

What has been the role of religion in international relations? Has it had a positive or a negative impact?

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Abstract

This document considers the role that religion has played in the context of international relations, and the development of the international system, as well as its role in international relations and world politics today. It approaches this from both different perspectives: philosophically, historically, and through considering the resurgence of fundamentalism in the 21st century. It concludes that religion is inextricably linked to the international system, and that this is something of a mixed blessing, and that perhaps it is not religion itself which is a problem for international relations, but dogmatism in general.

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Introduction

The study of International Relations considers many actors when analysing the world system and its structure. Traditional realist theories are concerned primarily with the nation state, and believe it to be the pre-eminent actor, whereas liberal theories contest this and say that there are other important actors, such as international organisations, multi-national companies and individuals.

What is interesting about the traditional theories is that they seem to neglect what is arguably an “elephant in the room” – the role of *religion* in international relations.

Religion in the context of international relations manifests itself in a number of different ways. Religion can be a major influence because of the direct effect of religious belief amongst individuals.

International relations can also be shaped by the religious institutions that have become powerful because of religious belief. Institutions such as the Papacy and the Church of England have wielded great power throughout history, playing important roles in decisions of war, peace, and everything in between.

Presumably a religious believer may also claim that religion has a third prong on which it can influence events: through direct *divine intervention*.

Religion is almost *omnipresent* in the politics of some states, and has almost a special place in discourse. Despite lacking an over all (temporal) leader in most circumstances, religious scripture and religious teachings tell billions of people what to do, how to act and so on, so it is of little surprise that when individuals become important in politics, their religious opinions matter.

A painfully obvious example of this may be to pick on the events that have defined the last eight years. The September 11th terrorist attacks were carried out by religious fanatics for partially for religious reasons. Whilst it has been correctly argued that “secular” politics were a factor in what caused the attacks – American dominance of the world system, the US government interfering in the affairs of the Middle East, and so on, it probably wouldn’t have happened if the hijackers hadn’t been indoctrinated by the extremist wing of Islam. Humans have evolved to have a strong survival instinct, with natural selection obviously not favouring those members of the species who will put themselves in danger – so no one would reason that killing themselves is the best course of action. This is why a religious motive was needed – the promise of an afterlife and the rewards that are apparently waiting for the terrorists is what pushed them to commit the atrocities.

An equally painfully obvious example would be the arguments that George Bush used in justifying the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Obviously again, there are many reasons why the invasion was perceived as good thing, both officially, with arguments about weapons of mass destruction and toppling a brutal dictator, and perhaps behind closed doors – such as accessing the oil which America desperately needs to sustain itself. Arguably though, even when these arguments are presented, war is not a desirable option, and to make the decision, Bush would have needed extra motivation. Again, nobody could rationally call to send soldiers into harms way for a war of resources. It could be argued that George Bush’s fundamentalist Christian beliefs were what provided the ultimate motivation: God *told him* to invade¹.

¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/10_october/06/bush.shtml [accessed 30/01/08]

Succinctly put, religion's role throughout history has been both dramatic and profound – it has caused war and maybe even peace. It has both assisted and crushed rebellions. What is disputed though is both the extent of religious influence on IR, and whether that ultimately, it has had a positive or a negative impact.

To contextualise this debate, the 21st Century has been a *mixed blessing* for the world's major religions. Religious movements are currently undergoing something of a resurgence around the world, with Islam and Christianity in their more fundamentalist forms growing in popularity and influence in the Middle East and the United States. The resurgence has been quite dramatic and unpredicted: eight years ago, *The Economist* Newspaper famously wrote an obituary for God for their Millennium issue², the obvious implication being that religion had become irrelevant- it has since printed another article recanting this assertion.

Additionally, since the beginning of this century, there has been a greater interest in atheism – the lack of a belief in a deity – due to a slew of populist books on the topic by so-called "New Atheists"³. Polemic books by the likes of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Dan Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens (who have wryly dubbed themselves "The Four Horsemen"), have topped bestsellers lists, attacking religion and religious beliefs for both scientific reasons and political reasons. These books have helped contribute to a greater interest in religious affairs amongst the general public by taking a different approach in looking at the actions of the major religions.

Perhaps these two not-unrelated trends have polarised world opinion more than before? Either way, conflict between the two groups raises the obvious question

² http://www.economist.com/diversions/millennium/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=347578 [accessed 30/01/08]

³ <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.11/atheism.html> [accessed 31/01/08]

of whether or not religion has been a positive or negative influence on our existence – and that is what I hope to investigate, with specific regard to International Relations.

To add some caveats to this investigation, the dissertation will primarily concentrate on the two major Abrahamic religions: Christianity and Islam, as they are the religions that the author is most familiar with. This should not be a problem as they are the number one and number two world religions respectively, in terms of numbers of adherents, with 2.1 billion Christians and 1.5 billion Muslims⁴ – easily over half of the world population. Whilst the case studies, examples and so on will be focusing on these, the author would assert that broadly speaking the philosophical points apply to varying degrees with the other world religions, and generally with beliefs that lack evidence.

As one might expect when dealing with religion, morality plays an important part, and the terms of “positive” and “negative” have cloudier definitions. It will be generally assumed that peace, or lack of conflict is a good thing, whereas war, terrorism, and causing death, is generally a bad thing. This will be discussed further in the philosophical context section.

Additionally, as a declaration of interest, the author is an atheist and hopes he can remain objective when evaluating the role of religion.

⁴ http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html [accessed 31/01/08]

Philosophical Context

The underlying philosophy of religion is important to understanding its overall impact upon the world. Throughout history, religion has come into contact with politics, and discourse has constantly tried to reconcile the two. Hobbes, in his *Leviathan*, argued that religious and civil powers should be separated, and that religious powers should be subordinate – this is because of the problem of *faith*. Hobbes explains:

"When God speaketh to man, it must be either immediately or by mediation of another man, to whom He had formerly spoken by Himself immediately. How God speaketh to a man immediately may be understood by those well enough to whom He hath so spoken; but how the same should be understood by another is hard, if not impossible, to know. For if a man pretend to me that God hath spoken to him supernaturally, and immediately, and I make doubt of it, I cannot easily perceive what argument he can produce to oblige me to obedience, so as not by act or word to declare I believe him not; but not to think any otherwise than my reason persuades me. But if one that hath not such authority over me shall pretend the same, there is nothing that exacteth either belief or obedience."⁵

Hobbes is basically explaining how divine revelation and religious claims in general, by their very nature are not grounded in observable fact or falsifiable evidence – people choose to believe in their religion because of *faith*.

