We cannot escape it.

Human Costs of War

Evidence of the effects of war is sobering. Staff Sergeant David Bellavia recalls his first encounter with a platoon in Iraq running over a civilian candy truck.

The occupants were smashed beyond recognition. Our first sight of death was a man and his wife both ripped open and dismembered, their intestines
strewn across shattered boxes of candy bars. The entire platoon hadn’t eaten for 24 hours. We stopped, and as we stood guard around the wreckage, we grew increasingly hungry. Finally, I stole a few nibbles from one of the cleaner candy bars.¹

A 2008 report by The Associated Press, chronicling research authorized by the United Nations, estimates that 151,000 Iraqis have died since the recent invasion of Iraq in March 2003 through the middle of 2006.² The John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health places the toll of Iraqi lives during that same period at 655,000.³ Wikipedia and Antiwar.org place the number at over one million.⁴ Reports vary, but approximately 4,200 U.S. male soldiers and 100 female soldiers have been killed with reports of 30,000 to 100,000 wounded.⁵ The number of contracted civilian deaths are a mystery and often overlooked in the counts.

Deaths in previous world wars include millions of people. Ten million soldiers died and 21 million military were wounded in WWI.⁶ World War II claimed the lives of 15 million military and 35 million others.⁷ Vietnam claimed 58,000 soldiers and as many as 500,000 to 1 million Vietnamese.⁸ The Korean War claimed 2,448,095 soldiers.⁹

The Disastrous Effects of War

War produces unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, infant mortality, lack of clean water and electricity, massacre, rape and pillaging.¹⁰ And as we have witnessed recently, it may cause legislators to provide incentives for people to join in a war effort. As the war in Iraq forged on, the U.S. Congress enacted a law in 2005 that would raise the death benefit for sol-

2. The Associated Press, “Study Estimates Iraqi Death Toll was 151,000 in Three Years,” Kansas City Star (January 10, 2008), A9.

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diers from $12,500 to over $237,000. On the surface, this bill seems to be very generous. Recruitment funds also increased in order to attract people into the armed forces. But Patrick T. McCormick, in analyzing this escalation of funds, wonders if our government is exploiting the poor by buying their bodies for war.\footnote{Patrick T. McCormick, "Volunteers and Incentives: Buying the Bodies of the Poor," \textit{Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics} 27, no. 1 (2007): 77–93.}

\textit{Environmental Degradation}

War poisons everything it touches, and often creates environments that support cruelty and inhuman behavior. Major Stefan Vetter of the Swiss Armed Forces asks questions regarding the human costs that seem to be an outcome of every war. He discusses the medical experiments done by Dr. Joseph Mengele and General Shiro Ishii during WWII. Both believed that agonizing torture done in the name of winning a war or producing a better society was acceptable. Mengele killed and dissected human beings and Shiro experimented with biological warfare on people in his own country.

Major Vetter describes the atrocities that prisoners experienced at the hands of the 23 U.S. military soldiers and four interrogators at the Abu Ghraib Prison. Those actions included torture, demeaning naked acts, attack dogs, and physical violence that led to some prisoner deaths. He places the blame for the atrocities on group loyalty and idealism that led to a personal psychological shift in perceptions about reality.\footnote{Stephan Vetter, "Understanding Human Behavior in Times of War," \textit{Military Medicine} 172 (December Supplement, 2007): 7–10.}

This same shift in perceptions of reality has been unearthed by researchers who study other divisions of the military. Ann Herpel in her article in this issue, “The Ecology of Command: U.S. Pacific Command and the Environment of the Pacific Rim,” challenges us to think about how the military is killing life in our oceans, on islands, within swamps, in the skies, and the future. She argues that the U.S. military, under the guise of protection, believes in a “god of death” and through their supply lines, past war efforts, and current practices, is killing the planet. She thrusts her fists in the face of all the military commanders and demands them to stop.

\textit{Psychological Costs}

\textit{Post-traumatic syndrome and other diseases.} War leaves obvious physical scars but long after the cessation of fighting, people may experience post-traumatic stress in various forms.
The war in particular presents profound mental stresses: unknown and often unseen enemies, suicide bombers, a hostile land with virtually no safe zone, no real front or rear. A 360-degree war, some call it, an asymmetrical battle space that threatens to injure troop’s minds as well as their bodies.¹³

Soldiers must learn strategies to deal with the pain they experience when they kill others, while at the same time, watching their friends die.⁴ According to Gregg Zoroya, about “three in 10 GIs on their third tour (of Iraq) admit emotional illnesses.” “Soldiers in combat suffering emotional issues and who saw friends killed were twice as likely to abuse civilians by kicking or hitting them, or destroying their property...”¹⁵ Suicides also increased among soldiers. In 2007 there were 121 soldiers who committed suicide and about 2,100 who tried to commit suicide or injured themselves. About 20 percent of those stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan experience severe marital problems.¹⁶

Chronic fatigue syndrome. More recently physicians have been studying the glut of illnesses developed by soldiers after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. A series of doctors have identified chronic fatigue illnesses that are related to exposure to chemical, biological, and radiological exposure.¹⁷ More than 100,000 soldiers in the Gulf War developed illnesses that include gastrointestinal problems, confusion, depression, skin rashes, disabling fatigue and more. Another culprit underlying these diseases may be the barrage of vaccinations given to each soldier before deployment to the Gulf.

