



Addressing Fundamentalism by Legal and Spiritual Means

By Dan Wessner

Religion and Humane Global Governance by Richard A. Falk. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 191 pp.

Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal before Allah, Unequal before Man? by Shaheen Sardar Ali. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000. 358 pp.



Religious Fundamentalisms and the Human Rights of Women edited by Courtney W. Howland. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. 326 pp.

The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights by Ahmad S. Moussalli. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. 226 pp.

The post-Cold War era stands at a crossroads. Some sort of new world order or disorder is under construction. Our choice to move more toward multilateralism or unilateralism is informed well by inter-religious debate and international law. Both disciplines rightly challenge the “post-Enlightenment divide between religion and politics,” and reinvigorate a spiritual-legal dialogue once thought to be “irrelevant or substandard” (Falk: 1-8, 101).

These disciplines can dissemble illusory walls between spiritual/sacred and material/modernist concerns, between *realpolitik* interests and ethical judgment (Kung 1998: 66). They place praxis and war-peace issues firmly in the context of a suffering humanity and world. Both warn as to how fundamentalism may subjugate peace and security to a demagogic, uncompromising quest. These disciplines also nurture a community of speech that continues to find its voice even as others resort to war. The four books considered in this essay respond to the rush and risk of unnecessary conflict wrought by fundamentalists. These authors engage political dialogue in areas of human rights, gender, religion, and global affairs. They present paradigms for democratic voice, systemic justice, and nonviolent forms of multilateralism. They collectively push for dialogic pathways that can moderate, even mentor the otherwise unilateral objectives of fundamentalists—be they a hegemon or a terrorist cell leader. These books speak prophetically to any and all religio-political sermonizers who proclaim the inevitability of a new, longer, colder “world order” of conflict.

***Realpolitik* and Populism**

In the last half of the twentieth century, the *realpolitik* of the Cold War dominated the disciplines related to human development and global affairs. *Realpolitik* assumed that only state actors could address international peace and security. Some determinists posited the inevitable wave of inter-civilizational conflict against an embattled and missile-shielded West. Others presumed the “end of history” and the emancipatory benefits of democratic market enlargement, neoliberal deregulation, consumer growth, and the efficiencies of global trade and finance—a global market tide that would lift all boats. These homogenizing paradigms continue to preach a false universalism (Barber 1992). They dismiss the probable “blowback” against western imperialism (Johnson 2000). They undercut sincere humanitarian intervention, human rights regimes, good governance, and peaceful relations.

Yet with the demise of Soviet-U.S. tensions, there have been compelling pluralist challenges to this dominant realist-capitalist discourse. Diverse voices have begun to unmask several fictions: one, that only sovereign states should deal with threats to peace and security; two, that only neoliberal market forces and benign western superpowers can otherwise right misguided policies or oppressive governments; and three, that the answers found within fundamentalist beliefs can loose one from the twining tendrils of one’s own victimized construct of history. These are all power myths.

Indeed, there continue to be from many sectors a reassessment of contemporary values by entities peripheral to statist *realpolitik* and capitalist centers of power. These emerging voices address the gap of political participation between male and female discussants, majority and minority groups (be they ethnic, religious or racial), rich and poor parties, and powerful and subaltern states. Movements of women, non-European ethnic and racial groups, religious communities, and poor people in both first and third worlds are engaging political, legal, ecclesiastical, and economic issues from their underprivileged contexts. These movements affirm that we are “irresistibly interdependent” (Barber 2002: 12).

These postmodern threads form a fabric among human rights activists and jurists, theologians, and lay people. Among the authors considered here, Courtney W. Howland presents gendered arguments across a spectrum of dominant Northern and subaltern Southern perspectives. She addresses the profound legal and spiritual tension between fundamentalism, human rights, and liberation. In the context of Christian-Muslim discussions, she contends that the private/public and the domestic/international interpretations of “cultural relativism” are the major obstacle to justice and freedom. From Howland’s multidisciplinary and broad perspective to a particular case, Shaheen Sardar Ali examines gendered legal issues in Pakistani Islamism. This subject, she writes, is dynamic and complex. Yet the number of advocates for greater protection of women’s rights under Pakistani cultural, state, and international legal norms is quite small. More affirming of the rights debate within Islam is Ahmad S. Moussalli. He describes the long historical course of human rights concerns, democratic speech, and diverse sacred interpretations of the *Qur’an*, even among Muslim fundamentalists (hereafter, Islamism). He contends that Islamism ranges from strains of radical totalitarianism to inclusive pluralistic state-societal relations.

Collectively, these authors deconstruct fundamentalisms that have held captive too long the development of individuals, groups, and nations. They also draw parallels between rigid

fundamentalism and unilateral politicking. I close, therefore, with Richard Falk's sketch of a reconstructive postmodernism that unites the above concerns. His "citizen pilgrim" path is one of "politically engaged spirituality." Here one embraces dialogue within spirituality, law, and state-societal politics in order to embody the world's suffering. One must acknowledge that suffering is the first truth across these religions. A second truth is the need for accountability and humane governance. Together, these authors challenge anyone's practice of impunity—whether that of religious fundamentalism or political unilateralism.

Fundamentalist Juggernaut

Human rights activists, jurists, and theologians are not the only people interested in a cloth woven of spirituality, law, and politics. So, too, are fundamentalists—the very group that Howland, Ali, Moussalli, and Falk find most confounding. Still these authors appreciate that fundamentalists, while dogmatically honing a narrow perspective, do have a rhetoric that must be heard. Empathetically, fundamentalists often decry the global apartheid of extreme poverty and profligate superwealth. Ethically, they discern that modernist secularism has overtly privileged raw power, technocracy, reason, and economic clout over faith-informed morality. Logically, they see sorrowful developments resulting from the privatization of spirituality and wholesale propagandizing of materialism. More than a decade ago, Benjamin Barber argued that these fundamentalists feared most the overwhelming pull of a globalizing McWorld. In turn, they have propounded an equally un-democratic and particularistic *jihad*. Borrowing from this Muslim term for spiritual cleansing, Barber refers to *jihad*-like concerns across many tribes and religions. He clarified his position after the post-September 11th war on Afghanistan:

Jihad ... may grow out of and reflect ... a pathological metastasis of valid grievances about the effects of an arrogant secularist materialism that is the unfortunate concomitant of the spread of consumerism across the world. It may reflect a desperate and ultimately destructive concern for the integrity of indigenous cultural traditions that are ill equipped to defend themselves against aggressive markets in a free-trade world. It may reflect a struggle for justice in which Western markets appear as obstacles rather than facilitators of cultural identity (Barber 2002: 17).