'Faith' by its very definition exists outside of the bounds of logic and reasoning. A 'belief' is an assertion that is not testable through observation or reasoning. In a standard academic argument, be it about politics, science, philosophy, literature,

⁵ HOBBS, T (1651), *Leviathan*, Andrew Crooke, London (pp156 of 2006 republished edition by Kessinger)

etc – every other discourse, essentially consists of assertions that are justified by appealing to evidence and reason. It is upon this framework that humanity has progressed to where it is today. A theistic belief, by contrast, does not face similar levels of scrutiny that a political or scientific argument would – it is enough for the believer to simply *believe* it without justification. In fact, many theists claim that the *lack* of evidence for their beliefs is in fact confirmation of their strong faith and that any attempt to rationally justify them would be an insult.

Religious belief impacts upon the actions of an individual by adding an inherently “irrational” element to their processes of thought. And similarly, the actions of individuals can add up to a group of people (such a state, or other actors), acting in a specific way – not unlike the net actions of a group of cells in an organism causing the organism to act in a particular way. Adding an unjustifiable belief adds a ‘wildcard’ factor that could change the outcome of a decision. Again, the example of the war in Iraq is useful. Tony Blair took the United Kingdom into a massively unpopular war that had been widely condemned by experts, on a shaky premise, against massive domestic and international opposition – there didn’t seem to be a rational explanation for this, although since leaving office Blair has admitted that he has very strong Christian beliefs (faith had been “hugely important” to his premiership, apparently⁶). It is reasonable to assume that this could have been an important factor in the decision to go to war in the face of such opposition.

The link between political decision making and religion exists because religion offers morality to the believer – and it is the words of the Bible or the Koran or whatever holy book one follows that will inform the morals of the believer.

⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7111620.stm [accessed 04/03/08]

Religious morals appeal to be people because they offer unchanging absolute values to live by, which is obviously appealing when existence is in a constant state of flux. A common theist attack on non-believers is that morality cannot exist without a higher power. This is obvious nonsense (why else don't morally bankrupt atheists go on killing sprees?), but it is possible for absolute values to be derived from "secular" sources.

As an interesting aside, the link between morality and religion has been challenged many times in history. Plato's *Euthyphro* offers an articulation of the central argument about why morality is not dependant on religion. Stephen Law puts the argument into contemporary language⁷: "Are things wrong because God says so, or does God say they are wrong because they are?" – To which it is obviously impossible to answer one way or another and the implication (skipping a few lengthy arguments) is that there exists a moral standard independent of both God and the individual.

Perhaps one illustration of religion encouraging 'morality' could be that US divorce rate amongst born-again Christians is 27%, compared to 21% of atheists and agnostics⁸ – a group who many Christians assert are also 'amoral'.

A religion may offer morality and instructions, but to what can it appeal to justify its authority? The obvious answer is somewhat circuitous – the reason the Holy Book is right on issues of morality is because it is the word of God, the omniscient, omnipresent creator. Of course, the flaw in this logic is the next question: how do we know that God is infallible... this is because the holy books say so. This shaky logic has been the foundation of religious authority since its beginnings.

⁷ LAW, S (2003), *The Philosophy Gym*, Review, London

⁸ http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm [accessed 05/03/08]

A believer may assert that religion offers “answers” to questions that science has not yet answered – the false assumption being that science not knowing the answer implicitly makes “God” the correct answer. The sceptic would contend that as well as being logically flawed, “God did it” is not a philosophically satisfactory answer to explain the mysteries of the universe, because it does not offer any testable hypothesis or observable methods, and merely fills in the gaps to explain what science and philosophy do not yet know – as ‘New Atheist’ Christopher Hitchens has noted “religion ends where philosophy begins”⁹.

Perhaps the most valid authority to which religion can appeal is tradition and culture. Because religion belief has been an integral part of humanity as a whole for many thousands of years there is an undeniably religious tradition that has been used as a guide and a crutch throughout history. For example, the Christian virtues of “thou shalt not kill” and “thou shalt not steal”, however ignored, abused and misused over the ages, were a part of the Ten Commandments¹⁰.

Religious values can perhaps also claim authority because in many societies, the religion of choice maintains what is essentially a *popular mandate* – if one is surrounded by thousands, if not millions of people claim to believe in the same dogma and conform to the same value system, then it is not hard to understand why one may feel compelled to follow the same system and believe in what the chosen religion is saying – “if everyone says its true then it must be doing something right” would be the (questionable) logic here. (Again, the sceptic would counter this by pointing out that objective truth, and science as a conduit

⁹ Interview with Hitchens on *Lou Dobbs Tonight* on CNN Domestic (USA), 03/05/07. Interview hosted on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ_I3Utr670

¹⁰ Exodus 20: 13-15; Deuteronomy 5:17-19

to discovering that truth, isn't a democratic process – which is a relief to consider when confronted with polls that most Americans don't "believe" in evolution¹¹).

This collective *groupthink* isn't just hyperbole – psychologists such as Susan Blackmore have characterised religious belief as the result of *memetics*¹² – which without going into too much scientific detail, is essentially applying the theory of Natural Selection to ideas (*memes*), and not just genes, and theorising how ideas can survive and perpetuate in a similar manner to genes.

Another factor in the continued influence of religion is written into the dogma itself. The Bible and Koran both place an emphasis in places on punishment for non-believers and punishment for not obeying its strict rules, as well as empowering believers to act as missionaries and spread the religion.

The Abrahamic religions all use the concept of judgement after death to control the actions of its adherents – the theory obviously being that if you've led a life that conforms with the Holy book then you will go to Heaven.... If not, you will go to hell. This level of psychological torture, the ultimate *argumentum ad consequentiam* (arguably the weakest type of argument), is obviously a very powerful concept. Christians believe that if you don't obey the Bible you will face eternal punishment and torture after you are dead *forever*. This can go a long way to explaining why religious belief has persisted... are people really going to be persuaded to think for themselves when the "risk" is that great? This is why Pascal hedged his bets with his famous wager¹³ (which has been discredited by many sceptics¹⁴, but still appeals to many with its "game theory"-esque characteristics).