There is some evidence to suggest that French soldiers who fought alongside U.S. soldiers in Iraq did not develop the same diseases. Debora MacKenzie, in the New Scientist, says that France was the “only country not to vaccinate its troops.”¹⁸ Researchers have proposed studying all of the French troops to determine if vaccinations are the culprit of chronic fatigue syndrome.

¹⁴. Ibid.
¹⁵. Gregg Zoroya, “A Fifth of Soldiers at PTSD Risk,” USA Today (March 7, 2008), 11A.
Violence Against Females

Sexual assaults and harassment are also byproducts of war. In 2007 2,688 sexual assaults were reported in the U.S. military. "There were 181 court-martials last year for sexual assault, 201 non-judicial punishments and 218 other administrative actions and discharges," according to Pauline Jelinek, "$[T]he problem of violence against women in the military remains persuasive."\(^1\)

Master Sgt. Cindy Rathbun knew something was wrong when her hair kept falling out in clumps. She is a member of the first class of females to go through the Women's Trauma Recovery Program. At least 182,000 females have been deployed to Iraq. In 2006 nearly 3,800 women were treated for post-traumatic stress disorder. Twenty percent of women seeking care from the VA showed "symptoms of military sexual trauma." Yet some academics have argued that war is good for females.

Theorist and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon in 1967 postulated that war equals the playing field for females. The normative patriarchal environment that discriminates against females becomes suspended and they become an integral and important part of the war. While fighting alongside the males, females are recognized as equal and take on greater and more important responsibilities. They become liberated from the roles that society expects.\(^2\)

Aaronette M. White tested his thesis by interviewing females who had fought in revolutions in Africa. Her discoveries are frightening. "Like the posters depicting images of a liberated African woman with her baby in one hand and her rifle in the other, romanticized conceptions of women revolutionaries fail to grapple with the power structure of military organizations."\(^3\) Soldiering and war lend itself to a hyper-masculine culture. There is an intimidating power that stymies other voices. People feel as if they must obey. This "super-macho combat" environment cannot produce equality for females. Instead they become utensils to be used to support the power structure. They are bought and sold and their sexual favors are required if they are to be true to the war or revolution.\(^4\)


22. White, "All the Men are Fighting for Freedom," 865.

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In contradiction to Fanon’s theory, females in the wars in Africa did not attain equality but experienced degradation in status, marginalization, and shame for their participation in the war. Their terror and abuse was never discussed because the community demanded silence. Rita Mazibuko tells a horrid story about being raped by several men repeatedly, shut up in a room, sodomized and cut. 23 The stories of the females who survived the wars in Zimbabwe center on “torture, forced pregnancies, forced sex work, molestation,” and more. 24 How does a woman overcome the physical and emotional scars of comrades who have terrorized her while fighting alongside of them? White ends her insightful report as follows:

Women who choose to join military forces have to combat both the external enemy and the patriarchal attitudes and actions of their fellow soldiers. Even in circumstances where revolutionary violence is justified, the long-term psychological costs of war may be far more damaging for women and men than Fanon suggested. 25

Children at War

When I was stationed in the North-West Frontier province of Pakistan with the Pakistan army Special Service Group, I learned that each Pathan youth was given a weapon by his father when he reached the age of 12. 26

There is no more emotive topic within discussions of war than “child soldiers.” It is estimated that more than 300,000 children serve in armies in at least 44 countries. Many are abducted and stolen from their families. Some join willingly as a way to overcome homelessness, hunger, loneliness, or because they believe in the “cause.” In a chaotic war, some say, “the safest place to be is in the military.”

It is not merely that children are abducted to serve in a war but children are taught to kill other children. Some of the unlucky ones are forced to kill their own parents so that they have no one to love them, nowhere to go, if they were to escape the nightmare.

Donald Dunson chronicles the life of Sunday Obote in Uganda from the time in 1994 when he was abducted at the age of seven from his parents’ home. He joined about fifty other children around his age. One of the boys ran away from the group and was caught. The leader decided to teach the rest of the group a lesson.

