

REVIEW ARTICLE

L. Michael Spath

RELIGION, COEXISTENCE AND CONFLICT: SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Recent titles discussed in this article include: Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and War*, Routledge Encyclopedias of Religion and Society, no. 5 (Routledge, NY: Routledge, 2004), 530 pp., including 60 b&w photos, Hb. £90.00, ISBN 0 415 94246 2; F. E. Peters, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, Volume 1: *The Peoples of God*, Volume 2: *The Words and Will of God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Vol. 1: 328 pp., Hb. US\$29.95, ISBN 0 691 11460 9, Vol. 2: 406 pp., Hb. US\$29.95, ISBN 0 691 11461 7, Vols. 1 and 2, Hb. US\$49.50, ISBN 0 691 11561 3; Majid Tehranian and David W. Chappell, eds., *Dialogue of Civilizations: A New Peace Agenda for a New Millennium*, Human Security and Global Governance Series (London: I. B. Tauris in association with the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, 2002), 302 pp., Hb. £35.00, ISBN 1 86064 712 X.

Prolegomena

ONE OF THE GREAT ADVANCES OF post-modern philosophy—and we are merely on the cusp of understanding its implications—is the collapse of *all* meta-narratives and their relativization. No religious tradition or ideology is excluded, not even modernity, which is based upon scientific and technological progress. It has been and continues to be difficult for religious traditions, especially in the West, to confront modernity and to understand its fundamental mythological and symbolic foundations. Often, in the West, the options presented have been a return to the certainty of a childlike faith or an enlightened worldview that rejects religion as superstition and elevates reason as ‘objective’ and, in its own way, salvific. Neither of these alternatives has proven itself to be consistent with, or particularly useful in, confronting the complexities of contemporary realities. The other ‘modern’ consequence for religion has

been its privatization—its divorce from social, political, economic, or cultural decisions or manifestations. Ironically, their critiques of religion's privatization has made strange allies of pre- and post-modernists, even though their solutions are diametrically opposed to one other, with the pre-modernists desirous of returning to a pristine, absolutist worldview and tradition, and the post-modernists embracing pluralism and globalism as their new meta-narrative.

Again, we do not quite yet understand all of the many implications of this post-modern view, not only for religion, but also for the relations between people and with the environment—as well as for human survival and that of the planet itself. However, one thing has become clear from inquiries in many fields and on many levels, and that is the contextualization of religion. Clifford Geertz's body of work has helped religionists to understand cultural systems as comprising both ideology and religion, with their hermeneutics revealing patterns of thought, worldview and meaning. Simply put, "[c]ulture is the form of religion; religion is the substance of culture," to use Paul Tillich's famous phrase. From Michel Foucault's understanding of *episteme*, a paradigm that "defines the conditions by which one knows," to Rene Girard's insight into individual and social behaviour as "acquisitive mimesis," an all-encompassing expression of imitation, to Pierre Bourdieu's description of *habitus* as "a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures," the effect on religion of culture (broadly defined as both thought and attitude manifested as communal forms) and the complex interrelationship between the two has been especially significant for the study of the political, social and ethical implications of the theologies contained in each tradition. And nowhere in recent years have we seen the effects of such an interrelationship more clearly and with more dramatic effect than in the religious justification for the use and perpetuation of violence.

But is there a still more direct relationship between religion and violence? In other words, is there something inherent in religion, not just a perspective or mindset or doctrine capable of being abused or manipulated, but something in religion *qua* religion to make it the ready and willing mistress of prejudice, hatred, violence and war? Each religion—and its theological tradition—has elements that can be used to provoke, inflict and justify violence. Is there something in religion that feeds violence, breeds violence, that *needs* violence? And, conversely, is there within the structure of religion itself, that is, in religion *qua* religion, as well as in each religious tradition, a place that is not corrupted and corruptible by cycles of violence? Is there hope for religion in a post-modern world? The answer may seem obvious to the vast majority of the public who still identify themselves as religious, but it is certainly not inevitably true. Denial is still a powerful force, even—and especially—in religion.

So, if religion is to remain relevant in a post-modern world, then it must provide its own answer to the problem that it has raised: the problem of religiously-justified hatred, violence and war.

The books: Introduction

This brings us to the three books under review. Each makes its own unique contribution to a broad, ongoing discussion on the struggle between pre-modern, modern and post-modern forms of religion, with particular emphasis on competition, conflict and violence, on the one hand, and conflict resolution, dialogue, liberation movements and peacemaking, on the other.

The Encyclopedia of Religion and War is the fifth volume (the first four being encyclopaedias of millennialism and millennial movements, African and African-American religions, fundamentalism, and religious freedom) in the Routledge Religion and Society Series, a set of useful, one-volume reference works that has been very well received. The distinguished ethicist, Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez, and his associate editors have assembled 106 internationally-recognized scholars from various disciplines (including anthropology, history, peace and conflict studies, philosophy and religious studies) to write 130 essays that discuss: war as a factor in the origins of various religions; the theological and historical justification for war within each tradition; major social revolts and religious conflicts; and relevant pacifist groups. The *Encyclopedia's* geographical and religious scope is remarkable for a single-volume work.

F. E. Peters, the highly-respected professor of Middle Eastern studies, Hebrew and Judaic studies, and history at New York University, has written such works as *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians* and *The Children of Abraham* to try to understand each of the three Abrahamic religious traditions in its own context and in relation to the others, for the history of each has impacted, shaped and formed, for better or worse, the other members of this "fractious family." The subtitle to the two volumes of *The Monotheists*, namely, *Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, explains the focus of Peters' excellent study, which is the second work under review here.

The final work is *Dialogue of Civilizations: A New Peace Agenda for a New Millennium*, a collection of papers presented at an international conference of the same name in Okinawa in February of 2000. Both book and conference were sponsored by the Human Security and Global Governance (HUGG) initiative of the internationally-respected Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research.

The first essay, "Informatic Civilization: Promises, Perils, and Prospects," is written by co-editor Majid Tehranian and outlines the post-modern 'informatic' paradigm defining the contemporary world

and with which religions must engage. All of the subsequent essays provide commentary upon it. In Part One, "Science, Religion, and Civilization," eight representatives of the world's major religious traditions delineate the theological resources within these traditions that might contribute to the formation of a civilization dedicated to peace, solidarity and religious pluralism. In Part Two, "Peace and Policy Agendas," "peace practitioners," most of whom hold (or have held) positions in government agencies or relevant NGOs, offer concrete proposals to further the cause of peace and justice that are based in the theologies, religious movements and institutions discussed in Part One.

The structure of the current review article moves, in general, from diagnosis (*Encyclopedia of Religion and War*) to case-study (*The Monotheists*) to prognosis and prescriptions (*Dialogue of Civilizations*).