¹¹ http://www.religioustolerance.org/ev_publi.htm [accessed 10/03/08]

¹² BLACKMORE, S (1999), *The Meme Machine*, pp133, Oxford University Press, Oxford

¹³ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/> [accessed 10/03/08]

¹⁴ DAWKINS, R (2006), *The God Delusion*, pp103, Bantam Press, London

The same Holy books also frame non-believers as essentially cursed individuals who must be saved – the implication being that others must be converted or killed. Both the Koran and the Bible have passages that are intolerant to other religions or non-believers, and in a lot of cases actively advocate violence towards others. As these books are the basis for their followers' beliefs, it seems obvious that the words contained within have an influence on the believer's actions.

Some examples of intolerance in the Bible¹⁵ are:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites ... And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones ... And they burnt all their cities....

"And Moses was wroth with the officers ... And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? ... Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves." (Numbers 31:1-18)

"And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword." (Joshua 6:21)

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (Samuel 15:2-3)

¹⁵ Taken from <http://dwindlinginunbelief.blogspot.com/2006/09/holy-war-and-holy-father-bible-vs.html>

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)

And some examples from the Koran¹⁶:

"Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate". (Koran 9:73)

"Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous". (Koran 9:123)

The Hadith is another collection of Muslim texts and sayings – based on things that the Prophet Muhammad is alleged to have said. It is where a lot of Islamic law is derived from – for example, many Muslims apparently consider dogs to be unclean because of the Prophet did so¹⁷. Of the 300,000 sayings, there are a number of *matn* that appear to incite violence towards non-believers¹⁸:

"Jihad is your duty under any ruler, be he godly or wicked"

"A single endeavour (of fighting) in Allah's Cause in the forenoon or in the afternoon is better than the world and whatever is in it."

"A day and night fighting on the frontier is better than a month of fasting and prayer."

"He who dies without having taken part in a campaign dies in a kind of unbelief."

¹⁶ Taken from HARRIS, S (2006). *The End of Faith*, UK, Free Press, pp32

¹⁷ HITCHENS, C (2007), *God Is Not Great*, New York, Warner Books

¹⁸ Taken from HARRIS, S (2006). *The End of Faith*, UK, Free Press, pp112

“Paradise is in the shadow of swords.”

It is not hard to see, with interpretations like these how religious dogma can be so intrinsically linked to a conflict.

Obviously though, since these texts were first written, despite the dogmatic absolutism promoted by religious belief, both the religions here have been forced to evolve over time to cope with the unabated onslaught of modernity. For example, in Great Britain at least, only the most extreme believers today practice and preach the message of a literalist interpretation of some of the above quotes. However, to reluctantly cite Richard Dawkins again, he blames these religious moderates for helping to foster the extremists at the fringes, by teaching that unquestioned “faith” is a virtue¹⁹ – yet a reasonable case can be made that the dogmatic allegiance to religious belief can be the cause of many problems.

It is a common refrain for moderates to claim that religious extremists are the cause of all of the problems, because they are distorting the message of their holy book (whatever its flavour) – to imply that it has been distorted is to imply that there is a “right” or “wrong” interpretation of the text. The extremists though, do *believe* what they are reading is the *right* thing to be doing – after all, a religion is only defined by the people who follow it – the nature of the existence or lack of, of the deity at the centre of the religion is irrelevant, as it is the believers themselves who label themselves with a particularly religious badge and they decide the values which it stands for.

So in conclusion, it is clear that “faith” is the underlying characteristic that makes religion distinct from other areas of intellectual inquiry – it is even taught to be a

¹⁹ DAWKINS, R (2006), *The God Delusion*, pp308, Bantam Press, London

virtue. Hobbes' hypothetical argument about whether or not to believe that someone has spoken to God or not is a major argument as to why the Catholic Church has lost the influence it once held – and it is an argument against the notion of faith, and one of the reasons that throughout history, the influence of religion has been gradually changing.

Historical Context

If one were to look at the history of religion, they would essentially be looking at history itself. Religion and history are intrinsically linked, and not just because of the mythology surrounding historical events. Religious movements, practices and events have shaped history and the international system that we see today.

To heavily qualify this, it is clear that religion itself is not to “blame” or the sole source of all conflicts – all conflicts will invariably happen for political reasons (such as disputes over borders or challenges to state power), economic reasons (such as the acquisition of resources) and countless other reasons. What is clear though is that in most international conflicts religion is certainly a factor, or there is a religious dimension to the disagreements.

One only has to look at the labelling of the sides in a conflict to detect religious divide: Northern Ireland is divided between Protestants and Catholics, much of the Middle East between Sunni and Shiite, the Indian sub-continent between Hindus and Muslims, and so on.

Prominent critic of religion, Richard Dawkins, put it thusly:

“My point is not that religion itself is the motivation for wars, murders and terrorist attacks, but that religion is the principal label, and the most dangerous one, by which a ‘they’ as opposed to a ‘we’ can be identified at all. I am not even claiming that religion is the only label by which we identify the victims of our prejudice. There’s also skin colour, language, and social class. But often, as in Northern Ireland, these don’t apply and religion is the only divisive label around.

Even when it is not alone, religion is nearly always an incendiary ingredient in the mix as well.²⁰

As a label, religion is divisive and changes the nature of who the “enemy” is. An example of this could be how up until the 1960s that the Vatican charged *all of the Jews* with deicide – the killing of a deity, for crucifying Jesus²¹.

Religious influence in international relations has varied throughout history. Religious ideas were perhaps at their most prominent prior to the ‘Westphalian system’, the framework by which the international system is still arranged today.

Prior to the peace of Westphalia, states were not necessarily discrete territorial units with borders and governmental mechanisms that would perhaps define a state today. The state was not necessarily the primary actor in international relations: the world (or more accurately, Europe) was divided along religious lines.