23. Ibid., 874.
24. Ibid., 869.
25. Ibid., 880.
“We will prove to you that we don’t like children who try to escape. This boy will die in front of you here because he tried to escape.” Odoki was then hit on the head with a big axe. He was dead but they continued to hit him until you could not recognize he was human. We were warned not to cry for him.27

According to legend, Gobind Singh, founder of the Khalsa Sikhs, created the same allegiance without killing anyone. With blood on a sword he challenged those who would be followers to enter the tent. They had to be willing to die in order to become a member of his group. They entered the tent knowing that they might be killed. The blood on the sword was a trick but it separated the followers into a group he could trust.

Child soldiering is not new. According to the Hebrew Bible, David killed Goliath, a mortal enemy, with a slingshot. Children joined the Christian Crusades in the thirteenth century.28 Indigenous tribal customs around the globe often include warfare as a way of proving manhood for a young boy.

Blame for the recent barrage of fighting children is often placed upon the production of lighter weapons like the AK-47. Yet gun specialists argue that lighter weapons were produced and used in the world wars. Common sense tells us that children have historically had access to lightweight killing instruments like bows and arrows, slingshots, knives, and machetes.

Children fought in the world wars and the U.S. Civil War, often called the “boys’ war.” And throughout the twentieth century north and south countries recruited children to serve in their armies. Today, from Al Qaeda training camps to military schools around the globe, children are taught about war and soldiering.

Brutal commanders also recruit female children. According to P. W. Singer, females did not fight in the U.S. Civil War nor were they part of Hitler Youth, but they compose 30 percent of the child armies in the world today.

Underage girls have participated in the armed forces of 55 countries, in 34 of these, girls saw combat, and in 27 nations they were abducted to serve. Girl soldiers are often singled out for sexual abuse, even by their own commanders, and they have a harder time of integrating back into society at war’s end.29

After the end of fighting, what happens to the children? A special report in *U.S. News and World Report* explores the effect of Mozambique’s civil war on children. When the war ended, they found homeless and financially crippled children who had never taken care of their health. Many of them were forced into slavery. They found no future waiting for them. And some children developed debilitating physical and psychological illnesses. Wray Herbert writes:

Firinice [Nharala] was only 6 when he was abducted by Renamo and witnessed the brutal murder of family members... When he ended up at Lhanguene (at home), he was mute, and although he later regained his voice, he was by all reports never completely healthy again. He was delusional much of the time, and in his early 20s he was still living in the care of his mother. That is where I was supposed to meet him, but I never got the chance. Ten days before I arrived in Mozambique, Nharala drowned in a nearby lake while fishing.30

Financial Costs

There appears to be no end to the financial costs of war. According to *Digital History*, WWI “cost $186 billion in direct costs and another $151 billion in indirect costs.”31 *The National Priorities Project* tracks the cost of the War in Iraq. In October of 2008, the Federal Government had spent $560 billion on the war or about $341 million per day.32 The Congressional Budget Office projects that the costs of the Iraqi war could reach $2.4 trillion by 2017 and some people in congress want to place that figure at $3.5 trillion.33

*The National Journal* collected figures from several agencies in order to compare costs of important U.S. projects or wars as a way of highlighting the financial drain of the Iraqi war on the country. Costs for the Interstate highway system were $360 billion. The Vietnam War totaled $518 million. Only $106 billion went to the Apollo project. And they are estimating as of 2008 that $800 billion has been spent on both the Iraq and Afghan wars.34 How else could this money have been spent?

Causes of War

Most people agree that destruction of humans, property, the environment, and our future by waging war should be avoided. Yet, for as far back as the historians can uncover, people have warred against one another. When discussing "war" the pundits "know" what it is but often disagree on how to define it. According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, war is defined as "a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations." Cambridge Dictionaries Online defines it as "armed fighting between two or more countries or groups...".

And then there is the more recent phrase, "War on Terror." What is it? How do you define it? Many attempt to cast a definition in religio-ideological terms such as a war against "evil" or a war to create a better world. Others interpret it as a "clash of civilizations" or an "Islamic insurgency."

When did the War on Terror begin? Is it a war between Islam and the West, or between civilization and terrorist outlaws? Who—and where—are our friends and enemies? Is the framework for this war on terrorism only limited to al-Qaeda or do we recognize other terrorists in countries such as Ireland and South America? So the United States is at war with terrorism but who are the terrorists?