Encyclopedia of Religion and War

Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Religion and War*, writes that he intentionally kept a "narrow focus," looking to "one part of religion, not to the whole" when commissioning essays for the volume. Quoting sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer, Palmer-Fernandez characterizes that part as "the dark alliance between religion and violence." He describes his effort in this way:

Religious iconography . . . [involves] images of violence, warfare, and martial exploits, as these are among the most prevalent and enduring images in the world's religions. At or very near the core of many religions we find a universal battle between order, equated with all that is righteous and good, and confusion, equated with all that is evil and bad, and we find heroes, martyrs, and holy warriors arrayed against the legendary foes of the cherished divinities and ultimately receiving vast and eternal rewards. . . .

This volume provides authoritative historical and cross-cultural information that will help readers understand war and other forms of political violence in the major religions of the world. It also covers violent religious conflict in different regions, particular religious movements, and religious wars (xii-xiii).

Palmer-Fernandez also identifies three "salient themes" in his selection of material: first, scriptural and doctrinal views on war; second, religion in alliance with states in support of war; and, third, pacifism and non-violence in the world's religions. These themes are ultimately articulated in the essays under six broad topical categories:

- 1 The role of war in the origin, development and spread of the major religious traditions, as well as in those traditions (for example, the Mennonite) that consider themselves pacifistic.

- 2 The role of religion in specific conflicts and wars (such as the American Revolutionary War and the Crusades).
- 3 Religious wars in Europe (1559-1715).
- 4 The development of 'theologies of war' in the major religious traditions; also, specific war-related attitudes, beliefs and doctrines, such as holy war, *jihād*, millennialism, fundamentalism and Holocaust.
- 5 Religiously-based, geographical wars and conflicts in the contemporary world (for instance, in Kashmir, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Sudan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories).
- 6 Religious attitudes toward violence, hatred and aggression.

In alphabetical order, the religious traditions covered by the volume include African religion, Baha'ism, Buddhism (Zen has its own entry), Christianity (Roman Catholicism, too, is listed separately), Confucianism, Daoism, Hellenistic religions, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. Essays on these traditions demonstrating the role of war in their origins, evolution and spread make up most of the volume, with the remainder being composed of separate pieces looking at most of these traditions in different geographical regions and historical periods, each written by an expert in the field. This approach may seem obvious but, given that so many policy-makers, academicians, media pundits and other 'educated' people still treat religious traditions as monoliths, it is very important and helpful for the reader. Examples include the important distinction between 'Hundred Schools' Confucianism (6th-3rd centuries BC) and the political and religious developments that took place during the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220); and the incorporation of Zen values into Japanese militarism and nationalism, including the evolution of the Samurai ideal.

Judaism, the oldest of the three Abrahamic faiths, is treated in this volume as an "evolving religious civilization" and discussion of it moves through the Jewish Revolt of the first century through other historical periods. Each of its modern trends—Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform—is examined separately, as well as the paradox of, on the one hand, Jewish victimization in the Holocaust and Jewish opposition to Vietnam, genocide and terrorism, all reflecting its rich tradition of pacifism and, on the other, its "war ideologies" and attendant theological justifications for war, in addition to the complexities of the Zionist and settler movements in the context of the development of the modern Israeli state.

However, the editors of the *Encyclopedia* devote the greatest amount of space to Christianity and Islam. Among the Christian entries are essays on: "Anabaptist Pacifism"; "Christian Identity"; "Constantinian Movement"; "Jesus Movement"; "Eastern Orthodox Pacifism"; "Liberation Theology"; "Lutheran Germany"; "Mennonites"; "Methodism";

“Quakers”; “Reformed Christianity”; “Roman Catholicism”; “U. S. Civil War and Christian Churches”; and the “World Council of Churches.” The entries falling under the heading of Islam include: “Assassins”; “Fundamentalism in Egypt, Sudan, and Iran”; “ Hamas and Hizbullah”; “Islam in the Age of Conquest”; “Qur’anic Islam”; “Shi’ite and Sunni Islam”; “Sufism”; “Taliban”; and “Wahhabism.”

Both the Crusades and *jihād* are given full treatment, historically and theologically. Although each topic is explored by a different author, both place their subject firmly in the context of the relationship between East and West, between Christianity and Islam, and between society, politics and religion. Timothy Renick, the author of “Crusades,” writes about the ironies of the impact of that dark period.

While Pope Urban II’s original goal was to reverse the advances of Islam, the Crusades may well have had the opposite effect, raising militaristic interpretations of the concept of jihad to a more prominent place in Islam and forcing Muslims to reevaluate the threat posed to them by Christianity. As Karlfried Froehlich writes, “the Crusades led directly to the Turkish wars of later centuries, during which Ottoman expansion threatened even central Europe.”

The impact of the Crusades upon Christian views of war was equally profound. In effect, the Crusades represented the completion of a long process, initiated by Augustine in the fourth century, to reverse the attitude of the early church toward war. While the first centuries of Christianity were largely pacifistic, the Crusades took the Augustinian justification of Christian violence to its ultimate conclusion. The pacifistic monastic orders of previous centuries now were joined by monastic military orders like the Templars and Teutonic Knights, charged with killing in the name of Christ. As such, the Crusades inspired an important period of intellectual introspection about the nature of war within Christianity and the West. Aquinas’s seminal contributions to the formation of just war thought in the thirteenth century were written in the shadow of the Crusades and, almost surely, as a response to some of their excesses. The flowering of just war thought in the sixteenth century followed swiftly, and probably not coincidentally, upon the close of the crusading period.

To this day, the Crusades sit at the heart of the religious discourse on war, serving at times as an example of ultimate devotion and sacrifice in the name of God but more often as a cautionary tale about the potential excesses of religious fervor (100).

Reuven Firestone’s entry on “Jihad” notes the way that this concept is misunderstood in much of the West, and misused and misapplied by some within Islam, and attempts to set things right by placing it within its rich Islamic theological and historical context. Tracing its Qur’anic

roots, discussing the so-called sword verses and then discussing *jihād* in terms of contemporary discourse on Islamic law and realpolitik, Firestone makes an important contribution by examining *jihād*'s parameters. Admirably, he steers clear of stereotypes and straw men.

[In the modern period,] new thinking began with the impact of European colonization. Some responded to the shock of colonialism by calling for reform of Islamic doctrines and ideas, while others called for a return to military jihad and the pristine ways of early Islam in order to regain divine favor. . . . The attack that destroyed New York City's World Trade Center and damaged the Pentagon, and the response of the United States in attempting to destroy what is often called "Islamic" terrorism has shocked the Muslim world and has encouraged some reevaluation of the doctrines of jihad. What will emerge from this will only become evident as the twenty-first century progresses (237).

In other entries, notably, those on "Martyrdom," "Shi'ite and Sunni Islam," the "Nigerian Civil War" and the "Palestinian-Israeli Conflict," there is further discussion of the ways in which *jihād* has been viewed and, sometimes, manipulated by various protagonists.