The empires and kingdoms that ruled various parts of Europe were split by Catholic or Protestant allegiances. To illustrate how important religion was, one only has to look at the Tudor period of British history, where the religious affiliation of the different monarchs caused a lot of tension. As everyone knows, Henry VIII broke with Rome out of a desire to get a divorce – when his Catholic daughter Mary acceded to the throne in 1553, she restored the link with Rome and in the next year marrying Phillip II of Spain, a fellow Catholic. It was only when Mary’s half-sister Elizabeth took the throne after she died, one again severing the link with Rome and making England a Protestant nation that Phillip launched the famous Spanish Armada, a failed invasion of Britain.

²⁰ http://www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/WorldOfDawkins-archive/Dawkins/Work/Articles/2001-09time_to_stand_up.shtml [accessed 10/02/08]

²¹ HITCHENS, C (2007), *God is Not Great*, pp110, New York, Warner Books

The head of the Catholic church, the Pope, has historically wielded an awful lot of power over the pre-Westphalian international system. It was he who denied Henry VIII a divorce in the first place, for instance. This author would in fact suggest that the Pope's role had similarities with the inter-governmental organisations today. Papal approval was important, and gave the actions of states some legitimacy. Much like how United Nations membership is a gold seal for legitimate statehood today, approval of the Pope used to perform a similar function. To use the Tudors another example, Henry VIII took control of the Kingdom of Ireland in 1542 and became King of Ireland, although this wasn't recognised by the Catholic states – only when Mary I got a '*papal bull*' some years later was the *personal union* - two states united by the same monarch – Austria-Hungary being a more modern example – was the union seen as legitimate²².

A wider example of the Pope's influence could be that he played an important role in the Holy Roman Empire, which was a loose confederation of German states prior to German unification. It had a complex system by which the Emperor was elected by the princes in each state in an electoral college – but this had to be approved by the Pope. In fact, the Pope was the person who officially crowned the emperor.

Of course, the most obvious historical example of Papal authority would be The Crusades, declared by the Pope to take back the 'Holy Land' from the Muslims. All of the crusades together lasted several hundred years and drew the participation of most of Christian Europe at the time.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_I_of_England#Foreign_policy [accessed 11/02/08]

The Catholic Church's role in international relations at this time could perhaps be a middle-ages analogue to the English School of International Relations theory – it acted as a key "societal" institution that helped regulate the anarchic international system²³.

The Catholic Church's religious hegemony was undermined though by the Protestant reformation in the early 16th century. The reformation was famously sparked by Martin Luther's anger towards the selling of indulgences – the Catholic Church essentially selling 'forgiveness' for sins. Luther himself said that the church shouldn't have a say over secular matters – perhaps an embryonic example of advocating church and state separation. This notion challenged the church's role in politics, and certainly in the protestant countries, gave the state more power.

The Thirty Years War, fought between 1618 and 1648 began as a war about religion in Europe's Germanic states. The dispute began because German princes under the earlier Peace of Augsburg were able to choose which strand of Christianity (Catholicism or Lutheranism) their territory adhered to – and people within a state were not allowed to practice any other religion. This conflict grew, drawing in most of the other European powers for geopolitical reasons (essentially simply a desire to control more territory or weaken rival powers), and caused damage on a scale rarely seen before – apparently around 20% of German civilians perished directly or indirectly as a result of the war.

The war ended with the Peace of Westphalia, which was a set of peace negotiations involving all of the European powers – it was here that the rules that govern the international system today were established.

²³ THOMAS, S (2005), *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the transformation of International Relations*, pp17. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Westphalia established several important concepts, such as the mutual recognition of international borders and each other's sovereignty, and the right of a state to self-determination. The peace also led to more religious freedoms, allowing people to worship whichever church they chose in any of the German states (as long as that church is Lutheran, Catholic or Calvinist, of course).

This is important, because it illustrates an erosion of the power of religion in international relations and how the nation-state became the primary actor.

Between the 17th and 20th century, the role of religion in international relations broadly declined, perhaps due to advancements in science and increasingly secular values becoming the international norm.

The French and American revolutions were both key events and established the modern republic as a form of government, in place of a monarchy. Many of the key figures in both revolutions were not religious in the traditional sense. Maximilien Robespierre was one of the main architects of the French revolution – it was he who ordered the execution of Louis XVI – considered himself to be a deist, which was essentially the most rational viewpoint one could take prior to modern scientific progress. He spoke of a "supreme being"²⁴ – the composition of which is unknown, and this religious stance is reflected in the French revolution, when France granted citizenship to Protestants and Jews for the first time. Similarly, Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States was also a deist, as were a number of the other founding fathers. Both America and France, with their secular governments, established the traditions of religious freedom, the separation of church and state, representation and democracy, all of which are norms for liberal democracies today.

²⁴ STEEL, M (2003), *Vive la Revolution*, London, Scribner

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the two revolutions were not unrelated – and one figure, Thomas Paine was a prominent figure in both. Also a deist, he wrote both *The Rights of Man*, which set out secular democratic ideas of rights for individuals, and was ahead of its time in suggesting progressive taxes and universal health care. He also wrote *The Age of Reason*, which challenged the Bible's claims of miracles and so on, and challenged religion in a way not widely seen before, calling the stories of Jesus being the son of God, and the fall of man "Fabulous inventions"²⁵.

The 20th century was one of the bloodiest centuries in human history, and a century when organised religion seemed to take a backseat in causing conflict – the two major conflicts, World War II and the Cold War do appear to have secular origins – although this is not to say that religious ideas weren't harnessed, even if any of the ideologies we would refer to as an organised religion were not.

A misconception that has been repeatedly peddled by fundamentalist Christians is that Hitler was an atheist. In actual fact, he never denounced his Catholic faith, and often invoked the use of the term "God" in his speeches. More significantly though, Nazism became so popular in part because Hitler stirred up support through what has been termed *völkisch nationalism*. 'Völk' is the German word for "folk", and this type of nationalism invoked mythology in much the same way that religions do. The idea was that romantic associations with myths and legends from German history would act as a uniting force, and would isolate outsiders. Although initially the Catholic Church was complicit with Hitler, he deemed it a threat to his power, so set about replacing religious icons with Nazi ones – the *völkisch* ideas were used in the creation of the "God Believers" – an alternative to

²⁵ PAINE, T (1796), *The Age of Reason*, pp76, London, Watts and Co

the established church that by 1939 boasted over 3 million members²⁶. The Nazis replaced Christian traditions during occasions such as wedding ceremonies with Nazi ones – and laterally, Nazi iconography and tradition took on a distinctly religious style.