Hence fundamentalists may well believe that theirs is a path of liberation from oppression. Adherents may surely be seeking justice, solidarity, and freedom.

While mindful of possibly constructive goals, these four authors address at least nine fundamentalist factors that are dangerously uncompromising, especially in the context of foreign affairs and domestic gender concerns:

1. Fundamentalism is an ideology both shaped by and constitutive of a tortured interpretation of history. The past is idealized, based on a narrow spectrum of readings and facts. This perspective may have factual grounding, but is more likely an elitist and patriarchal manipulation of events. A fundamentalist typically wallows in a history of victimhood, humiliation, scorn, and persecution. This historical worldview is particularly threatened by the seduction of women and the apostate threats of outsiders.

2. Fundamentalism includes the well-orchestrated study, preaching, and cultural re-enactment of this constitutive history. This re-enactment can blend worship, patriotism, and nationalism. It melds the private sphere of family life with the public affairs of state and religious defense. In this blending of private and public matters, fundamentalism can co-opt the state, or identify some state as “the evil other,” or find that secular elites are co-opting one’s faith.
3. Fundamentalism is a high-stakes discourse of dualism. This storyline prescribes a life-or-death drama whereby one upholds the righteous or is duped by “the evil other.” One is expected to choose the solace of disciplined faith over eternal damnation. These stark options are presented with such “radical simplicity” that one’s choice is preordained (Said 2002: 2). Fundamentalism often places gender at the fulcrum of this good-evil dualism. A Manichaeian construct of private and public life stokes intolerance of others’ thought or experience.
4. Fundamentalism combines secular and sacred evidence in a transcendent narrative. This storyline shuns the complexity of counter-evidence, self-scrutiny, or another’s compelling argument.
5. While fundamentalists shy away from others’ interpretations of events, they may be very attentive to unfolding global and political events. Their level of interest, though, is to shore up a received doctrine and worldview. To proof-text the *Qur’an* or the Bible is to scan for verses in support of a preconceived hermeneutic. Fundamentalism, therefore, relies upon proof-texts in both sacred scriptures and secular sources of news.
6. Moreover, fundamentalism is messianic. Often reiterated is the belief in one’s own deliverance from pain and evil (real or imagined), just as surely as one’s anticipation of a righteous person’s receipt of just deserts (real or imagined) and the “evil other’s” just damnation. This apocalyptic vision proclaims a triumphal end to the timeless struggle of good and evil. This victorious path is by definition exclusivist. It cannot permit contamination. There may be no inclusion of unworthy, unclean others unless they wholly convert to the fundamentalist’s path.
7. With a strategy of such magnitude, violence is justified in the cause of a higher, ordained, fundamentalist end. This violence may be defensive or pre-emptive. One thinks of himself or herself as fighting for a better social, political, and spiritual world.
8. One’s predilection to view the world (and treat the world) as described above reinforces all of these constitutive elements. It rises to hubris. It becomes an embedded ideology that keeps both adherents and apostates “in their place.” This may amount to totalitarianism since politicized “place” has religious, political, legal, social, and economic connotations.
9. Fundamentalism lobbies legislators to change state and ecclesiastic laws to conform to a particular interpretation of doctrine. The result is that “broad, vague notions of religious freedom and representation serve as the justification for the state controlling an ever-enlarging public sphere that may well encompass every aspect of public and private life”

(Howland: 95). Falling within this lobbying effort are private matters of sexuality, reproduction and spousal relations, as well as international positions that support or oppose Pax Americana. Our post-September 11th world menacingly juxtaposes countervailing fundamentalisms of Al Qaida and the Bush Administration.

These nine common factors within fundamentalism show how faith can become a juggernaut of political unilateralism. These four authors also demonstrate the plurality of fundamentalisms. These nine elements may play out in diverse lands and religions. They can feed the unilateralism of a hegemonic power or further the terrorist threats of a cell group or subaltern state. There are, for example, in Hinduism the virulently anti-Muslim Shiv Sena and the nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party, and in Judaism the ultra-Orthodox Haredi and Zionist Gush Emunim, and in Buddhism and Roman Catholicism the strict limitations on women's leadership roles. In any of these settings, fundamentalist factors can fortify a unilateralist agenda.

How then can legal or theological discourse moderate or mentor fundamentalism? If the post-Cold War era allowed some space for postmodern discourse, today's post-September 11th world may be more prepared to revert to a past that muted alternative perspectives. Terrorists and the Bush administration alike call upon fundamentalism to assert local and global might. Both focus on asymmetrical, lethal forces. Both pit *realpolitik* against populist empowerment. Their posturing is more coercive and militarist than persuasively political, diplomatic, or spiritual.

Nonetheless, civil society may still feel emboldened by the gains of non-state, non-powerful voices of the 1990s. Indeed, in the weekends leading up to the second U.S. war on Iraq, there were estimates of 30 million citizens pounding city pavements worldwide in a concerted anti-hegemonic, anti-war protest. One must consider whether global civil society has ever been so democratized. Can this same civil political voice now call upon theology and law to hold in check two egregious fundamentalisms—Protestant Evangelicalism and Islamism? Can they moderate these belief systems' punishing politics from the Near East to the Potomac?

Islamism

Islamism is richly described by Ahmad Moussalli and Shaheen Sardar Ali, who examine human rights, gender, state-societal affairs, and international relations in a plurality of Muslim forums. These two authors call upon political anthropology, transitional politics literature, ethics, emerging law codes, and finally religious beliefs. There is no short cut in discerning another's religio-political identity. In particular, this section notes the thought and influence of Egyptian Sayyid Qutb's form of Sunni Islamism. Qutb's explication of *jihad*-like spiritual cleansing in private and public spheres, as well as in domestic and international affairs, has shaped the beliefs of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaida network.

Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden have long stressed a Sunni Islamism that seeks the restoration of the religio-political office of caliphate. Since 661, among Sunni Muslims, who comprise 90% of Islam's population, the caliph has been understood to be the successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Whether under the Umayyad dynasty, the Abbasids, the Fatimid rulers, or the Turkish sultans, caliphs ensured that Muslim governments adhered to *shari'a* law. *Shari'a* law is

understood according to two categories. In *shari'a* reliance on Qur'anic verses that address ethics and religion, there is firm belief in inerrancy and immutability—a categorization of *Ibadaat*. But in matters dealing with socio-economic issues, there can be and often is change. These latter verses are recognized as being much more contextual—a categorization of *Muamalaat* (Ali: 56). With regard to the latter, caliphates have varied in terms of their support of broadly consultative (*shura*) models, allowance for pluralistic difference (*ikhtilaf*), and norms favoring human rights and minority representation. Thus governance under *shari'a* law may vary radically. It depends upon whether a caliph differentiates between a materialist-contextual *Muamalaat* definition of the modern world or an *Ibadaat* worldview that is fundamentally about ethics and religion. To generalize, there are three interpretative options. Life is profoundly shaped by materialism and imperialism. Or life is embedded in spiritual and religious concerns. Or life is a complex complement of materialism and spirituality.

The forcefulness of a modern-day Islamist argument is its claim that the western world has during the last century insisted upon the first of these three possible interpretations of life. For Islamism, a particularly egregious demonstration of western materialism and imperialism was World War I and its aftermath. One, the Euro-American post-war geopolitical map-drawing set aside Middle Eastern and Near Eastern oilfields for the resource needs of an industrializing west. British and French missionaries cemented western military, mercantile, and political gains. Two, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the secular leader of the new Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, abolished the caliphate. To launch the Muslim world toward equal footing with the west, Atatürk supported a materialist interpretation and modernization agenda. Three, even today, the protestant Evangelical movement of the west has targeted the “10-40” swath of the developing world—those countries, largely Muslim, that lie between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude. Islam chafes, particularly, when western missions combine Christian proselytizing with modernist development agendas and bequests of essential medicines, livestock, and food assistance (Lampman 2003: 15). In radical response, Islamism deems the restoration of its religio-political caliphate office and its enforcement of *shari'a* law as essential to the integrity of Sunni lands and the Islamic community (*ummah*).

Thus the Egyptian school under Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood withdrew from corrupted Islamic state-societal relations and independently formed a spiritual and political *jihad* against both infidels outside of Islam and apostates within the faith. Moussalli argues that as Qutb called for the expansion of Islam to the corners of the earth, his movement actually helped to strengthen pluralism within Islam. He practiced *ijtihad*, which is independent reasoning outside of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings, the *Hadith*. Qutb's arguments opened debate about *jihad* against both internal and external opponents of Islamism. He posited the need for extreme measures, even violence against institutions of systemic injustice. His Muslim Brotherhood disciples, though, further radicalized Qutb's position on systemic injustice and violence. They advocated assassinations—for one, the killing of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, and later, a more broadly spread terrorism across state boundaries and international order. In the last two decades, Qutb's disciple, Osama bin Laden, founded Al Qaida as one transnational path of Islamist *jihad*. Other Islamist responses have been the Pakistani *mujahideen* schools, the Afghani Taliban government, and the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria.

Shortly after September 11th, the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera network broadcast Osama bin Laden's assessment of this attack: "America has been filled with horror from north to south and east to west, and thanks be to God ... What America is tasting now is only a copy of what we have tasted ... Our Islamic nation has been tasting the same for more [than] eighty years, of humiliation and disgrace, its sons killed and their blood spilled, its sanctities desecrated" (Appleby 2002: 505). His Islamist convictions underscore the tortured historical reading of victimization since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The threats to true Islam, according to his fundamentalist perspective, are internal and external. These threats are economic, cultural, militarist, and territorial. They encircle the holy sites of Islam. The pain of these sacrileges are re-enacted within Islamist families and throughout the states and societies of the Muslim world.

While Western strength, ideology, and economics may seduce less vigilant believers, the Islamist believes that they cannot diminish the dualistic, apocalyptic, and religio-political mission of Al Qaida to free the Muslim community (*ummah*) of its oppressors. Followers of Osama bin Laden are keen students of the global milieu, at least from their interpretation of globalization and transcendent narrative. As many of us recall, the Al-Jazeera broadcast of the videotape showed Osama bin Laden's calm confidence, even from a camp of humble surroundings. Nonetheless, this plainly dressed leader of a fundamentalist network posited a hubris and unilateralism that revealed in the demise of its hegemonic enemy.

At the same time, Islamists and certain Muslim governments seek a sympathetic hearing among westerners. They call upon international covenants and the west to respect the religio-political debate within Muslim states and the cultural relativism of their state-societal goals. For example, the opinions (*fatawa*) of Muslim jurists regarding the first Gulf War were vigorously debated. They contributed to a rich and complex inter-religious and legal discussion of the ethics of war and peace. They largely agreed that the first Gulf War was not an instance of *jihad*—a just war fought according to the purposes and limits of God, but an example of *harb*—a secular war fought for reasons other than the defense of Islam. Moreover, these jurists seek a sympathetic consideration of the diversity of Muslim responses to September 11th. David Smock convened Christian, Jewish, and Muslim jurists to discuss this range of religio-political positions. This terrorism, according to many Muslim clerics and jurists, was condemned as a gross injustice, crime against humanity, sinful act, and tragic expression of nihilism. Still others couched the unjust terrorism of September 11th in the broader context of legitimate condemnation of Israeli occupation and the Muslim world's dismay over a western materialism and hegemony that know no limits. These impressions have been stated more strongly in the aftermath of U.S. militarist responses to September 11th. For instance, Muqtedar Khan writes that the United States must stop "obsessing over bin Laden and Islam and examine the recent history of their actions overseas to grasp the depth of hatred they engender among foreigners ... [for] when the United States responds to the murder of innocent people with massive attacks that kill more innocent people, then they are merely responding to terror with terror" (Smock 2002: xvii).

Howland and Ali, moreover, argue that the Muslim world also demands western respect for cultural relativism. Whether or not the west is attentive to this cultural relativism and how the west responds to domestic practices within an Islamist state affect the rights of women, especially in cases where *shari'a* law relegates questions of gender to immutable *Ibadaat* ethical and religious interpretations. Howland and Ali demonstrate that the women's position is confrontational in this

context for four reasons. First, women's rights concerns lie at the heart of private versus public domain. Second, women's rights and religious freedom are scarcely addressed in international conventions. Third, religious freedom covers a range of concerns that address both civil political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. Fourth, the western feminist movement, according to Islamism, has relegated gender questions to the socio-economic sphere.