The *Encyclopedia* contains a very insightful series of articles on Zen, particularly those written by Brian Victoria of the University of Adelaide and one by Jeffrey L. Richey of Berea College, that give an unusually nuanced account of their subject and counter, to some extent, the conventional view of it as interior-oriented, non-violent and pacifistic. Although this view may be accurate for the most part ("through the single-minded practice of Zen meditation it was possible to see deeply into one's nature, become a Buddha, and 'transcend life and death'"), historically, politically, militarily and even spiritually, there is much that aligns it with other religious traditions that condone war or even argue that it is necessary.

Any account of Zen Buddhist attitudes toward war must take into account both the commitment to nonviolence shared by Zen with all Buddhist traditions and the ways in which Zen Buddhists have cooperated with nationalistic and militaristic efforts in various East Asian cultures (464).

Victoria's articles are balanced, with an eye toward taking on those who would write revisionist or idealist accounts of Zen.

Until recently, the relationship between Zen and modern Japanese nationalism has been one of the least understood aspects of the Zen tradition. This is because Zen apologists such as Daisetz T. Suzuki

(1870-1966) have consistently presented this school of Buddhism to the West as transcending not only good and evil, life and death, but history itself including such related “isms” as capitalism, communism, and, of course, nationalism. The truth, however, is the very opposite, for the Zen tradition has been among the most loyal and faithful servants of the modern Japanese state . . . (458).

Victoria proceeds to show how it was in the writings of Suzuki, who was probably the most influential interpreter of Zen for the West (following his Rinzai Zen master, Shaku Soen), that the relationship between Zen and nationalism and Zen and the military originated in pre-World War II Japan. This culminated in the thought of the ‘god of war’ (*gunshin*), Lieutenant Colonel Sugimoto Goro, who is quoted on why he practiced Zen.

The reason that Zen is important to soldiers is that all Japanese, especially soldiers, must live in the spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects, eliminating their ego and getting rid of their self. It is exactly the awakening to the nothingness (*mu*) of Zen that is the fundamental spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects. Through my practice of Zen I am able to get rid of my ego. In facilitating the accomplishment of this, Zen becomes, as it is, the true spirit of the imperial military (460).

Although Suzuki blamed Shinto, in the post-war period, “for providing the ‘conceptual background’ to Japanese militarism” and for being responsible for Japan’s role in the war, Victoria quotes journalist Arthur Koestler to point out that Suzuki “failed to address his own Zen-based support for Japan’s war effort.” In fact, admissions of responsibility and apologies from both the Soto and Rinzai sects were made only recently (in 1993 and 2001 respectively). Furthermore, in an extraordinary pro-war comment at a 1976 meeting, the Rinzai Zen master, Yamada Mumon, justified the right-wing, nationalistic politics that had led to a Zen religious validation of ‘holy war.’

Japan destroyed itself in order to grandly give the countries of Asia their independence. I think this is truly an accomplishment worthy of the name “holy war.” All of this is the result of the meritorious deeds of two million five hundred thousand heroic spirits in our country who were loyal, brave, and without rival. I think the various peoples of Asia who achieved their independence will ceaselessly praise their accomplishments for all eternity (463).

Of course, “at the heart of the Zen Buddhist tradition is the basic Buddhist commitment to nonviolence.” Richey summarizes the pre-modern

Zen ethical tradition as an expression of one's inner Buddha-nature, noting the

well-known Zen saying that *samsara* (Sanskrit, "revolving," meaning the cycle of rebirth) and *nirvana* (i.e., freedom from rebirth) are one and the same. For premodern Zen Buddhists, it was possible to interpret this saying in two rather different ways: as an exhortation to moral responsibility (including nonviolence) as a sign of one's enlightenment, or as a license to transgress moral norms (such as nonviolence) in the name of skillful means and even compassion (466).

One of the real strengths of the *Encyclopedia* is its usefulness as a single-source reference for organizations that have used religion to condone violence as a means to effect change, to make a political, social, or moral statement, to overthrow what they perceive as an oppressive regime, or to give voice to an oppressed minority. Examples of such religiously militant organizations include the Japanese religious sect, Aum Shinrikyo, "the clearest contemporary case of an apocalyptic movement that mobilized for a violent encounter with the host society (25)"; Afghanistan's Taliban, whose Deobandi origins in the context of the country's recent political vacuum resulted in a restrictive and "cruel" interpretation of the *shari'a*; and the American white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan, which has a "long history of vigilantism, guerilla warfare, terrorism, and political assassination targeting black people . . . Jews, Catholics, and others perceived as subverting an idealized White Protestant America" (265).

The role of religion in the escalation of violence in regional conflicts is, as noted above, another subject covered in the volume, with space given over to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the genocides in Bosnia, Sudan and Rwanda, and ongoing ethno-religious struggles in a variety of locations, including Northern Ireland, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and, of course, Israel and Palestine.

Important movements discussed include feminism, liberation theology, millennialism, martyrdom, genocide and biblical notions of holy war. Zionism is covered in the article on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, primarily as a "secular movement," although some of its religious foundations are explored as well. However, glaringly absent is any discussion of the growing and extremely significant 'Christian Zionist' movement in the United States, particularly, the uneasy alliance between America's civil religion, Christian evangelicals, Orthodox Jews and Jewish Zionists.

The *Encyclopedia* does offer a sampling of pacifistic theologies and doctrines from a dozen traditions, some of which (Anabaptist, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Mennonite) have separate entries, while others (Baha'i, Buddhist, Church of the Brethren, Methodist, Mormon,

Quaker and Sufi) do not. It is a shame that, given current events, the coverage of peace in Islam rates only one page in relation to Sufism, completely ignoring Islam's peace tradition and, thus, reinforcing age-old stereotypes about the faith's 'sword theology.' Nevertheless, the discussions that *are* included are welcome additions to the volume.

In a helpful article on "Religious Terrorism," Ishtiaq Ahmad of Eastern Mediterranean University offers an interesting summary of terrorism which might have served the *Encyclopedia's* editors as a guide to understanding religious violence in general and which further underlines the reasons why this volume is a timely and useful resource for student, layperson and scholar alike.

The emergence of religion as a driving force behind the increasing lethality of international terrorism shatters some of the main assumptions about terrorists. In the past, most analysts tended to discount the possibility of mass killing involving chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear terrorism. Few terrorists, it was argued, knew anything about the technical intricacies of either developing or dispersing such weapons. Political, moral, and practical considerations also were perceived as important restraints. The compelling new motives of the religious terrorist, coupled with increased access to critical information and to key components of weapons of mass destruction, render conventional wisdom dangerously anachronistic. The motives of current religious terrorist groups go far beyond the creation of a theocracy based on a particular deity. They may include mystical, transcendental, or divinely inspired imperatives as well as a staunchly antigovernment/state populism reflecting conspiracy theories based on a volatile mixture of sedition, racial, and religious maxim.