Similarly, the rise of Communism, whilst distinctly atheistic in character, rather paradoxically indoctrinated its followers with almost a religious fervour. A common charge against atheism is that Stalin, Mao and Communists in general were atheists, and they committed arguably the worst atrocities in history – the retort being that whilst these atrocities were *atrocious*, they were committed not in the name of atheism – in the sense that how the Inquisition was in the name of Christianity – they were committed in the name of *Communism*. In this author's opinion, Communism, Nazism and the religions are not dissimilar – all are equally dogmatic.

It isn't just political history that has impacted upon religion; the role of religion has also been severely undermined by scientific progress too. The development of the scientific method in roughly the same timeframe has led to religious ideas and assertions being challenged by an empirical body of internally cohesive, rigorously peer-reviewed, falsifiable evidence based on observation. Science has questioned some key religious concepts which have hit religions at the heart, at their core tenets and ideas, which have made them less credible. Perhaps the most well known instance of this is Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection explaining that fundamental religious question: *where we come from*, in such a way that it removes the need for a deity. It is now commonly accepted amongst the majority of people that humans share a common ancestor with apes, and that the fundamentalist religious view of a literal seven day

²⁶ FISCHER, K (1995), *Nazi Germany: A New History*, London, Constable and Company

creation is incorrect. Rather than be the force that makes the rules, religions have all been forced to adapt to incorporate new ideas.

The fact that secular and rational ideas have become more influential, and that society has looked elsewhere for guidance, show that direct religious influence in politics has declined in modern society.

This is not to say, however, that religion is no longer a factor in international relations – far from it. Many disputes in the international system have large religious factors.

The conflict in the Middle East, between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and the Israelis and the wider Arab states can be framed in religious terms. The creation of Israel in 1948 was created out of a desire for a homeland for Jewish people.

The modern Zionist movement began in the 19th Century out a desire to create this homeland, partly as a reaction to anti-Semitism in Europe. The nationalistic movement existed partially because Jews were seen as *different* and discriminated against – because they were distinct in their religion (and as a consequence of most branches of their religion, such as Orthodox Judaism, restricting intermarriage) and their ethnic group.

The creation of Israel itself created conflict, as Israel was essentially created artificially out of the British mandate in Palestine, covering the location of sites sacred to the Jewish faith. Prior to the creation of Israel, it was suggested that a Jewish homeland could be established in what is modern day Uganda²⁷,

²⁷ KEAY, J (2004), *Sowing the Wind: The Mismanagement of the Middle East 1900-1960*, London, John Murray (Publisher)

thousands of miles away in Africa – of course, this didn't happen because of the religious associations.

Unfortunately, the one place on earth that is specifically sacred for three major religions is where Israel was created. Unsurprisingly, dismayed at the loss of Arab territory, and Jewish control of the Temple Mount, the site that contains both the Wailing Wall (sacred to Jews) and the Al Aqsa Mosque (sacred to Muslims), Muslims took to arms and have been in varying levels of conflict with Israel ever since.

Interestingly though, whilst the number of Jews in the 'Holy Land' has been increasing over the centuries as Jews faced discrimination elsewhere (such as in 1492, when as a consequence of the Spanish Inquisition, all Jews were expelled from Spain), there were still more Arabs in Palestine at the time of Israel's creation – 1.3 million compared to 630,000²⁸. The problem with a Jewish state then would be that it would theoretically not represent the people living there, and any democratic process would be flawed if the state were to remain 'Jewish', as in a democracy, the will of the majority (in this case, the Arabs), would prevail. Whilst this could be framed in terms of ethnic conflict, religion is critical in this conflict, as religion plays a large role in defining the identity of each side.

To take another microcosm of conflict that religion has had a role in, one could look at the Islamic revolt in Sudan in the 19th century, which was a conflict between the British imperialists and Sudanese Muslims. The conflict arose out of a dispute over slavery. The British side was led by Charles Gordon, an evangelical Christian anti-slavery campaigner, who believed that the advancement of British colonial influence should be associated with the end of slavery²⁹. He opposed

²⁸ GORNY, Y, (1987), *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882-1948*, pp. 5

²⁹ *Clash of the Worlds: Sudan*, BBC Television, Documentary, Broadcast date unknown.

slavery on the biblical principle of Moses's "let my people go" and was a follower of anti-slavery campaigner and fellow-evangelical William Wilberforce.

The leader of the revolt was Muhammed Akhmed, who also used to religion to advocate his pro-slavery position and as a uniting force for his followers. He knew the entire Koran by the age of 11, and in June 1881 styled himself as the answer to a prophecy that claimed a new leader would emerge to lead an Islamic state – he called himself the Mahdi. "He who does not believe will be purified by the sword", he apparently said³⁰.

The Mahdi had some considerable successes, winning numerous victories with the numbers against him, with the dates and circumstances matching the battles of Al-Badhr in the Koran – this religious link encouraged Muslims to join in the fight on the Mahdi's side.

This is a good example of religion being used as a uniting force – "prophecy" providing a motivation for followers to travel and make it seem much more than a battle for territory – it makes it seem infinitely more important. Not dissimilar, perhaps, to the way Al Qaeda have used religion as a force to oppose foreign powers.

Religion has also played a supporting role in many modern conflicts. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for example, was repelled by the Mujahideen supported by the United States. Due to the high-stakes game that was the Cold War, the United States couldn't engage the USSR directly, and chose to fight a proxy war, with the goal to give the Soviets "their own Vietnam". Part of the reason the Soviets were eventually repelled was because to young men in the Middle East, the conflict was framed in religious terms – it was presented as a

³⁰ *Clash of the Worlds: Sudan*, BBC TV documentary. Broadcast date unknown.

crusade to defend Muslim lands in Afghanistan against an infidel superpower, with Muslims from all over, from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Yemen going to Afghanistan to join the fight, with others sending money³¹. A uniting religious war was useful politically too, away from the frontlines, as it united Muslims against a common enemy, and away from problems with the United States and the House of Saud – just a month prior to the war, on November 20th, a group called the Muslim Brotherhood briefly took control of the central Mosque in Mecca – the site of the Hajj – in a bid to oust the House of Saud.