Summarizing the reasons for conflict in the world today is an encyclopedic task. Amos Yoder, in World Politics and the Causes of War since 1914, identifies and plots all of the major wars up until 1982. He surveys scores of causes that include aggressiveness, distortion of violence by the media, repressed resentment, genetic pre-disposition, self-preservation, nationalism, racism, competition among competing political ideologies, hatred of another nation, historical conflicts, protection of territory, survival of the fittest, frustration, failure of foreign policy, greed, personal profit, a perception that war is glamorous, and dangerous idealism. Powerful politicians and charismatic leaders in power often use the patriotism and the willingness of people to give up their lives for their country. They can "distort reality to convince their soldiers that they are fighting for their nation."

In this short article we will focus on only a few of those causes.


37. Yoder, World Politics, 195.
Globalization and the Divine Money Men

"In order to save the village, it became necessary to destroy it."

Technology under the codename of "globalization" has changed the world forever. Only a few years ago, India and China seemed so far away from us but now they are at our doorsteps. They answer our phones and manufacture almost everything we buy. We can instantly email people all over the planet and watch home-grown videos on YouTube that cross all sorts of cultural barriers. Distinctive cultural identities and languages are fading in the light of Western expansionism. Terrence R. Guay summarizes a definition of "globalization" created by the International Monetary Fund:

…the growing economic interdependence of countries world-wide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology.

Prem Shankar Jha predicted that the expansion of technology and its partner globalization would produce conflict over a decade ago.

Ironically, the seeds of future global conflict lie buried in the very development that led to the emergence of a global marketplace, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. This is the (re-)emergence, not long after the Second World War, of technology as the driving force behind social and economic change. Technology has unified markets, through revolutions in information gathering and dissemination, brought transport costs down to a fraction of what they were in the fifties, and thereby created a global market. Technology has also given countries the means to exploit the market.

Modern businesses have learned to objectify and manipulate images to such an extent that human needs pale against the supposed rational-virtual-cyber-life.

Through science and technology we have gained unprecedented power to manipulate and order the world in the way we want… In a similar fashion we have substituted new gods for old, without perhaps fully understanding what we have given up and what we have in return.


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The Divine has transformed itself into the supposedly controllable marketplace. And that Deity catapults aggressive consumerism, nationalism, and ideological expansionism into a collision of values around the globe. In an anti-intellectual stealth and steel-faced pose, modern nations evoke this new jihad and allow capitalistic divine entrepreneurs to conquer the peoples of the earth. Market-share has become a code word for creating and engaging the “enemy.” And this expansionism has left the factory workers in the United States stunned and standing in bread lines. Watching great industrial giants head for cheaper labor markets has created a despair and frustration that could erupt into a major social conflict.

Underlying every war in the last century was the need to expand product, space, and bank accounts. “All wars in the past and present...were caused by private ownership relations and resultant social and class antagonisms in exploiter formations,” says Yoder. Underlying every war in the last century was the need to expand product, space, and bank accounts. “All wars in the past and present...were caused by private ownership relations and resultant social and class antagonisms in exploiter formations,” says Yoder. Underlying every war in the last century was the need to expand product, space, and bank accounts. “All wars in the past and present...were caused by private ownership relations and resultant social and class antagonisms in exploiter formations,” says Yoder. 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Economic theory provides the foundation for these religio-type economic wars that satisfy the voracious greed of big business. Of course, big business argues that progress is a good thing. But progress that destroys the cultures and habitats of indigenous peoples; usurps power over local and state governments; and milks societies to the point of extinction is not progress. It is a cold and calculating techno-cultural war that often ends in revolution and civil unrest. Walter Wink calls this type of revolution “redemptive violence.” Aggressors believe that they know what is “best” for the world and continue to forge their will on others. These capitalistic ideologs challenge the world to act with them or against them. There is no

43. Yoder, World Politics, 27.

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middle position. Within this economic framework is a fundamental belief that the world should reflect one way of thinking, one marketplace, one language, and one value system. According to George Bush Senior, this was to be a "New World Order." And big business is in the driver's seat in attempting to create one market for themselves.

The Killer Instinct

Seyom Brown in The Causes and Prevention of War asks questions that, perhaps, we do not want to consider. He points us toward the irrationality of war and wonders if humans are programmed for violence. Are we born with a "death instinct" or is it a learned behavior? Is aggression a product of isolation and alienation? Do people use violence in a calculated manner in order to gain something?

An unprejudiced observer from another planet, looking down on man as he is today, in his hand the atom bomb, the product of his intelligence, in his heart the aggressive drive inherited from his anthropoid ancestors, which this same intelligence cannot control, would not prophesy long life for the species.

Many theorists, including Riane Eisler, have taken Seyom Brown's theories further. They argue that it is the male who brings the phallic desire of killing to the table. This violence is programmed into the genes of males and evidence for their behavior can be traced back through time. Novels like William Golding's Lord of the Flies explores the possibility of this primeval disease.