This predicament for women in Muslim state-societal relations is not new. Ali explains that the underlying context of all of these hermeneutical paths for understanding gender in Islam is the fact that the Prophet Muhammad received the word of Allah against a pre-Islamic Arabic society filled with ignorance (*jabilliyah*). She contends that because of this context, one finds that there are, indeed, six Qur'anic verses that go so far as to enjoin misogynist practices. But these are six out of 6,666 verses. Although a mere 0.1 per cent of Qur'anic verse, these lines still find emphasis in current Islamist state-societal relations that continue to draw upon patriarchal traditions of pre-existing Islam.

Ali concurs that *shari'a* law is not immutable. It is critiqued by widespread study and discussion of the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition of Muhammad (*Hadith*), the words and deeds of Muhammad as recorded by scholars of *Sunna*, consensus building among leading Muslim jurists (*ijma*), and by analogical deductions in Islamic law where the Qur'an and *Hadith* are not dispositive (*qiyas*). There are, therefore, layers upon layers of interpretations: religious injunction, cultural practices, socio-economic debate, constitutionalism, and domestic ratification of international covenants. Obviously, the power to categorize a person's behavior as falling under *Muamalaat* or *Ibadaat* is considerable. Clerics, scholars, jurists, and leaders may posit that a "clean slate" is requisite if women's rights are ever to attain international standards of work, integrity, and pay. For instance, in Pakistan, Ali claims that the private sphere of family laws are essentially socio-economic issues and must be presented as such. If thus viewed as contextual and open to fresh interpretations (*Muamalaat*), gender discrimination would be free of the real or imagined jurisdiction of religio-political sanctions of *shari'a* law (*Ibadaat*). But Ali and Howland concur that in Pakistan and other Islamist contexts, these women's rights are subordinated beneath pre-Islamic cultural norms that become the rigid backbone of fundamentalist religio-political norms. Women are thus rarely recognized as being *sui juris*, able to act legally on their own. With its own present political calculations to justify war in mind, the Bush Administration raised the issue of unjust religio-political discrimination against Muslim women. This was done to bolster its argument for military action against both Afghanistan and Iraq, though the latter was under secular Ba'ath Party rule. The Bush Administration extrapolated its discernment of discriminatory practices against women under Taliban doctrinal law to the gender concerns of Iraqi women. This argument conflated gender inequality, religio-political rules, terrorist support, and anti-democratic principles as common damning sins of the Afghani and Iraqi governments. In so doing, the administration's case for two wars co-opted for its own political purposes the ongoing struggle of certain Muslim women for integrity. Rather than serving these women's interests of liberation, this sort of western political opportunism became an additional injustice against them.

Moussalli, however, presents a deeper and broader perspective on the Muslim struggle for justice in matters of gender equality. He observes this Muslim debate over foreign affairs and domestic cultural relativism across a longer historical timeline. From classical, to medieval, and to modern times, there have been diverse Islamic perspectives on gender and politics. Collectively, they have

nurtured practices of democracy, pluralism, and human rights. While these political values have clearly not established themselves as universal principles across Muslim states, they are becoming embedded norms in certain Muslim state-societal relations. Even within Islamism, Moussalli argues, there are pluralistic strains that include theological, legal, and academic debate. He asserts that Islam has generally thought of its religio-political practices as evolving toward state-societal relations that are more progressive, even *less* discriminatory and *more* humane and equitable than the western Enlightenment and Judeo-Christian beliefs (Moussalli: 4).

Thus Moussalli seeks, but no time soon anticipates, moderation between polar responses to Islamism. At the one end, there are Muslim scholars who assert with regard to gender and politics the need for a clean slate, a fresh interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds (*Sunna*). At the other end, there are those prepared to engage *jihad* in a dualistic, violently apocalyptic, and religio-political mission to free Islam from its oppressors. We are, therefore, left with the need to seek an understanding of Islam's diverse forms. There are those who embody all nine elements of fundamentalism described above. There are others desperately seeking an open and serious dialogue with the non-Muslim world. In these days of expanding war, it is least helpful to caricature Islam's faith adherents. It is equally harmful to rely publicly and diplomatically upon Evangelical fundamentalist interpretations rooted in western materialism and imperialism. Unfortunately, caricatures of the "evil other" and a countervailing Evangelical fundamentalism now dominate official discourse in Washington. This globalizes a lack of discourse between two fundamentalisms whose battle feeds each party's distorted sense of history and mission, and thereby threatens the peace and security of countless others.

Evangelical Fundamentalism

In the latter part of the nineteenth century and apart from any perceived threat from Islam, protestant Evangelical fundamentalism was born in America. It reacted against modernist methods of historical criticism, insisted upon scriptural inerrancy, preached a dispensationalist picture of divine rapture, and opposed secularist responses to social welfare and gendered norms. In recent years, this variant on fundamentalism increasingly focused on the scourge of Islam. It achieved surprising influence in global affairs through its ardent support of the "clash of civilizations" and "end of history" arguments. These concepts align neatly with an apocalyptic expectation of doing battle against the Antichrist at Megiddo, a hill in Israel. Engaging this "evil other" in the Battle of Armageddon is said to usher in the thousand-year reign of Christ. In the 1970s to 1990s, this form of fundamentalism grew impatient with the U.S. government. From abortion clinics to the White House, a fundamentalist "chosen elect" politicked to take back the Supreme Court, the Congress, the public schools, textbook publishing houses, foreign affairs, and the Executive branch. Ironically, their crusade is as evident as anywhere in the words and deeds of the current Bush Administration.

While I recognize that more than a single ideology or religious belief informs the thought process of the Bush Administration, it is clear that protestant Evangelicalism is the guiding path. The above-mentioned elements of fundamentalism have unabashedly become common word and deed for this Administration. First, Bush's tortured interpretation of personal and world history is constitutive of an Evangelical fundamentalism that is re-enacted regularly for public consumption. Second, this civil religion reinforces a high stakes dualism that conflates complex state-societal

identities, international relations, and the historical record. Third, this struggle is transformed into a transcendent picture of benign American hegemony and messianism. Fourth, the end result of this Pax Americana is that the righteous and unrighteous shall gain their just deserts.