The reasons why religious terrorism results in so many more deaths than political terrorism may be found in the radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and worldviews embraced by the religious terrorist.

According to terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman, "holy terror" contains a value system that stands in opposition to "secular terror." Secular terrorists operate within the realm of a dominant political and cultural framework. They want to win, to beat the political system oppressing them. Their goal may be to destroy social structure, but they want to put something in its place. Secular terrorists would rather make allies than discriminately kill their enemies. Holy terrorists, however, are under no such constraints. They see the world as a battlefield between the forces of light and darkness. Winning is not described in political terms. The enemy must be totally destroyed (424-25).

Finally, despite the editor's admittedly "narrow focus" and all that is impressive about this volume, it does seem unfortunate that it contains

no significant treatment of forgiveness and reconciliation (to use two traditional Christian terms) as theo-political movements: consider, for instance, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which receives only a brief mention here. Over the last decade, there has been a growing body of literature, as well as academic and other programs worldwide, offering faith-based alternatives to religious violence in the form of conflict resolution and dialogical strategies for peace. Douglas Johnston's *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford University Press, 1994) is the seminal work in the field, along with Marc Gopin's *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Raymond G. Helmick, SJ, and Rodney L. Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Templeton Foundation Press, 2001); and Mohammed Abu-Nimer's *Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, and Change: Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel* (State University of New York Press, 1999). Yet, these works, strategies and programs, not to mention the agencies sponsoring dialogue, peace-keeping and justice-seeking programs, receive either no coverage or merely passing reference in the *Encyclopaedia*. Let me give two specific examples. Although the World Council of Churches is given its due (especially its statement on the 2003 Iraq war), the World Conference of Religions for Peace rates only a single sentence. Similarly, the volume ignores the academic programs that not only discuss the religious bases for peace and conflict resolution, but also strive to achieve these goals on the ground in a wide variety of cultures. In fact, recent Nobel Peace Prize laureates whose work is based in their religious faith, such as Desmond Tutu and Elie Wiesel, receive only a bare mention, while Aung San Suu Kyi is not referred to at all.

Another important weakness is the editor's failure to discuss the criticism that 'religion needs violence.' Disparate voices, like those of Freud, Durkheim, Mauss and, in our day, René Girard (in his discussion of the religious necessity of a 'scapegoat' in the West), all suggest that, until religions (and their many manifestations) recognize their linguistic and, therefore, very real dependence on violence and war—at least historically—they will remain captive to violent theologies and unable to free themselves from the prejudiced, divisive and violent forces that necessarily arise within each tradition owing to man's very nature. Hence, the question that needs to be asked is how those forces lying within individuals and religious ideologies mutually shape and influence one another. Is there something about the human condition that gives rise to violent currents in theologies, rituals, myths, symbols and religious structures? Or do the latter encourage violent emotions, attitudes, prejudices and behaviours—including scapegoating—within human beings? Out of almost 475 pages of text, this extremely important,

relatively new and very timely interdisciplinary subject is given a mere five paragraphs (under the entry "Religion, Violence, and Genocide"). Sadly, although this encyclopaedia is dedicated to describing the manifestations of a 'religious' predilection for violence, it leaves this vital question virtually unexplored.

The Monotheists

F. E. Peters' two-volume work, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, is the culmination of a lifetime of effort to address this very question. Volume one, *The Peoples of God*, tells of the origins of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, while the second volume, *The Words and Will of God*, examines the inner lives of adherents and "the spirit that animates and regulates them."

This study is both authoritative and comprehensive in scope. Moreover, one of the first things that the reader notices is the clarity and conciseness with which Peters discusses his subject; indeed, most of the subsections in each chapter are no longer than two pages, making a handy reference work of these two volumes.

Peters has spent his career as an academic attempting to understand the complex interrelationships among the three Abrahamic religions. (In fact, *The Abrahamic Religions* or, even, *The People of the Book* may have been a better title, given other attempts at monotheism, however short-lived.) The Abrahamic connection is a central element of his work and he explains it as follows:

[A]ll three may be called "Abrahamic" in the sense that (1) there is an Abraham story at the heart of their long-term memory . . . ; (2) that story has to do with a promise, a covenant, a contract; and (3) each thinks it is the unique beneficiary of that promise, the sole genuine heir among Abraham's children (2:377).

In each volume, Peters elaborates upon this Abrahamic understanding, both historically and theologically. Jews believe themselves to be, both by blood and by fidelity to the Covenant, the literal "children of Israel," that is, the descendents of Jacob. Christians reject this argument of blood descent and instead look to Abraham's faith as a model of righteousness. And when the new Arab prophet was asked whether his message of monotheism and his stories of other prophets and an eschatological judgement was simply a recasting of the message of Jews and Christians, he replied, returning to the earlier source, "No, 'this is the religion of Abraham'" (Qur'an 2:135).

Admittedly, this raises all kinds of critical questions, literary and historical, but Peters leaves that for others. Although he is conversant with

these discussions, his self-appointed task is to understand the three traditions 'from within,' as their followers see them. But what also concerns him is their

whole range of acquired and conditioned traits borrowed, stolen, or imitated—do the words really matter?—one from the other. This is, after all, a family portrait of siblings definitely not separated at birth. They lived together—side by side hardly does justice to their intimacy—through thick good times . . . and in excruciatingly thin bad ones . . . (2:384).

What binds these monotheistic lines together within this "fractious family" is a shared belief that their common God established a covenant with an historical Abraham and that this God's revealed will has been recorded and preserved in scriptures.

History, therefore, is the mode in which faith has been made manifest and is realized.

That is why the present work is essentially a work of history. It is less concerned with events in heaven than with what transpired on earth; less with the *acta Dei* than with *gesta*, though with *gesta fidei*, the 'deeds prompted by faith' rather than by the historian's more familiar *gesta hominum*. . . .

[T]he three communities are notable in that both their Scriptures and their tradition unfold within the dimensions of time and place that we call history. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all have their cosmic moments and eschatological afterthoughts that escape history, but they are, for all that, merely moments. Both the *acta Dei* and the *gesta hominum* that make up the body of their Scriptures take place, we are given to understand, in discernible historical time (2:384; emphasis mine).

Judaism, like the other two traditions, begins with a promise; and it is frequently repeated in numerous variations involving various individuals throughout the Hebrew Bible. Actually, there are two parts to the promise, as the Jews understand it: state and real estate. The first has to do with the "making of a great nation" (Genesis 12:2) and the second involves the gift of a particular piece of land (Genesis 12:7). Peters is quick to point out that both Muslims and Christians, too, view this same land as holy, but for quite different reasons related to history and pilgrimage. But for the Jews, this land, an earthly as well as a spiritual Zion, is an intrinsic part of their self-understanding and identity as a people.