Yet, anthropologists have discovered and studied peaceful societies where males are not physically violent. For instance, the Kung Bushman in southern Africa do not use forms of violence to deter citizens from breaking social rules. They employ public ostracism while continuing to perpetuate stories of revered heroes who "survive adversity by trickery and deception" not violence.

Religions and War

..."[B]low them all away in the Name of the Lord." Jerry Falwell

Religion and war enjoy each other's company. According to Vimal Tirimanna, "[B]y 1998 more than half of the U.S. Secretary of State's list of the thirty most dangerous groups consisted of religious organizations." Today all of the above is subsumed under the topic of "terrorism." The passion that we discover in religion and the passion that we feel when threatened may join hands and propel us toward savagery. Many writers place the awful atrocities and unthinkable destruction of peoples at the feet of beliefs or religions. When people become so intertwined in a religious belief; when they have lost their own identity to a moral system created for them by a charismatic leader; when they give up thinking for themselves; when they find that religion helps to take away the pain of living; they may fall prey to being used by ruthless makers of violence. Karl Marx was not far off the mark when he spoke of religion being the opiate of the masses.

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.

If a religion becomes a drug for a people then that psychological stupor puts people and nations at risk.

Understanding the relationship between religions and war is a complicated topic. No one has a definitive handle on how and why they seem to be so intertwined. David R. Loy thinks, "[R]eligion is a central, perhaps central force, [sic] that motivates and mobilizes people." Henry A. Atkinson, in The Causes of War, concludes that religion is a "fruitful" cause of war. "Every war at some period, if it lasted long enough, became a 'Holy War.'"

Since 9/11 most Americans define war in terms of terrorism. There is a tendency, fueled by the media and founded by the politicians, to lay blame for the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq at the feet of Islam. Reza Aslan writes:

From the moment U.S. President George W. Bush launched what he called a "crusade" against "evil-doers," there has been a growing sense, not just in the Muslim world by among our closest allies, that U.S. foreign policy is being filtered through an unprecedented union of religious and political ideology.

Muslims and people who are mistaken as Muslims, such as Sikhs, Indian-born Hindus, or anyone of Middle Eastern descent have become scapegoats in the recent international conflicts. They are abused and even killed by Americans because we cannot clearly define the "enemy."

Monotheistic Traditions
All religious traditions support non-violence or peace efforts in one way or another. And when we discuss religious traditions we must recognize that within any religious tradition there are divisions and sects. To argue that a religion teaches "this or that" can be disproved because there is always a sect or division that believes or teaches otherwise. So we will discuss the issues in a general way knowing that there is always another opinion on the topic.

Defining the enemy and destroying him are concepts embedded in the religious literatures of the major monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. If there is only one supreme Deity/God/Yahweh/Allah then there is only one way and one truth, say many who follow the traditions. Refina M. Schwartz in her book, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism,* "argues that there is an interrelationship between monotheism and violence. She takes pains to demonstrate how identities, through covenant and exclusivity in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, have led to violence in history."

All of the major monotheistic religions on the planet developed out of cultural circumstances of pluralism and syncretism. They adapted and adopted rituals and beliefs of other religions around them to create their own distinctive brand. But, in times of conflict, pluralism often is replaced with a single-way of "righteous" thinking. And that singleness of belief may breed war.

Warrior Gods and Future Messiahs
All three monotheistic religions have their own interpretation of a messiah who often acts as a Warrior-God. The Hebrew Bible tells stories of Yahweh leading Israelites into battle or victimizing those who do not wor-

ship him. The apocalyptic battle at the end of time found in the Christian book of Revelation portrays a God who is more frightening than his opposition, Satan. Marla J. Selvidge compares the tactics used by both of these adversaries in Revelation. “God” engages in torture, burning a prostitute, killing sea creatures, and creating famines, pestilences, sores, earthquakes, plagues, hailstones, and even levels mountains. Christianity claims many apocalyptic writings that look toward the end of all existence and the creation of a new world with a reigning Messiah. (See the Book of Revelation.)

Beliefs in a future Messiah often control the lives of people in the present. After all, if you believe that a Messiah will reign in the future then your religion, your lifestyle, your hopes and dreams will reign also. You will obtain power some time in the future. People who believe in the coming of a Messiah may even attempt to order their lives and the world in a direction that would hasten the coming of the future. That move toward the future often involves conflict. Shiaism, within Islam, looks forward to the 12th Imam, or “hidden Imam,” known as Muhammad al-Madhi. He will return just before the “judgment” is to occur and right after a time of peace. Within Judaism there are sects known as “Messianic Judaism” and “Lubavich Hasidim.” Both look forward to a time in the future when a messiah will emerge.