Bush's biographer, David Frum, contends that a "culture of modern Evangelicalism" is the "predominant creed" in White House policymaking, its Executive branch Bible studies, and the President's oft-mentioned time spent in prayer (*The Progressive* 2003: 8). David Gergen observes that Bush is confident that he is a key actor in this creed. The president believes that he is a powerful instrument of God whose providence has already saved him from alcoholism, and whose guiding hand is behind every political act, decision, and step toward war or peace—"behind all of life, and all of history" (Goodstein 2003: 4). This is why, according to Newt Gingrich, the president during his campaign argued that Jesus Christ was "a political philosopher" of immense influence (Brookhiser 2003: 63). There is no exegesis or hermeneutic behind this claim, but rather as William J. Bennett notes, the zealotry of a "convert" (Goodstein 2003: 4). This confident belief is re-enacted often on diverse public political stages. So from the presidential campaign trail, to the National Prayer Breakfast, to the State of the Union Address, the story of Bush's divinely inspired victory over alcoholism conflates with others' struggles—whether they be Afghani women chafing under Taliban rule, Baghdad civilians about to see the destruction of their city and Saddam Hussein's regime, or mourning family members of those killed in the Columbia Shuttle tragedy, the September 11th terrorism, or America's present wars.

Bush unreservedly applies this personal sense of religio-political certainty to domestic and foreign affairs. At home, he demonstrates unwavering stewardship of the religious right's position on tax reform, abortion, delivery of social welfare, and private-public education issues. I focus here on his fundamentalist approach to international affairs. The president's firm Evangelical convictions allow him to target an "axis of evil" or any other citizen, leader, or country standing in God's way. So Kim Jong Il is flippantly called a "pygmy" whom the president "loathes," Arafat is routinely denied an audience, role, and compound in the Israeli-American-Palestinian debacle, Sharon is the most frequent visitor to the White House of all foreign heads of state, and those not with the president are for terrorism and the forces of evil (Goodstein 2003: 4; *The Progressive* 2003: 8).

When the president is not emphasizing these points, he lends the stature of the White House to a number of other prominent fundamentalist voices who echo his refrain. Most notable is the frequency with which Franklin Graham appears in this Administration's photo opportunities. Although an outspoken Evangelical who has denounced Islam as "an evil religion," Graham has been invited to offer the Inauguration Prayer and lead Good Friday services at the Pentagon. He was allowed to supply U.S. troops with Arabic-language New Testaments for distribution in the Gulf region. He is vocal among a consortium of other Evangelical non-governmental organizations that are playing a hand in rebuilding the Afghani and Iraqi portions of the "10/40" mission belt.

This harmonizing of Executive branch and public propagation of an increasingly fundamentalist civil religion is sorely divisive. It unites one portion of the American public, while excluding other sectors of the U.S. populace committed both to spirituality and good governance. All the while, this propaganda incites general outrage and distrust among Muslims and non-Americans worldwide. The president underscored this division and self-righteous identity in his 2003 State of the Union

Address. He looked directly into the teleprompter and camera, smiled, and intoned, “‘There’s power, wonder-working power’ in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.” The actual words of this standard refrain sung during the altar call of many Evangelical revivals are that this wonder-working power is “in the blood of the Lamb.” By analogy, the inference to be taken from the president’s tortured read of history and hymnology is that Christ’s passion is realized in the righteousness of certain American people. In the hours leading up to the latest U.S. war on Iraq, Bush further equated his own spiritual quest with Christ’s suffering and the narrow path of righteous decisionmaking. “And I, on bended knee to the good Lord, asked him to help me to do my job in a way that’s wise” (Bumiller 2003: 11).

Finally, Michael Klare among others has noted there are blended strains of apocalyptic messianism, control of world oil resources, and militant fervor in this self-righteous proclamation of U.S. intentions. Chalmers Johnson contends that the president’s fundamentalist ideology “is there to cover the militarism” (*The Progressive* 2003: 10). Either way, Bush’s particular read of personal and world history allows the president to believe he is the key figure in a pivotal struggle between the forces of good and evil. This confrontationalism permits a level of risk-taking that is wholly inappropriate to fragile international and inter-religious relations.

Elaine Pagels argues that the president’s fundamentalist language is “enormously divisive and dangerous. If there is an axis of evil, that obviously places him in the axis of good, and also means that anyone who disagrees with the policies he is advocating is placed on the other side” (Goodstein 2003: 4). This dualism denigrates individuals trying to decipher world events, and simultaneously creates a high stakes geopolitical gamble. Bush intentionally conflates his personal story with complex state-societal identities, international relations, and the historical record. Take, for example, the conflation of September 11th terrorism and his later pronouncement of imminent threats from an “axis of evil,” and especially the government of Saddam Hussein. On 7 October 2002, Mr. Bush articulated in Cincinnati his reasons for war against Iraq. Even as he prepared to deliver this speech, peace rallies and major inter-religious observances occurred in twenty U.S. cities that same weekend. Over subsequent weeks, these demonstrations coincided with countless others around the world. So, too, there were diplomatic protests among nine of the fifteen states on the U.N. Security Council. The stymied effort of the United States and United Kingdom to read U.N.S.C. Resolution 1441 as legal U.N. sanction for military intervention speaks to a profound diplomatic and civic disagreement with the Bush Administration’s rush to war. Regardless, Mr. Bush posited unilateralist “might makes right” calculations of power and merit. Although his rhetoric spoke of securing freedom, his stress of the word “terrorism”—thirty times in thirty minutes—was meant to produce fear and loathing. He intoned:

America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud...

...[W]e have every reason to assume the worst, and we have an urgent duty to prevent the worst from occurring.

...Failure to act would embolden other tyrants, allow terrorists access to new weapons and new resources, and make blackmail a permanent feature of world events. The United Nations would betray the purpose of its

founding, and prove irrelevant to the problems of our time. And through its inaction, the United States would resign itself to a future of fear.

...We refuse to live in fear. This nation, in world war and in Cold War, has never permitted the brutal and lawless to set history's course. Now, as before, we will secure our nation, protect our freedom, and help others to find freedom of their own (Bush 2002).

Paul Krugman is chagrined that the American populace so blithely accepted Bush's case for war on the basis of a manufactured threat—the “mushroom cloud.” Clearly, the U.N. inspection regime and the post-war sweep of Iraq have not supported this bold and undocumented assertion, whether for nuclear or other forms of weapons of mass destruction. Krugman asks, therefore, whether or not “the leaders of a democratic nation [are] supposed to tell their citizens the truth” (Krugman 2003). He begs the question as to why the mainline media and citizenry expect so much less. In this case, the fundamentalist bent of the president's mission allows him to cow the public into quiet observance while he reconfigures current events and history to suit the dualism he is prosecuting. Nonetheless, if Bush were demanded by a democracy to defend more cogently the post-World War II record of the U.S. “securing” itself and “finding freedom” for others through its overt and covert wars, there would either be a humbling truth-telling or an egregious redressing of history in the stories of U.S. operations in Afghanistan, Belgian Congo, Cambodia, Chile, China, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Grenada, Indonesia, Iraq, Korea, Laos, Libya, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Sudan, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia. The U.S. “contribution to freedom” in these states is remarkable for its extensive reliance on disproportionate military intervention. In the present Middle East and Central-South Asian context, the U.S. is making forward deployment of its troops, planes, munitions, bases, and military advisors in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Diego Garcia, Djibouti, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen (Hartung 2002: 21-24). Krugman's comment on Bush's Cincinnati speech only scratches the surface of the depth to which cathartic truth-telling might draw the American citizenship and leadership. U.S. (humanitarian) intervention for the sake of freedom actually means that “freedom” and grass roots movements that differ from the desires of U.S. government policy makers will be suppressed, often violently.