The Jews have always regarded themselves as a single historical people, and so they alone, not the Christians or the Muslims, were capable of possessing—and actually did possess—a national capital (1:18).

Jerusalem, spiritualized and allegorized (see St. Paul's words at the beginning of Galatians), later became a holy city with cosmological significance for Muslims. Moreover, the Haram al-Sharif, home to both al-Masjid al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock, is important to Muslims not only because of its association with *al-isrā' wal-mī'rāj* of the Prophet, but also because of its biblical—that is, Jewish—associations, such as the Temple of Solomon, David's prayers, Jacob's vision and Abraham's intention to sacrifice his son. So, prescient in meaning to this present day, and rather understated, Peters describes Jerusalem in the years after the Islamic conquest:

Jerusalem remained what it had been since the second century: a provincial backwater that now possessed major Christian and Muslim shrines and a Zionist recollection of a Jewish one. Pilgrims still came and went, more and more of them Western Christians (1:21).

But Jerusalem/Zion, both in the literal, geographical sense and in the spiritual one became the locus of the yearning that exiled and diaspora Jews had for home, whether in the sixth century BC, the first and second centuries AD, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or, Peters adds, the post-Holocaust period. It is within this context that Peters discusses the adoption, in 1950, of the Law of Return by the newly-founded state of Israel.

Peters says that the covenant with God was more than merely an "Abrahamic birthright"; it was a "spiritual identification" as well, albeit one still modelled on Abraham's faith. Genealogical and spiritual paternity meant that the Jews were both a "kinship community" and a holy people, one set apart from the Gentiles in what Peters refers to as "an ethnic separation" (1:124). Consequently, the question of who was a Jew was no "mere speculative issue," especially once the appellation of "children of Abraham" also came to be used by both Christians and Muslims. Theologically and politically (based in perceptions and misperceptions among the three traditions), Peters suggests that this "is the overarching religious context of the monotheist communities' self-identification."

Who or what is a Jew is a legitimate, self-posed question for Jews, as is its counterpart for the other two bodies of monotheists. Each community has struggled to define and so separate itself from the various "others" who surrounded and challenged it. By defining themselves, at least in part, as Children of Abraham, the Jews laid down the initial issue of identification for the Christians and the Muslims, who likewise claimed that title. Thus the Christians had from the outset not merely to identify themselves as the authentic Abrahamic heirs, but to deny such a claim to the Jews, to dismantle at least part of the Jews' self-identification, and

the Muslims to do likewise with both the Jews and the Christians (1:121).

Peters summarizes the Pharisaic answer to the question:

A Jew was someone who observed the Law, both the written Torah given to Moses and the unwritten Law, the tradition of the fathers, that went back to the same time and had the same sanction, and whose authoritative interpreters were the rabbis who after the second devastation of Palestinian Jewry in 135 were the sole voice of Judaism (1:125).

The fact that adherents to the three faiths are collectively known as "People of the Book" leads Peters to compare and contrast their views of their various scriptures as "the Word of God," the position of tradition in each understanding, its formation into and manifestation as law, and the implications of these interpretations of scriptures, tradition and law for the relationship among the three. Taking up one-third of the second volume, this analysis is central to Peters' own argument.

For Peters, law and its manifestation in daily life are clearly distinguishing features for each of the traditions. The law is the mark of the covenant between a chosen people and their God but, moreover, as Peters points out,

the tradition of a society governed by law is very old in the Near East, and where societies were governed by rulers whose powers were intimately bound up with divine descent, designation, or approbation, the distinction between secular and religious law is not easily or even profitably made (2:87).

He does a masterful job of untangling the multiple and overlapping levels of definitions in the traditions (and the various ways in which the members of each have interpreted them), looking at law that is biblical/Qur'anic; ritual; moral; based in prophetic tradition; authoritative for all times and places; ever-developing; codified; divine; and written on the heart. As noted, law is one of the most controversial questions for the Abrahamic traditions because adherents to each believe that it is their laws that are the concrete, earthly manifestations of the Divine Law revealed by the one, shared God. Hence, the various understandings of law and its application reveal deep divisions within and among the three traditions.

In each case, Peters discusses not only the understanding of God's will as revealed in law, but also those movements that seek to balance a narrow, legalistic understanding of law. He also discusses the evolution of the way in which law has been understood in each tradition.

Contemporary Judaism, for instance, traces its understanding of the law from the Bible to the “traditions of the Fathers,” to the two Talmuds, to the Jewish Codes—including those of the Mishneh Torah and Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed*. The role of the rabbis in applying the law, as well as its function in the continuity of Jewish tradition, cannot be overestimated. The law had a dual purpose: “to order society and to bring humans to an understanding of the highest truths. It had, in sum, an ethical and a religious purpose” (2:93). However, it had its limits in application, depending upon which part of it was referenced.

The Law appears, then—most clearly in its cultic and sacrificial aspects—to be a transitional and ameliorative instrument rather than final and perfect, at least when viewed from a historical perspective. . . . [E]ven among the traditionalists, the Talmud was not looked on as a legal system frozen in permanent stasis (2:93).

As in Judaism, there are a variety of ‘Christian’ understandings of law that depend upon one’s choice and interpretation of scripture and period in Church history, as well as one’s theological view and Christian sect. Even a simple question about Jesus’ relationship to the law is capable of provoking a variety of biblical and other responses that later theologians might somehow have conflated and rationalized. In St. Matthew’s gospel, Jesus comes to fulfil the law—to “bring a new law.” For St. Paul, however, Jesus had set people free from Jewish law. This discrepancy, of course, raised serious issues for early Christians regarding Jesus’ own Jewishness and the Jewishness of his first followers and they often chose to ignore the problem or to develop, from earliest times, a form of Christian supersession.

So, from the first, the role of the law raised questions about authority and its various levels, questions that have uniquely plagued Christianity throughout history. Potential sources of law included scripture, the Church fathers, ecumenical councils, bishops (who “represented the orthodox consensus that prevailed throughout Christendom”) and the “emerging authority of the bishop of Rome,” that is, the pope. Peters briefly traces the development of canon law in the Western Church from Justinian through Gratian’s *Decretum* to Gregory IX’s *Five Books of Decretals*, codified as canon law from 1491 onward. Very simply, Peters suggests that law was also central to Christianity:

[C]anon law in a sense defined the Latin Church as an organization since it governed almost every aspect of its life from its most general beliefs to the smallest and most prosaic details of human activity. Even after the Reformation, the new confessional churches that emerged from the

medieval Great Church, whether Lutheran, Calvinist, or Anglican, quickly had to develop their own codes of Christian conduct and their own ways of instructing the faithful in them (2:103).