Sacrifice
Sacrifice, at the heart of every war, is an essential historic ritual within all three major monotheistic traditions. Ancient Israelites sacrificed animals as part of their normal activities. While in Egypt they were told to sacrifice a lamb and place the blood on their doorposts. The high priest would offer a sacrifice for sin once a year in the Holy of Holies in the temple. (See Exodus in the Hebrew Bible.) (Judaism has reinvented this killing tradition with the holiday, Yom Kippur, where no animal is sacrificed.) Christianity appropriates that image of a sacrifice with the story of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb (Gospel of John). Central to the Christian faith is his horrible death and, then, resurrection.

In Islam, at the end of the pilgrimage to Makkah is the Festival of Sacrifice, or Eid al-Adha, where worshipers usually kill a goat.

During the celebration of Eid al-Adha, Muslims commemorate and remember Abraham’s trials, by themselves slaughtering an animal such as a sheep, camel, or goat...

It is very important to understand that the sacrifice itself, as practiced by Muslims, has nothing to do with atoning for our sins or using the blood to wash ourselves from sin. This is a misunderstanding by those of previous generations: “It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him” (Qur’an 22:37).

The symbolism is in the attitude—a willingness to make sacrifices in our lives in order to stay on the Straight Path. Each of us makes small sacrifices, giving up things that are fun or important to us. A true Muslim, one who submits his or herself completely to the Lord, is willing to follow Allah’s commands completely and obediently. It is this strength of heart, purity in faith, and willing obedience that our Lord desires from us.\(^6\)

Some have termed these religions “death cults” because death is so central to the belief systems. Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Herland* (1915)\(^6\) criticized death cults by writing a book that placed “birthing” at the center of life, not killing. According to many, when a religious text contains stories about a Divinity who kills, maims, retaliates, and allows his only son to be killed—that type of violence penetrates the psyche of individuals. Joanne Carlson Brown links the problem of child abuse in our culture to the violent teachings about a child, Jesus, who is allowed to be beaten and killed while a powerful Father God watches.\(^6\) She argues that the story has penetrated our culture and psyche so much that we are not outraged at violence toward children. We accept it, perhaps, as we accept the atrocities of war.

**War**

The Muslim Qu’ran, the Jewish (Torah, Tanakh, Pentateuch) Hebrew Bible, and the Christian New Testament contain teachings about retaliation and violence. Consider this Islamic text:

> And slay them wherever ye catch them. And turn them out from where they have turned you out. For persecution is worse than slaughter. But fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there. But if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who reject faith (Surat 3:191 Qu’ran).

Within the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible are violent stories of conquest. Joshua was told by his God to conquer the promised land. He was to drive out the inhabitants and kill every man, woman, child, and animal in his conquest of the property. This is the beginning of “Holy War.”

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\(^{60}\) See [http://www.islam.about.com](http://www.islam.about.com).


“[And] when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them” (Deut. 7:2 NRSV). “You will annihilate them—the Hittites and Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the Lord your God has commanded...” (Deut. 20:17).

The history of ancient Israel and early Judaism is filled with movements aimed at taking and possessing the land now called Israel. Some have termed it “Zionism.” Reuven Firestone believes that, “The notion of divinely commanded war...was never expunged from the repertoire of Jewish ideas.” And that belief has powered Jews to retain the country of Israel, even today.

The Christian New Testament presents many stories of violence and killing. For example, there are many violent stories in Acts of the Apostles. Stephan in the Book of Acts is stoned to death. Ananias and Sapphira are killed because they lied to the Holy Spirit. Saul killed Christians before he was converted. The Christian Gospels, in particular the Gospel of Matthew, warn of an imminent war:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man’s foes will be those of his own household (Mt. 10:34-36 NRSV).

Reading the history of the development of Christianity from the time of Constantine in the fifth century CE through Gregory the Great in the Middle Ages up to the time of the Crusades in the eleventh century and then onward toward the Inquisition in the thirteenth century finds that Christianity is littered with war and violence. Islamic expansionism from the eighth century on fostered violence for centuries.

Non-Violent Religious Traditions

Monotheistic Traditions

While the monotheistic traditions teach violence and war they also argue peace. Peace organizations abound and peace and justice issues permeate the writings of the western monotheistic traditions. Nowhere will you

find such passion for peace and justice than within the writings of the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. In the Psalms within the Hebrew Bible one of the lyrics of a hymn reads, "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14 NRSV). The collector of the Christian Gospel of Luke writes, "Blessed are the peacemakers." And, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you..." (Lk. 6:27 NRSV).

Within Islam, the Qu'ran and Hadiths (stories) about Muhammad are filled with verses and stories about peace.