Mr. Bush's Cincinnati speech was also problematic in that he demonstrated contempt for international legal constraint on the use or threat of force. He conflated events of September 11th with broader, independent foreign and economic policy objectives of his Administration to preempt, prevent, and eliminate unsavory governments. In so doing, he ran roughshod over the Charter of the United Nations. Its underlying principles are pacific, deliberative, collective, defensive, and self-determinative so as to preserve state, group, and individual fundamental freedoms and human rights. By contrast, Mr. Bush's words are the dark side of today's schizophrenia: threat, peril, smoking guns, mushroom clouds, worst-case tyranny, permanent blackmail, an irrelevant U.N., and fear.

The emerging Bush Doctrine and its apocalyptic pictures of impending threats did not arise from a pre-September 11th vacuum. Rather, it is based squarely on three pre-existing and largely fundamentalist policy papers that argue for pre-emptive, preventive strikes against any entity that threatens the security of U.S. values, beliefs about benign global leadership, profligate consumption, and unparalleled power. These three plans buttress limitless pursuit of oil, promise the growth of the American consumer culture, and project the most dominant U.S. military-economic presence and

agenda ever. The underlying belief is that America is indispensable and deserving of such prominence. It has earned God's favor for its costly and tireless guard against the communism of the Cold War, the agrarian nationalisms of various corners of the world, and the Islamist critiques of western imperialism.

As the first piece of the Bush Doctrine, the White House released the May 2001 "National Energy Policy Report," also known as the Cheney Plan. Vice President Cheney's plan takes for granted the growing dependence of the U.S. and world economies on the Iraqi and Caspian Sea states' oil reserves over the next two decades. Combined, both proven and anticipated Iraqi reserves likely overshadow Saudi, Russian, and U.S. petroleum resources. The Cheney Plan posits that U.S. economic (hence national) interests must seek to control, if not possess, these Middle Eastern and South-Central Asian regions. This expanded sphere of U.S. influence stretches from Iraq and Iran, through Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, and through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the Arabian Sea. The deployment of U.S. forces after September 11th covers this terrain, and begins to project unprecedented U.S. influence over European, Middle Eastern, and Asian economies dependent on these oil reserves. Simultaneously, the U.S. is positioned to secure its own growing demand for foreign oil.

The second piece of the Bush Doctrine comes from a policy paper called "Defense Planning Guidance," drafted in 1992 by Paul D. Wolfowitz for the first Bush Administration. More than a decade ago in the early post-Cold War years, as Under Secretary for Policy in Cheney's Defense Department, Wolfowitz sought to guarantee that no counter-hegemonic superpower could threaten U.S. domination of geopolitics and global economics. Bill Keller reports that this Pax Americana imagined:

[W]ith the demise of the Soviet Union the United States doctrine should be to assure that no new superpower arose to rival America's benign domination of the globe. The U.S. would defend its unique status both by being militarily powerful beyond challenge and by being such a constructive force that no one would want to challenge us. We would participate in coalitions, but they would be 'ad hoc.' The U.S. would be 'postured to act independently when collective action cannot be orchestrated.' The guidance envisioned pre-emptive attacks against states bent on acquiring nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. It was accompanied by illustrative scenarios of hypothetical wars for which the military should be prepared. One of them was another war against Iraq (Keller 2002: 52).

Taken together, the Cheney and Wolfowitz plans are two of three pillars meant to secure the Bush Doctrine. It presumes the right to exercise military force globally, regardless of long-honored self-defense principles of international law, state necessity to survive immediate threats and secure fundamental interests, or humanitarian response to gross human rights violations (Falk 2003). This doctrine means either to manipulate or disregard U.N. principles in Chapters VI and VII of the Charter, favoring collective pursuit of security, fundamental freedoms and human rights, and tolerance. It mutes provisions for regional peacebuilding, dialogue, and U.N. Security Council study, monitoring, decision making, and specified action in response to concrete threats to international peace and security.

A third pillar of the Bush Doctrine is the September 2000 "Rebuilding America's Defenses" document, published by the Project for the New American Century. Wolfowitz was one of the

guiding participants in this project, which urged then-President Clinton and now-President Bush to challenge unsavory regimes, shape circumstances preemptively, and remove from office “axis of evil” regimes in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. This document was circulated in the Executive Branch two years ahead of Mr. Bush’s State of the Union Address that publicly identified this alleged axis. This document calls for preemptive strikes at an additional defense expenditure of \$100 billion per year in a number of other continents and countries, including China, Southeast Asia, Europe, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.

In sum, the Bush Doctrine carries with it a level of fundamentalist hubris that belies forward- and backward-looking consciousness. This Evangelical Pax Americana that divides the world into righteous and unrighteous actors projects a confidence of economic-military security. It rests, however, upon very uncertain knowledge of “the other.” This gaze into the unknown, though, is transformed into a more definite future because of profound faith in an American God and American policymakers, who can by this God’s grace control others’ responses. Richard Brookhiser concludes, “Bush’s faith means that he does not tolerate, or even recognize, ambiguity: there is an all-knowing God who decrees certain behaviors, and leaders must obey” (Brookhiser 2003: 63). It is an audaciously presumed omniscience that is justified neither by realism nor fact, but by fundamentalist belief. Thus the president is certain when he proclaims, “I will seize the opportunity to achieve big goals,” because “God is not neutral” with regard to the war on terrorism (*The Progressive* 2003: 8). Consider the words of now-Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz who ponders, “There’s an awful lot we don’t know, an awful lot that we may never know, and we’ve got to think differently about standards of proof here” (Keller 2002: 50). Nonetheless, the presumption of control is accompanied by a clear-eyed willingness to kill—either directly or indirectly—to maintain U.S. hegemony and “security.” Vice President Dick Cheney posits, “The risks of inaction are greater than the risks of action.” Granted, this lack of empathy for “the other” is not unique to the Bush administration. The Clinton administration, too, demonstrated callous valuations of human life. In 1998, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright remarked that a U.S. foreign policy based on “coercion, the threat of coercion, sanctions, [and] the threat of sanctions” was simply practical, though clearly not aesthetic (Albright 1998: 59). Asked whether U.S. policies could countenance estimates of one-half million Iraqi children dying from U.S. economic sanctions and military strikes, she concluded it was a “hard choice” over time, but one “worth it” (Chomsky 2001: 73). Still, Albright’s judgment did not project the grand, omniscient, prospective “certainty” of executive decision-making in the Bush administration, which Lee Quinby summarizes as a “holy trinity of militarism, masculinism, and messianic zeal” (*The Progressive* 2003: 10).