This is not to say, however, that all of religious influence is necessarily a “bad” thing. There are many instances in history of religion being used as a force for good.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the religions are that they speak of a God, who has infinite power, and that no mortal can match God in terms of power and influence. So far, I have described instances when this submission to greater authority has been used as a tool for control – but it can also have the opposite effect, and be used to organise independently of any state apparatus, and be used as a conduit for change.

Martin Luther realised this during the reformation, and the protestant concept of having a direct connection with God (rather than having to go via the Pope), was used to weaken the power of the established church. The anti-slavery movement, which I have also already mentioned, used the organising power of the church to protest against the slave trade in Britain. The Catholic Church, for all of its historical faults (see above), can be credited with helping bring about the fall of Communism and end Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Because religiosity in Poland is so great, Communism could not dislodge Catholicism and did not remain

³¹ UNGER, C (2005) *House of Bush, House of Saud*. Central Books, London

ideologically unopposed. A famous nine-day trip to Poland by then Pope, Jean Paul II, in 1979 is thought to have contributed to the foundation of the Solidarity trade union movement³², which ten years later brought about the end of Communism and the transition to democracy in Poland, and arguably helped push the communist dominoes over in the rest of Eastern Europe.

Religion has also played a uniting role in history. Because it transcends national borders, it has played a role in bringing countries together – perhaps not unlike globalisation. To pick one example, one could look at the brief union between Egypt and Syria as the United Arab Republic between 1958 and 1961 (Iraq also intended to join, but this never happened) – the two states had much in common, in terms of identity, of which religion obviously plays a large part. Today, there is an Organisation of Islamic Conference – and intergovernmental organisation that provides the member-states a framework for cooperation on issues of shared and mutual interest, such as the Arab/Israeli conflict. More-generally, the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic identity is aided by a religious requirement that all Muslims must learn Arabic and the Koran – unlike Christianity, there is no “legitimate” English versions – it is only available in Arabic. This has given many diverse countries, from Morocco to Pakistan a common language, which is important when it comes to defining one’s identity.

It could be argued that a shared Christian heritage and tradition is what has helped unite the European Union and it is the shared history and religious culture that has kept the bloc so cohesive – indeed, the Christian character of the union is one of the reasons that the argument over Turkish accession is so contentious, as one of the arguments opposing Turkey is that it is not *European enough*. (And this is where religious conflict becomes an issue again).

³² <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/19/spotlight/> [accessed 12/02/08]

Hopefully it should seem clear that religion has played a pivotal role in shaping the world we live in today – actions by religious groups and in the name of religion have been a factor in many, many historical developments. It would also seem that over time, the power religions wield has been reduced – but this is not to say it is now an irrelevance. In the 21st century, there has been a resurgence of religious influence around the world, perhaps due to two parallel movements: Christian and Islamic fundamentalism.

Religion Fundamentalism in the 21st Century

In the 21st century, religion has once again become an important factor in international relations. Though at the start of the 21st century, it looked as if religion would become an irrelevance (the Economist magazine even wrote of an obituary for God), two religions have become two of the most influential forces in politics, and they both something in common: fundamentalism.

Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms are both ideologies that are drawn from a very literal interpretation of their respective Holy Books – for example, some Christian fundamentalists believe that the Earth was created in literally six 24-hour days by God, approximately 6000 years ago – this contrasts with the more moderate Christian doctrine which dismisses some of the more unsavoury part of the Bible as antiquated, or open to interpretation. There are similar parallels for moderate and fundamentalist Muslims with the Koran.

To help illustrate the mindset of the Christian fundamentalists, one prominent fundamentalist leader, the late Jerry Falwell, who founded an organisation called *The Moral Majority*, to lobby for Evangelical Christian issues, just days after the 9/11 attacks placed the blame not on the terrorists but on secularists, supporters of civil liberties (such as the ACLU), feminists and homosexuals, saying:

"But, throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU,

*People for the American Way -- all of them who have tried to secularize America -
- I point the finger in their face and say, "You helped this happen.""³³*

Another example of (the hopefully more extreme end of) fundamentalist Christianity could be the Christian Zionists like those led by John Hagee, who is said to be one of the most influential Christian Evangelists, who claims up to 4.5 million people a week watch his Sunday sermons³⁴. Christian Zionists are staunch supporters of Israel, who want to bring about Armageddon and the second coming of Christ – they believe the final conflict will be between Israel and a satanic army, who they interpret to mean an army of Arabs led by the Russians.

Christian fundamentalists or Christian evangelists as they prefer to be known, perhaps first became politically prominent in modern times with the election of George W Bush as US President. Bush, himself a born-again evangelical Christian, relied on the evangelical voting bloc, to win himself the election. The religious right, as they became known were such a formidable force because unlike other groups, they had homogenised values and were essentially already organised and regimented as an organisation (as churches), and thus were able to deliver a huge number of votes en masse. Other potentially influential groups are much harder to organise behind one candidate (an obvious example would be socially-liberal, fiscally conservative libertarians who are an unknown quantity as they don't conform to typical party divisions – so nobody has ever tried to organise them behind a Presidential candidate).

Bush was able to use the religious right to win him more votes than his nearest rival for the Republican nomination, John McCain, and then in the general election against Al Gore (Floridian controversy notwithstanding).

³³ Unknown author, 2001. "God Gave US 'What We Deserve,' Falwell Says," *The Washington Post*, September 14th.

³⁴ http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/20278737/jesus_made_me_puke/print [accessed 15/03/08]

As the religious right became a recognised and quantifiable voting bloc, they could command certain political power – as after all, Bush would want to repay his constituents, as we saw when he cut funding for groups that offer abortion – a hot-button issue for fundamentalist Christians, as well as creating the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives – a department of the President’s office that gives funding to faith groups for providing social-services. In the 2005 financial year, apparently \$2.2bn was given to these faith-based organisations³⁵.