Islam is the religion of peace. Its very name is derived from the word "salam." Salam is not only the absence of violence and aggression but it also means total well-being and happiness. It means literally "to be safe, secure, sound, wholesome, unharmed, unimpaired and intact..." In the Qu'ran, God is called Al-Salam i.e. the Perfect one (Surah 59:23). The state of salam is the state where everything finds its fullness, glory and perfection... The paths of righteousness and virtue that lead to God are also called subul al-salam (5:16) and the greeting of peace both in this world and in the hereafter is Assalam "alaikum which is emphasized in Islam and is taught as a proper greeting for the believers. The Prophet—peace be upon him—said, 'The best Islam is to give salam to every one, whether you know that person or not" (al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 11).66

David Martin argues that the main goal of Christianity is to make peace not war. And as Christianity makes its peace, it ignores or does not understand or is uninvolved with politics and therefore finds itself caught up in violence.67 S. Wesley Ariarajah argues that religion can become a scapegoat for a host of issues.

It is common knowledge that much violence that goes on in the name of religion has little to do with religion. Often religion is used, misused, and abused in conflicts that have social, economic and political motivations, and many of the persons that actively perpetrate violence have little or no knowledge of the tenants of the faith in the name of which they join battle. In most of these cases it is religious identity and fervor that play the important role than the motivations provided by the faith itself.68

There are Christian pacifist traditions such as the Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites who argue against any type of killing.69 And then there are those who subscribe to the "just war theory." Killing can be justified if there are good arguable reasons to support the effort.

69. Learn Peace is a website about World Religions and War and Peace. http://www.ppu.org.uk

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Eastern Traditions
Underlying the polytheistic (belief in many Deities) Hindu and Jain traditions is the concept of *ahimsa*, non-violence to any living thing. Many Hindus in both India and Nepal do not eat or butcher meat and some Jains wear masks to keep from swallowing or killing a bug. But this belief did not stop locals in India from a civil war with Muslims fought over land that they claimed belonged to a temple dedicated to Shiva. Embedded within the ancient Hindu caste system is a kshatriyas/warriors caste (responsible for governing and the military in India) that is typified by the stories of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, an important holy writing within the Mahabharata.

Within a sect of Buddhism known as Soka Gakkai is a peace pledge called “My Victory Over Violence.” It is as follows:

I will value my own life. Recognizing that a lack of self-identity and hope for the future lay at the roots of all violence. I will reach beyond my limitations, taking concrete steps each day to uncover my real potential. I will never give up on my dreams, even if they seem impossible.

I will respect all life. Recognizing that violence comes in many forms. I will not isolate myself but will create an environment where others feel comfortable and can be themselves. I will see beyond superficial differences and reflect on my own behavior.

I will inspire hope in others. With courage, I will resolutely stand up against violence, be it verbal, physical or passive and teach others through my own example. I will support others and encourage them to follow their dreams.⁷⁰

According to the website *Learn Peace* many within Buddhism espouse peace and would rather die than kill someone else.⁷¹

Bernard Faure takes exception to those peaceful attitudes and strongly argues that the seeds of violence are fostered within Buddhism, especially within Zen.

In whatever countries Buddhism has become official ideology—whether Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia or Tantric Buddhism in Tibet or East Asia—war has often been zealously waged. At present, the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, for example, have openly taken up the struggle against the Tamil freedom fighters. What is true of Japanese Zen holds equally for other forms of Buddhism. Long before its lyrical metaphysical flights exerted their charm, Buddhism took hold first and foremost as a tool for protecting States.

The Buddha's sermons seem, however, to condemn all violence, toward oneself and toward others. Suicide, it is true, is not formally forbidden. And Buddhism remains ambivalent toward the interiorized form of violence that is asceticism. Well-ordered violence begins with oneself...

Murder, on the other hand, is clearly condemned. As the Buddha states in the Brahma Net Sutra: "If a child of Buddha himself kills, or goads someone else to kill, or provides with or suggests means for killing, or praises the act of killing or, on seeing someone commit the act, expresses approval for what that person has done, or kills by way of incantations, or is the cause, occasion, means, or instrument of the act of inducing a death, he will be shut out of the community."  

Benefits of War
How can war benefit anyone? Wars or violence would not occur if someone did not derive benefit from the activity. Frantz Fanon argued that violence perpetrated in the cause of liberation has a positive psychological effect upon people.

The practice of violence binds them together...as a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upwards in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning... [This] violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.  

There are many economic benefits of war and one could argue that many soldiers from the war in Vietnam came back to the United States feeling rejected and defeated even though they had risked their lives for the liberation of a people. The citizens in the United States failed to value their sacrifices and, even today, many of those soldiers feel rejected living with little self-respect.