These Bush Doctrine considerations raise a series of questions. Does this fundamentalist quest for absolute security actually diminish our own, not to mention others’ justice, freedom, liberty, and equality? Does state-centered security increasingly take on an unabashed Machiavellian or Manichaeian calculation of power and good-evil caricatures? Does it presume the right to coerce and subordinate regional and international economic and political interests of others to the immediate desires of U.S. policymakers? Does this current policy exceed the hegemonic reach of Cold War *realpolitik*?

Moderating/Mentoring

It may be easier to join a fundamentalist camp, political party, or civil religion than to parse fundamentalism's many claims. So why take the heat for speaking out before a large, well-populated, and indoctrinated crowd? Richard Falk offers four positive and emancipatory reasons. Each helps to nurture a culture that hears the other, is self-ironic, commits to "politically engaged spirituality," and eagerly comes to terms with others who are "different." These commitments are to a culture of nonviolence and respect for all of life, a culture of solidarity and just economic order, a culture of tolerance and faithfulness, and a culture of equal rights and partnership (Falk 2001: 69, 130). Altogether, this is clearly a less traveled post-September 11th path. It takes seriously various fundamentalisms' fears of modernity and a complex world. It studies their rhetorical claims and worldview, but then builds one's own faith-ethic and approach to normative laws. It calls upon inter-religious inquiry and international legal constructs. It creates a forum of dialogue and venues for service. This closing section presents the possible scope of such a stage for politically engaged spirituality.

The four authors addressed herein walk this path. They suggest how we must not dismiss adversaries—be they domestic or international forces—but rather humanize them. We recognize with Howland and Ali that Islamism's extreme patriarchal roots severely challenge the roles of women. Similarly, Moussalli describes how Islamism's worldview threatens international peace and security. Nonetheless, these authors also remind us that Islamism does seek to side with suffering and the poor. It has helpfully questioned the infallibility and hubris of western modernity and American hegemony. By the same token, when one examines the mindset underlying the direction of the Bush Administration, there is clearly an awesome sense of self-importance and righteousness, but also a fundamentalism rooted in Evangelical hope and empathy. Politically engaged spirituality asks that we call upon multiple disciplines, embrace service and learning among others situated differently than we, and insist that these various perspectives be held accountable for a more just world. This high expectation is not possible if fundamentalism is dismissed out of hand. It cannot be labeled as the enemy. This multilateral path means to contain the extremism of any state's, or any leader's, or any religion's claim to possess the sole truth. But to even begin to moderate such exclusivity, Falk's "citizen pilgrim" who embraces a politically engaged spirituality must also learn how respective fundamentalisms come to believe that their sense of truth is absolute.

A religio-political approach to today's troubling domestic and international milieu is also humbling. It is daunting to consider the number of committed religious, academic, political, medical, non-governmental, and legal professionals who may be called upon to help rebuild conflict-ridden lands. So besides the essential discipline of quiet reflection, one must also consider "best case arguments" from diverse disciplines and perspectives. Arguably, this is a given in the practice of international law. For instance, rather than focus on the specific criminal accountability of a single leader or terrorist, one must examine simultaneously a sense of justice in systemic terms. One weighs diverse paths for the containment of threats to peace and security through truth commissions, war tribunals, criminal courts, and cross-civilizational, inter-religious dialogue and debate. Second, one must see that threats to home security and the earth's fragile ecology require two forms of investigation. One is to examine the possible security breaches of leaders, be they terrorists, totalitarians, or elected representatives. Another investigates populist and statist accountability for

social, cultural, and economic rights alongside civil political rights. Third, one must discern and empower both indigenous and exogenous sources and experts in the process of rebuilding conflict-torn lands. The mosque and church are logical places to begin to gather and call upon the people to craft and own their personal and national needs and belongings.

I posit that “security” in our present domestic and global milieu is best served by examining our collective past—insuring that our read of history is not a tortured, victimized one as is commonly found and re-enacted in Islamism and Evangelical fundamentalism. As a lawyer and minister committed to faithful community, I call for a new “confessing church” whose vocation would be to secure good governance at a time when the Bush Administration’s hegemony is scarcely being tested. A forum would hone a political, theological, legal, and ethical perspective on whether today’s wars strengthen or threaten the security of people. I draw upon my own pacifist theology, as well as the insights of reformed theology, Islam, Judaism, an inter-religious understanding of just war doctrine, and diverse interpretations of realism.

A modern-day confessing church could demand the accountability of any Administration that is unleashing policies, troops, and armaments. I borrow from the template of theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and John C. Bennett, who in the early 1960s crafted a confessing and searching forum in a journal they co-founded, *Christianity & Crisis*. They engaged inter-religious debate and international relations/legal concerns at a time when successive American administrations were launching American’s longest war. The debacle in Southeast Asia cost nearly sixty thousand American battlefield deaths and over eighty thousand suicides among recently returned U.S. veterans (Viet Nam Veterans Foundation 1993, Pollock *et al.* 1990: 772-76, CBS News 1987, CBS News 1988, Spencer 1986). Less often addressed was the troubling fact that more than three million Vietnamese soldiers and citizens died. Critical to a functioning democratic republic, according to Niebuhr and Bennett, was the vocation of theologians, lawyers and other professionals to press the right questions at the right time. One may call upon pacifist thinking, mainline just war doctrine, and Christian-Judaic-Muslim understandings from a shared historical and religious trek to hold presidents, fundamentalists, pastors, policymakers, and academics accountable in a lively and public forum. This community of speech and service would seek to minister to people generally as we recalibrate collectively our values and sense of security.