The religiosity of Americans compared to a more secular Europe perhaps goes some way to explaining why fundamentalist Christianity has taken such a hold there. A poll by YouGov and Polimetrix for the Economist in March 2008 revealed that whilst about 80% of Americans believing that there is a God, in Britain the number was slightly fewer than 40%³⁶.

Even more interestingly, it appears that Americans generally value religiosity as a positive feature of a candidate standing for office, which perhaps explains why candidates will go to great lengths to prove their religious credentials and court the religious vote. A 1999 Gallup poll revealed that 48% of Americans would choose not to vote for a “generally well qualified person” for President who was an atheist – compared to 37% for a homosexual, or 38% for a Muslim³⁷ and 17% for a Mormon. (Unsurprisingly, in 1958, in the middle of the Cold War against the Godless Soviets, this figure was even higher, with 75% of people saying that they wouldn’t vote for an atheist.) Unfortunately, no similar figures are available for Europe.

³⁵ <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06616.pdf> [accessed 15/03/08]

³⁶ *The Economist*, ‘Anglo-Saxon Attitudes’, March 29th 2008, pp36

³⁷ <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheistbigotryprejudice/a/AtheistSurveys.htm> [accessed 15/03/08]

The personal evangelical Christian faith of George W Bush too has impacted upon his policy. Like Tony Blair, he has cited his religion as one of the reasons for going to war in Iraq. He claimed that he was "on a mission from God" when invading Afghanistan and Iraq³⁸. He clearly believes in a highly personal God – the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Nabil Shaath, explained that "President Bush said to all of us: 'I am driven with a mission from God'. God would tell me, 'George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan'. And I did. And then God would tell me 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq'. And I did."

Religion has clearly played a large role in Bush's capacity to make decisions. The President's former Deputy Director of the Office of Public Liaison, Tim Goeglein, said of Bush that just after 9/11 that "Privately, Bush even talked of being chosen by the grace of God to lead at that moment."³⁹

Similarly, the evangelical movement has retained its ties to Bush during his Presidency – with many preachers claiming to speak with him regularly enjoying the sort of access only usually granted to lobbyists. One example would have been Ted Haggard⁴⁰, who was the Pastor of the 10,000 member strong New Life Church in Colorado Springs before it was discovered that he'd been taking crystal methamphetamine and (ironically, given his fundamentalist stance on homosexuality) using gay prostitutes.

Fundamentalist Islam, like its Christian counterpart in America, has been an important part of the political backdrop of the Middle East for some time. Mainstream Islam in the Middle East, generally speaking, is perhaps closer to the beliefs of the fundamentalists than mainstream Christianity is to their fundamentalists – arguably due to the lack of what some commentators, such as

³⁸ MacAskill, Ewen, 2005. George Bush: 'Gold told me to end the tyranny in Iraq', *The Guardian*, October 7th, pp1

³⁹ <http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=1994> [accessed 15/03/08]

⁴⁰ *The Root of All Evil?* Channel 4 Documentary, Broadcast date unknown.

Salmon Rushdie⁴¹, have termed an “Islamic Reformation” analogous to the Christian reformation, which revised Christian doctrine to conform better to contemporary thought.

Fundamentalist Islamic groups hold considerable political sway in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is host to one of the most repressive regimes in the world, and the law there *is* Sharia Law – the religious law based entirely on the Koran and Haddith. There is no separate legal code, unlike in other less-extremist Islamic states where there are both secular and religious courts. Iran is similar as it only has one system of courts based on religious law too.

In the Palestinian territories, the party in power is Hamas, a fundamentalist party with a history of suicide bombings and violence (though violence isn’t exactly unfamiliar to their secular rivals, Fatah). Hamas have caused problems for the region because they refuse to recognise the existence of Israel, which is obviously a major problem for the peace process. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that they were elected freely and fairly in democratic elections that Israel and west demanded must be in place for peace negotiations to be conducted.

Though both fundamentalist groups differ in their make-up, the absolutist beliefs of the fundamentalists are providing a challenge to the status quo in the international system, and the international order.

On the issue of human rights, for example, Saudi Arabia is perhaps the most notorious country for human rights abuses. When Saudi Arabia’s actions are compared to the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, it breaks almost every article – as previously discussed, the rights of Saudi citizens are severely

⁴¹ Rushdie, Salman, 2005. Muslims Unite! A new Reformation will bring your faith into the modern era. *The Times*, August 11th

restricted because of the strict adherence to the strict Wahabii interpretation of the Koran, meaning that for example, apostasy is still punishable by death.

This is problematic for the international system because it goes against the very notion of *universal* human rights – a concept that is critical to international law, and a yardstick by which a state's can be judged, and one of the fundamental concepts that are used in justifying intervention, such as in the case of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The religious justification for the human rights abuses encourage a relativistic approach to human rights, because of the untouchable "special place" of religion in discourse, amongst many politicians.

Similarly, there is evidence of Christian fundamentalists trying to influence US policy in a way that undermines many of the precedents that have defined international law. In the run up to the Iraq war, and since, fundamentalist Christians have been some of the most fervent supporters of the war – a war that is broadly viewed as violating international law, not least because it fails many of the tests of Michael Walzer's *Just War* theory. The entire so-called War on Terror has been strongly backed by religious Americans – with former-Presidential Candidate Mitt Romney, who was a Mormon (a 19th century off-shoot of Christianity), at one point calling for "double Guantanamo" – a reference to the legally dubious ("dubious" in that it's illegal) American Guantanamo Bay Prison in Cuba⁴². Whilst it is debatable how much his religion has directly contributed to his point of view, it is clear that the strong conservative views exhibited amongst evangelicals can be rooted in the absolutist philosophy of the Bible.

On the environment and climate change too, arguably the biggest issue facing the international community today, evangelical have failed to act responsibly, and

⁴² <http://edition.cnn.com/POLITICS/blogs/politicalticker/2007/05/romney-double-guantanamo.html> [accessed 16/03/08]

have lobbied against environmental issues, with the likes of the aforementioned Jerry Falwell dismissing evidence for climate change⁴³. This is presumably due to the general hostility towards science which has come about because of scientific challenges to the literalist beliefs of evangelicals, on "issues" such as evolution by natural selection – a scientific theory that has been universally accepted by the scientific community and forms an integral part of modern biology, which evangelicals dogmatically oppose because it conflicts with the Biblical Genesis story. Because evangelicals believe science to be simply an opposing dogma, rather than an evolving framework that models objective reality, many are equally hostile to the "scientific theory" of man-made global climate change – which like Darwinian selection, has been broadly accepted as fact by the scientific community, based on the stacks of evidence that point towards it. Evangelical inaction has contributed to America's inertia on tackling climate change.