There are many economic benefits of war. Recent U.S. conflict in Iraq may have been initiated to benefit the manufacturers of arms in the United States. "Military spending declined from $431 billion in 1990 to $322 billion in 2000..." Current military spending has escalated to $564 billion in 2007. A recent report in the New York Times by Eric Lipton claims that weapons sales in the United States in 2008 have reached $32 billion. Compare that with $12 billion in 2005. Eric Lipton writes:


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The United States has long been the top arms supplier to the world. In the past several years, however, the list of nations that rely on the United States as a primary source of major weapons systems has greatly expanded.76

Lipton estimates that the defense contracts amount to $870 million to arms dealers in the United States between 2001–2004. But for the past four years “that total has been $13.8 billion.”77 The Friends Committee on National Legislation estimates that 42 percent of our 2005 income taxes went to pay for wars and the military.78 Considering that our taxes today have to also pay for the effects of past wars, they estimate that the U.S. spent $783 billion in 2005 on war and the military. Companies in our country reap financial benefits from the sale of arms but not without a cost. More often than not, these arms are sold to underdeveloped countries. Those countries “cannot feed their people, they can and do sell arms and send money back to us.”79

There is no better way to research “war” than to study the lives and work of the Nobel Peace Laureates. Mairead Corrigan, recipient of the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize, writes about the manufacturing of weapons:

Is it not insanity to go on producing nuclear and conventional weapons that if used can destroy millions of people, if not the whole planet?...while millions of children die of disease and starvation each year. Is it not insanity that developed countries—including Britain, currently the third largest exporter of arms in the world—sell huge amounts of armaments to poor and developing countries, which in turn use much of the money allocated to them for aid to pay for these arms?80

And today part of the problem of war spending is consolidation. Arms dealers have merged with larger arms dealers in order to form huge conglomerates. Take a look at Lockheed-Martin, Boeing, Northrop-Grumman, Halliburton and more. In order to compete with the power of these conglomerates, European companies are doing the same thing. Multinational companies who want a bigger piece of the war market also bid on our defense contracts. So arms manufacturing has become a global enterprise with advanced countries working together to manufacture arms and systems. Someone has to buy those systems and use them for those companies to stay in business. Creating a war somewhere or

allowing or fostering a revolution can produce a financial windfall for these international companies.

Terrence R. Guay warns us that globalization is a two-way street. "The assumption that the United States always will be on the leading edge of technology is false."*81 To think that the United States will always have an edge on the development of war machines and technologies is an illusion. And the assumption that the United States will always be the nation expanding markets is also false. At the moment, in October 2008, the markets of United States and the world are in the biggest free-fall in history.

Reflecting on War: Shiva

After researching the huge topic of "war" for almost a year, I am stunned at the costs to life, economies, and the environment. Yet, I have concluded that there is a transformative element within war. The Hindu God Shiva is both a destroyer and a creator and he has helped me to understand the outcomes of war. Some people thrive on the psycho-physiological high of waging war. There is a creative side to it just as there is a creative side to what big business calls "progress."

All of us have physical, mental, or emotional buttons that can be pushed to create an endorphin or dopamine high within us. Our brains will create these substances after fifteen minutes of exercise or meditation. It can also be created by activities such as painting, writing, teaching, playing sports, listening to music, and reading, or when killing another human being.

In my neighborhood, I have opposed the dynamiting of trees and land to create new roads and homes. The noise has shattered our quiet existence. The developers call it progress. I have watched the great and beautiful forest around me die leaving behind gaping holes in the rock, pollution, soil erosion, and drainage problems. The sounds of trains, trucks, motorcycles, airplanes, and hundreds of people have replaced the natural sounds of the forest. Homes are perched on the sides of hills and valleys that, in the past, filled with water. There have already been mini-slides behind our house and I fear that those houses will soon slide down to their demise. This is progress?

WWII left Tokyo in flames, nearly burned to the ground. Sixty years later it is one of the most gleaming, vibrant, beautiful, and technologically astute cities on earth. It is a marvel. Warmongers would argue that the Tokyo of today would not exist without the firebombing by Americans in WWII. "We did them a favor."


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Dictators, big business people, and wagers of war can use their creative energy to destroy. Their dreams of transforming a country, the marketplace, or a people are based upon a vision they have of the future. For them the nightmare of war is their creative engine and playground. They are often willing to risk everything, even their lives and the lives of their families and friends, for their dreams.

This short chapter quantifies only a brief encounter with the violent intersection of religion, business, and war. It is not a topic for the peaceful, and, yet, it is a topic that must be researched and understood if we are to bring peace to our neighborhoods. Many have discussed the issue of a genetic pre-disposition to violence, the killer instinct. They argue that it underlies the energy used to acquire, enslave, and kill. If this is so, then society needs to develop an antidote to this illness. It is a disease. How can we change the direction of a world gone mad?

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