Peters' expansive treatment of Islamic law reveals his own professional interest; but it also shows the central role that law plays in Islam, even more so than in the other Abrahamic faiths. However, as Peters rightly points out:

To pass from Justinian to Muhammad, who was born only a few years after the death of that emperor, is to move from the well-lit domain of a millennial tradition of Roman law codes and all the apparatus of a sophisticated legal scholasticism to the shadowy domains of unwritten tribal custom and a society in slow and uncertain transition from the nomadic to the sedentary life. . . . Implicit in all Muhammad did and preached was the notion that there was an Islamic "way" (*sharia*), which resembled the Jewish and the Christian way in that it came from God, and which stood in sharp opposition to both the religious paganism and degenerate tribal custom of the contemporary Arabs. But the Islamic way was no more explicit and formal than the random precepts of the Qur'an that defined it . . . (2: 106).

Peters explores in detail how prophetic tradition developed into law and, particularly, the roles of the *qāḍī*, the *ʿulamāʾ* and the *muftī* in this process. He makes only passing reference to the four Sunni schools of law, which is unfortunate, but he does contrast the foundations of Shi'i law with its Sunni counterparts. Peters' major contribution in this overview is his treatment of *ijtihād* (independent legal reasoning) and the lasting significance of the decision to 'close' its door. That being said, his boxed note on *ijtihād* (2:118) hardly does justice to the contemporary theological and legal debate within Islam about 're-opening the door of *ijtihād*,' which would have far-reaching and, possibly, reformative—even revolutionary—implications for Islam and for its relations with the West. This is owing to its potential effect on such issues as women's rights, family law, human rights, Islam and democracy, the relations between Islam and other religions—in fact, almost every facet of Muslim life. Peters finishes his treatment of Islamic law with a helpful discussion of its evolution into *qānūn* or statutory law, a process perfected by the Ottomans after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, especially under Sulayman I, the Magnificent, also known as al-Qanuni, 'the Lawgiver.'

Chapters seven, eight and nine of the second volume deal with reason and revelation, that is, the intersection of philosophy and theology, the continued increase in asceticism and its transformation into mysticism in each of the three traditions. This is the heart of Peters' analysis and it

shows him at his most insightful and synthetic. Peters demonstrates how each tradition struggled with its own approach to the relationship between reason and revelation with regard to the knowledge of God and God's will, examining controversies, inquisitions and schisms as he follows the tortuous evolution of each creed. Whether he is discussing Aquinas and the scholastics, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), al-Ash'ari and others versed in the practice of *falsafa*, Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, or the *kalām* of both Islam and Judaism, Peters is able to balance each tradition's maturing uniqueness with its dependence on Greek philosophy. The medieval rediscovery—and recovery—of the classics of Graeco-Roman culture and philosophy proved to be a turning point in the development and explication of each faith, as well as providing the material for reactions against ever-evolving, rigid and soulless scholasticism. Peters' point is that none of the three Abrahamic traditions could ever be the same again.

Hellenism was distinguished by its confidence in the human intellect's ability to discern the nature of the universe and humankind's purpose in it. The upper end of the Greeks' ambitious intellectual program, the study of the principles of being or philosophy, led to an ultimate principle of being, namely, God. The branch of philosophy devoted to the programmatic study of God—his existence, nature, and attributes—was called theology. According to one common version of the theology circulating in the ancient Mediterranean world, God was a primary spiritual principle, eternal, all-knowing, and all-good, from whose goodness and intelligence there flowed, as light from the sun, the descending order of beings in the universe, from the pure spirits on high, through the heavenly bodies, and, on earth, the highest vital form, intelligent humanity, to the lowest, the lifeless beings of the mineral kingdom. All this could be demonstrated, it was thought, by the most rigorous scientific proofs (2:211).

Throughout their histories, all three Abrahamic traditions were also influenced by another aspect of Hellenism, a more 'occultist' Pythagorean transcendent theosophy (what the school of Isfahan called *al-ḥikma al-muta'aliya*), which flowered in the West in the late medieval period. This provided a Hellenistic bridge of sorts between what had become a literalist and dry scholasticism based in Aristotle and a neo-Platonic synthesis based in the understanding of a "unity of being," which was epitomized by Christianity's mendicant orders, Bahya ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart* and the Sufi orders in Islam. This aspect stressed an alternative, "illuminative wisdom" (*al-ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*) with mystical manifestations that were once an underrepresented aspect of their confluence, but have become more prominent in the present day.

Peters gives appropriate attention to this part of each tradition, drawing interesting historical and theological parallels. Indeed, this is one of the strongest sections in the two volumes. *Ascesis* (*zuhd* in Arabic) is an important theme in the development of the mystical traditions in each one of the three faiths. Sensitive to the roots of the Christian eremitic and coenobitic traditions, Peters traces the evolution of asceticism in Antony, the rules of Basil and Benedict, the mendicant friars and some of their internal controversies, the military orders, and the Jesuits. He also includes a short, but necessary, section on Byzantine or Eastern Orthodox monasticism, a spirituality based in Mt. Athos. As he discusses each of these, he has an eye out for their encounter and interaction with similar spiritual practices in Judaism and Islam.

Charisma, holiness, *baraka*, or 'blessing,' as the Muslims had it, when embodied in the Christian saint (*hagios*), the Jewish *zaddik*, or the Muslim friend of God (*wali Allah*), has almost always and everywhere attracted public attention—to see, to hear, to touch the holy person is somehow to share in his or her gift—and, inevitably, provoked emulation in the strong of heart (2:254-55).

Although the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that there should be "no monasticism in Islam," the ambiguity of a famous Qur'anic verse (57:27) and the influence of Christian practice inspired an Islamic "monasticism of sorts" to be found in *taṣawwuf*, the theory and practice of Sufism. The great Sufi virtue of *tawakkul* ('trust in God'), the status of the Sufi as *faqīr* (a 'poor man') and the stages and states that were gradually identified on the spiritual path—all of these find their parallels in Benedict, Ignatius, Francis and other Christian monastics. And, yet, there were differences, too. One had to do with the endorsement of the order. In Christianity, the order required the approval of the Church's highest authority, the bishop of Rome, whereas Sufi orders required no formal sanction, since Islam possesses no central authority. Another difference involved the transference of the saint's *baraka*. The best that could be hoped for in Christianity was that the grace bestowed upon the order's founder/saint might be shared by the community that followed his rule. But in Sufism—and even in Shi'i Islam—the saint's *baraka* could be transferred to a designated successor. Both orders, then, possessed the saint's *baraka*, but one through the communal rule and the other through the successor or master or *shaykh*.