This challenge privileges no particular perspective. Islamism and Evangelicalism, realism and pacifism, modernist and post-modern voices need to be heard. The religio-political imperative is to understand another’s perspective at least as well as one’s own. Falk posits that we need to be rooted in the “unfolding of the modern world, sensitive to the material needs of people and the concreteness of their suffering ... Politically engaged spirituality implies both the will and the capability to intervene nonviolently yet with behavioral consequences in situations of conflict and oppression” (Falk 2001: 107). Such a forum may further a collective response to presumptive, preventive “just war” against terrorism as much as *jihad* against western globalizing hegemony. This quest is not naïve, for those with powerful force—be they states or terrorist cells—are perhaps the least willing to join such a forum. My belief, though, is that a moderating and cooperative moral spirit among the diverse group of citizens and professionals mentioned above grounds a broader populace in theology, law, and political theory as a basis for responding to escalating militarist U.S. policies in the Middle East, Central Asia, Northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia.

One critical lesson from Niebuhr here is how to address or contain the “unrestrained egoism” of leaders, be they fundamentalists or some other type of ideologue (Niebuhr 1960: xi-xii, 48-49, 83). He concedes that there is a political tendency toward international anarchy since people generally fail to observe how leaders abuse patriotism and altruism, and thus neglect their own duty to demand “moral restraint” on the exercise of power (Niebuhr 1944: 91). Hence we see a religio-political hedge on raw realism. There is a “grounded hope” that a thinking and gracious community of speech and praxis may, indeed, mitigate the destructive consequences of unchecked realpolitik. As emphasized in this essay, a first step is identifying and unmasking strenuously the self-righteous piety of any form of fundamentalism. The limitations and dangers of fundamentalist beliefs and illusions inform our critique of power at all levels. A forum for discourse, legal covenants, social democratizing forces, and a collective awareness of community-wide, class-oriented, and statist-nationalist interests may check the arrogance of any leader’s economic, political, militarist, and priestly coercion. Second, this forum admits that all leaders rely on coercion. Their assertions of discursive power and police-military force are part of social cohesion. We must scrutinize how these forces may both guarantee peace and security, as well as make for injustice, “a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose” (Niebuhr 1960: 6). Third, a democratic republic, such as that enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, embodies “the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself” (Niebuhr 1949: 268). It bears constant repeating that citizens must question authority. For it is only so long as a democratic government remains mindful that its conception relies upon the criticism of leaders that it is able to form better instruments of government.

Thus we may accept no particular state-societal balancing of power, belief system, or concept of justice as normative. In both domestic and international arenas, people must reach tentative and tolerable adjustments between their competing interests and those of others, in order to achieve order and some common notions of justice that transcend partial interests. Here an inter-religious grounding informs our sense of history that stretches across millennia. If our initial task is to know history, know current events, and then elect officials for sake of present and future order and justice, then our second task is to prevent any leader—domestic or international—from becoming tyrannical. For American citizens, since the U.S. government projects such hegemonic weight globally, it is incumbent upon us to think as internationally as we do domestically when acting within the U.S. political arena. Niebuhr posits that the “human capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but [human] inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary” (Niebuhr 1944: xi).

Two critical religio-political resources for this human effort to enhance our state-societal constructs are our collective sense of love and justice. Both Islam and Christianity—the religions underlying Islamist and Evangelical fundamentalisms—hold these resources as their highest virtues. *Shari’a* law and western rule of law place different emphases on the role of these ethical resources in meting out political justice and security. But they do wrestle with the same balance of virtues and needs. Whereas *shari’a* law would hold that the religious ethic flowing from these virtues can deeply inform the ethic of the state, western legal constructs separate rational and ethical goals here. In the west, rule of law fuses the interest of others and oneself in an ideally equalized playing field, whereas the religious ideals place the needs of one’s neighbor above one’s own. Thus a Muslim state may consciously seek to blend reason and religion, while a western modernist state stresses that religious moralists and their fundamentalism should not qualify national policies. These concerns are highly

relevant to the discourse within Islamism and the Bush Administration's fundamentalism. What is the source of justice? What is the source of service and compassion for the other? Is it to be secured in religious conviction and fervor, or in a just equilibrium of power? I argue that justice as dialogically discerned through a broad forum becomes a moderating and more secure check on the messianic, apocalyptic, and self-righteous illusions of leaders, moralists, and preachers who are certain they know what is best for others. A forum—rather than combat, terrorist cells or the unquestioned heights of Executive branch—is a better place to arbitrate differences, employ moral suasion, and address domestic and international human rights.

Thus we find ourselves at a crossroads. Are we to diminish the sense of religious and legal insights, while quietly accepting at face value the words and deeds of world leaders? Or are we to demand fresh thinking in Washington, in our places of worship, and in the media? Regardless of polls, approval ratings, and a fleckless U.S. Congress that demands little concrete evidence of threats to security, a religio-political forum of “pilgrim citizens” may press harder for factual, historical, legal, ethical, and theological points. We may embrace the wonderful complexity of this post-September 11th world. We may unabashedly shake up complacent illusions about today's spreading wars. We may cultivate responsible thinking by staging this debate in public squares, online, in classes, in places of worship, through mainline and alternative media, and in interpersonal relations. We may ground our respective communities in a true and honest reading of history, for if we allow fundamentalists to co-opt and reshape our histories, then we “betray our own time-based faith, our belief in judgment and our need for repentance” (Harding 1965: 216). Closer examination of our own historical understanding and those tortured historical constructs of fundamentalists reveals everyone's tendency toward fear and pride, lack of empathy for those who suffer, and general inclination to allow systemic injustice to continue.

At present, diverse religious bodies within Islam and Christianity are speaking to these truths of accountability. In the years of the American-Vietnam War, Vincent Harding, a civil rights activist and minister among Methodists and Mennonites, reminded his community that “the Christian churches cannot afford such arrogance. The Body of Christ cannot be so calloused to the suffering of innocent people. The universal family must not kill for national honor or die for a negative creed” (Harding 1965: 217). Three decades later, looking back on the annals of that earlier war, literary anthropologist Neil Jamieson writes of U.S.-Vietnamese relations and advocates that people of “all political persuasions and all generations and all walks of life must work to expand the sense of ‘we’ and to diminish the sense of ‘they’”. If we cannot humanize those whose destinies have impinged upon our own, if we cannot increase empathy and vanquish self-righteousness, if we cannot expand our moral imaginations to discern and accept the pattern that connects us all in a common human condition, then we shall all continue to have lost ... to perpetuate a struggle in which there are no winners” (Jamieson 1993: 376).

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