In fairness though, there are some signs of change in the evangelical movement – just last year, with more and more evangelical denominations deciding that action must be taken on climate change, framing environmental degradation as an "offence to God"⁴⁴.

This considered, it does raise the question as to why religion is suddenly so resurgent in international politics. One explanation could be that it is happening as a reaction to globalisation – which has revolutionised the world system. Globalisation has not been a strictly economic process, though economics has played a large role. Globalisation has led to a more inter-connected world, where capital, people and indeed, ideas, flow freely around the world, where thanks to advances in telecommunications technology, everyone is essentially connected with everyone else, and they have to be to survive, bridging geographic, cultural

⁴³ <http://mediamatters.org/items/200603140005> [accessed 16/03/08]

⁴⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/03/14/evangelical.rift/index.html> [accessed 16/03/08]

and class boundaries. A side-effect of globalisation has perhaps been the emergence of a so-called "world culture" that has displaced or eroded many indigenous cultures around the world. This is self-evident in the cliché that you can buy a Coke or a McDonalds whether you're in New York, London, Moscow, Tokyo, or more or less anywhere else on earth. This can perhaps be framed as an erosion of an individual's or a group's identity – and that people have turned to religion in its role as an expression of identity⁴⁵. This is perhaps unsurprising as people seem to be genetically disposed to sticking with the familiar, borne out of the need to survive. Religion can offer a familiarity in a world that is otherwise in a constant state of flux.

This is not an uncontested theory – others have said that the resurgence of religion is not "fundamentalist" or "anti-modernist", but rather essentially a *critique* of the historical developments of the enlightenment and the development that it may or may not have bought, and is necessary to make up for the deficiencies and what globalisation lacks⁴⁶.

Having considered both Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, perhaps the most interesting thing is that both of the fundamentalist ideologies are surprisingly similar. They are both obviously very uncompromising on their interpretation of scripture, which is why they could be considered to be very dangerous – and on a simply "policy" level, they share many similarities. Both movements are strongly socially conservative in character, such as in opposition to homosexuality and women's rights, and both see it as their mission to convert unbelievers to their religions – the only real difference is which deity they subscribe to. As you might imagine, this makes the "war" between the two, perhaps most vividly illustrated

⁴⁵ <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/jgcg/2007/sp07/jgcg-sp07-dorraj.htm> [accessed 16/03/08]

⁴⁶ BYRNES, T A & KATZENSTEIN, P J (2006), *Religion in an expanding Europe*, pp31, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

on September 11th 2001 all the more bewildering to people who believe in
neither.

Conclusions

Having looked at the role of religion in international relations from a philosophical perspective, a historical perspective and the perceived modern day resurgence of religion in the only remaining superpower, and one of the most contentious regions on earth, the Middle East, it is perhaps possible to draw some conclusions about the overall impact of religion upon international relations.

Obviously, it has not been possible to run a controlled experiment and run two parallel histories where religion and politics do and do not intersect, but it is clear that religious beliefs have shaped the international system as we know it today – from the institutional and governmental role the Church played in governing the international system prior to the development of the Westphalian order, to the arguably more benign place it holds in Europe today. More broadly, and unfortunate personification aside, the influence of religion has perhaps transformed from playing an active role at the international (and to a lesser extent, national) level, but in many places it has retained its role as an important part of identity for a great number of people, and still has the ability cause and resolve conflict.

The obvious question to ask would be whether or not religion has had a positive or negative impact upon international relations. Unfortunately, for the reasons stated above, it is impossible to say definitively one way or the other, although one can look can point towards evidence of religious dimensions to innumerate wars and conflicts throughout history on the one hand, but one must also consider the religious dimensions to many of the “positive” actions in international relations – Gandhi, the man who liberated India from British colonial rule, was a devoutly religious man, and his faith must have surely been one of the reasons he went to the great efforts that he did to free India. Poland’s Solidarity movement that brought about the downfall of Communism was borne

out of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, a document about social responsibility and working for the common good, which was written by the late Pope Jean Paul II.

Weighing this evidence up like this though has no bearing on *truth*. Specifically, whether or not the claims and assertions that form the basis for the religions are true or not – many of the claims of the Holy Books can be posed as factual questions that are answerable by observation and science – to take an obvious example: “Could a man really part the Red Sea?” Whilst this may seem irrelevant it actually is important as it is these improbable claims that the religious dogma relies on – and regardless of what has happened in the international system with this dogma, the question of whether or not the dogma is *true*, is most important.

This author would assert that the war and peace attributed to religion are not caused because of religion, but because of *dogmatism*. In other words, an authoritative set of beliefs that cannot be questioned. Communism and Nazism are just two non-theistic examples of dogma that have been attributed as the causes of war, conflict and general instability in the international system.

This is perhaps analogous to Kant’s warnings against absolute monarchies in his *Perpetual Peace* – if something cannot be challenged, if it not allowed to be challenged by rational argument, then it can become dangerous as it is (to use a perhaps anachronistic term) unregulated. Kant argued that republics are the best form of government as they will be regulated by the people, who will provide checks and balances that will prevent their leaders from doing something stupid, such as going to war on a whim – rational argument provides the intellectual checks and balances for ideas, and so prevent dogmatism.

Religious dogma is perhaps more difficult to tackle than the aforementioned Communism and Nazism, and perhaps explains why it has endured throughout

history for so long – it is literally dealing with life and death issues, and people are scared to attack religion intellectually for fear of causing offence – or worse, spending eternity in Hell when they die. French philosopher Blaise Pascal famously justified his beliefs based on what is essentially game theory – and weighing up the risks of believing and not believing⁴⁷. He followed religious dogma, because after all, who would want to upset God?

⁴⁷ http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/heaven.html [accessed 17/03/08]

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