The Sufi initiate took an oath of allegiance (*baya* . . .) to the founder of the order and to his present-day earthly successor and deputy, the current link in the spiritual chain that led uninterrupted back to the saintly founder. The initiate in a Christian religious order made three

permanently binding vows to God: one of personal poverty, one of celibacy, and one of obedience to the rule, as expressed in the will of the superior. The difference between the Christian monk and the Sufi becomes clearest precisely in this matter of the oath /vow. The Sufi swore allegiance to an individual, the monk to a rule, or an ideal. . . . [T]he tombs of holy Sufis became . . . a rich source of blessings (*barakat*) and graces (*karamat*). What the dead saint delivered from beyond the tomb, so too could the living sheikh of the tariqa as the recipient of the founder's own charismatic *karamat*. Both were channels through which blessings, favors, and protections against ills and tragedy might flood to the ordinary Muslim. The Christian Church directed those blessings through the highly institutionalized and depersonalized sacramental system; Sufism accomplished the same end through its personalized and decentralized rituals celebrating the friends of God, both living and dead.

A Sufi *tariqa* was essentially a collection of local chapters bound together by their common devotion to a singly saintly founder, from whom they derived both their legitimacy and their spiritual privileges. The Western religious orders . . . all formed societies closely regulated within the Church they served, and many of them were, no less than the Church itself, international in scope. . . . The sheikh's authority was charismatic and permanent, not attributed and temporary, like that which prevailed in Christian monastic communities, and his jurisdiction was local (2: 281-82, 285).

After discussing the three largest and most widely-spread Sufi orders, the Qadiriyya, the Shadhiliyya and the Mevlevis, Peters moves on to examine the Jewish *haburoth* (brotherhoods) that collected around recognized spiritual masters of the Kabbalah.

In Christianity and Islam, ascetical mysticism was popularized through the spiritual exercises of the monastic and Sufi orders, however, in Judaism, "it was the Hasidic movement that in the eighteenth century divested Kabbalism of some of its more esoteric and inaccessible features to render it a kind of popular revelation" (2:288). Born in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe, the movement's leaders—especially the Baal Shem Tov (Besht), the Master of the Good Name, who saw God everywhere; Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid, who was the movement's scholarly organizer; and Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Dov Baer's student and the founder of Habad (the movement and doctrine also known as Lubavitch)—were able to strike a balance between what had become talmudic legalism and the often unintelligible and inaccessible esotericism of the Kabbalah. They formed

distinct Jewish communities with a shared ethos, as marked by strict orthodoxy as by their Beshtian inheritance of joyfully finding God in

every act and object, but each with a distinct identity of its own . . . adhering with absolute fidelity to an apostolic succession of *rebbe*s in a kinship descent from the founding father . . . (2:290).

Asceticism was a vehicle for the rise of mysticism, but should not be confused with it. Peters defines mysticism simply, as “the pursuit and achievement of an immediate experience of God” (2:293). The origins of mysticism in the three Abrahamic faiths were grounded, much like their orthodox expressions, in the lives and experiences of their biblical and Qur’anic models.

The monotheists’ mysticism did not begin in the halls of academies. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, it started in Scripture, with Moses on Sinai, or the transport of Ezekiel, or in the Gospel account of Jesus’ transfigured revelation of his divinity to Peter, James, and John on Mount Tabor (Matt. 17:1-8), or in the Qur’an’s celebrated description of God’s shining forth “like a lamp in a niche” (24.35), or perhaps in Muhammad’s own miraculous ascension. These were only points of departure, however, hints that direct experience of God might be possible. None of the examples suggested that the encounter was the doing of the mortals who achieved it. From beginning to end, the Christian and Muslim traditions held—the Jews somewhat less certainly—that God bestowed the experience himself, not the efforts of his creatures, no matter how holy they might be (2: 294-95).

Peters suggests that, although Christianity might have offered the first concrete manifestations of a gnostic or mystical approach to the human relationship with God, the roots of this approach, like Christianity itself, are to be found in post-exilic Jewish apocalypticism, evidenced in the testimony of both the Mandaeans and the community of Qumran. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple, in the passage from Pharisaic to rabbinic Judaism, the work of Yohanan ben Zakka expressed the “possibility of a more intimate contact with God.” In this period of Judaism, there were two key recurrent themes:

the divine enthronement on a mythical chariot (*merkabah*) described in the first chapter of Ezekiel was the point of departure for such thoughts and the various heavenly journeys through the palace-temple (*heykaloth*) described in the apocryphal literature of Second Temple Judaism led the way. *Merkabah* and *heykaloth* are the twin poles around which early Jewish mysticism unfolds, all of it in otherwise highly legalistic and observant rabbinical circles, from the second to the tenth century in the Middle East, when they were supplanted by the system known as Kabbalah then emerging in France and Germany (2:296).

As Jewish mysticism developed, two other parts of scripture began to be emphasized: the erotic Song of Songs and Genesis. This gave rise to the anonymous *Book of Creation*, which first fully introduced Jews to the world of the *sefirot*, the ten divine emanations that parallel the gnostic aeons, and the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, the Kabbalistic work *par excellence*. Three centuries later, Safad, in Galilee, became the thriving centre of a new version of the mystical tradition, what Peters calls “a kind of ‘Kabbalah for everyone.’” He suggests that three men were particularly responsible for making the Kabbalah accessible—Joseph Karo, Isaac Luria and the Baal Shem Tov.

Returning to Christianity, Peters draws a line between asceticism and the development of Christian mysticism, as both an intuitive and sensual union with God. This union was describable and prescribable; that is, it could be explained for an adept to follow and replicate.

At the upper end of the ascetic’s “spiritual ladder,” whose lower rungs still consisted of practical asceticism, stood the new ideal of unity with God, *theoria* or *theologia*, as it was called in the new Hellenic-inspired vocabulary. The “purgative way” of the ascetic now led to the “unitive way” of closeness to God, and finally to the mystics’ goal, the “illuminative way” and the reception of the divine light (2:300).

Based in the sacramental system, as well as in prayer (for example, the Jesus Prayer of Orthodoxy), the imitation of Christ (see Thomas a Kempis) and the ascent of the spiritual ladder (see St. John Climacus of Sinai), these spiritual disciplines and exercises provided Christian mystics with opportunities to progress in the sanctified life and to grow in holiness.

Finally, Peters contrasts the Muslim mystical experience with that of its Christian counterpart. The Christian mystics who passed from a careful cultivation of self-denial to a desire to stand before the divine throne—or even look on the face of God—had ample precedents in their often-considered Jewish and Hellenic pasts. The early Sufis knew of no such transport to other realms. Instead, they had the example of their own masters. After an initiatory ritual (an angel physically opened Muhammad’s breast, either early in his life or immediately before he found his vocation as a prophet), the Prophet had himself once ascended to the highest heaven and communed with God. These two events, called, respectively, the Opening of Muhammad’s Breast and the Ascension, are the source of many subsequent Islamic associations, but only touched upon in the Qur’an (2:308).

Brilliantly and concisely, Peters traces the rudiments of the development of Sufi spirituality. From Rabi’a’s “lover’s longing for the beloved,” he explores al-Bistami’s “experiments with extinction,” Junayd’s equating

of *baqāʾ* (subsistence in God) with *fanāʾ* (extinction), as in his famous statement, “Glory be to me,” and al-Tirmidhi’s explication of Sufi ‘sainthood’ before reaching the martyred Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, who spoke the in/famous words, ‘Anā al-Ḥaqq! (I am the Truth!),’ appropriating for himself one of God’s names in the belief that he was in union with the Divine.

The climax of Peters’ discussion of Sufism is the great master and self-proclaimed ‘Seal of the Saints,’ Ibn ‘Arabi.

Ibn Arabi’s approach to the mystic’s quest for God plunges directly into the heart of two of the great, cross-cutting issues of monotheism: God’s similarity or dissimilarity to us, his creation, and God’s simultaneous Oneness and patently multiple manifestations. . . . Ibn Arabi embraced both. The mystic should be “the one with two eyes,” someone who acknowledges God’s transcendence and at the same time can savor, and take advantage of, God’s “withness” (*maʿiyya*) with respect to ourselves (2:330-31).

Although criticized by later Islamic scholars, for example, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldun, to name two of the most prominent, for his adaptation of the Christian mystics’ understanding of ‘unity of being’ (*wahdat al-wujūd*) and for underemphasizing God’s transcendence, Ibn ‘Arabi remains “*al-shaykh al-akbar*, the *Doctor Maximus* of Islamic mysticism,” particularly for his *Bezels of Wisdom* and *Meccan Revelations*.

As mentioned above, the depth of Peters’ erudition is most evident in his discussion of gnosticism’s role in the formation and shaping of asceticism and how asceticism subsequently developed into the varieties of mysticism unique to each of the three traditions, yet with common theological and spiritual themes and practices. The way in which he traces this evolution—showing the contacts between traditions and their influence upon each other, as well as the controversies surrounding some of the more significant figures—makes chapters eight (“From Desert Saints to Muslim Sufis”) and nine (“Leaping from the Dark into the Light: Mysticism”) alone worth the price of the second volume.

One quibble with Peters, however, regarding these chapters. Given the subtitle of the two volumes, *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*, and the present relationship between the three faiths in our volatile world, Peters might have made some mention, if not here then in his “Endthoughts,” of the potential role of mystics from each tradition in initiating interfaith dialogue: their common experiences of the Holy would seem to provide a natural starting point for such a discussion. Richard Khuri’s *Freedom, Modernity, and Islam* (Athlone Press, 1998) is one work, for example, that suggests that Sufism and, by extension,

the mystical sects of the other two Abrahamic traditions hold great promise for both the encounter with modernity and dialogue, reconciliation, democratic process, human rights and creative coexistence in our time.

Dialogue of Civilizations

This is a book that one wants to like for a number of reasons. Not only is it a timely critique of a superpower's attempt to extend its hegemony throughout the world according to its own agenda ("The Project for a New American Century"), but its premise counters Samuel Huntington's pessimistic "clash of civilizations" by arguing, instead, that dialogue between civilizations is not only a critical necessity, but a real possibility, so long as we have the will to pursue it.

The essays contained in this volume were originally presented at the February 2000 conference of the same name in Okinawa under the aegis of the Human Security and Global Governance (HUGG) initiative of the internationally-respected Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research. The most significant thing about this project is that it understands civilizations *holistically*, as human constructs, arguing that civilization "is a myth that contains significant traditions and institutions of civility . . . and certain cosmologies and technologies appropriate to its own ecology and is therefore a valuable means for human survival and progress" (15).

Consider, once again, Tillich's dictum that "[c]ivilization is the form of religion; and religion is the substance of civilization." Insofar as it concerns an individual or a people and manifests personal or communal identity and meaning, religion has often and rightly been identified with some of the worst abuses of civil and human rights and as a rallying cry for those who have inflicted great suffering. No religious tradition in either East or West can escape such accusations.

Yet, this 'new peace agenda' based in a 'dialogue of civilizations' understands, also rightly, that not only religious institutions, but also the core messages of the religions themselves, provide resources for reaching across great divides of language and culture—even those constructed by religion itself. As was demonstrated in Johnston's *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, referred to above, the heart of religion is capable of critiquing and overcoming religion's divisiveness.

As Hans Kung writes in his preface, an aggressive peace agenda such as this one could not be more timely, both in the short and long term. Humanity is at a crossroads and religion has an integral role to play.

1 There will be no survival of democracy without a coalition between believers and non-believers in mutual respect.

- 2 There will be no peace between nations and civilizations without peace between religions.
- 3 There will be no peace between religions without a dialogue between religions.
- 4 There will be no new world order without a world ethic, a global or planetary ethic (xvii-xviii).

Whether one follows Thomas Kuhn's notion of a "paradigm shift" in human history between a modernity that privatizes religion and a post-modern valuing of pluralism, or Ewert Cousins' argument that we are in the midst of a "Second Axial Age," in which global consciousness is replacing individual consciousness, just as individual consciousness replaced tribal consciousness, or Majid Tehranian's assertion that human civilization, viewed through the lens of technology, has now entered into a third era, that of Informatics, each of these thinkers suggests that humanity is at an important stage at which an earlier world-view, self-identity and technology is giving way to a new one. Every one of them points to the fact that all narratives matter, especially those of the marginalized, whether from an other religious tradition, society, or civilization, or from within one.

A global ethic has become particularly urgent in a world which has become secular, which is characterized by pluralization of the truth and individualization of life: a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes, which can and should be affirmed by all religions despite their dogmatic differences, and to which indeed non-believers and those of other faiths and views can and should contribute (xviii).

In their introduction, co-editors Majid Tehranian and David Chappell ask "whether our moral capacity and the institutions of peaceful conflict management can advance commensurately" (xxix-xxx) with the global realities of technology, interdependent economies, the growing gap between rich and poor, the "marginalization of vast segments of the world's population," "identity extremist politics," violence (both latent and manifest) and terrorism in its various forms, all affected and exacerbated by a stark unilateralism on the part of the United States. A new world order is being created, but will it be one of peace and justice or, to use the editors' term, a "new world disorder"?

In his lead essay, Majid Tehranian says that, after the agrarian and industrial-commercial periods of history, we are now "at the edge of a new global civilization that can be characterized as *informatic* because it is driven by information technologies," an "Informatic Civilization" (6). This new age has been recognized by a number of disciplines and under a variety of names: post-industrial society, the information age, the

microchip civilization, the digital age, the third wave and network society. Informatic civilization is a post-war phenomenon made possible by the production of the microchip in 1971 and it will see "an increasing convergence of computer and telecommunication industries" (2).

Tehrani's key insight is that a new peace agenda, grounded in a dialogue of civilizations and the understanding that we now are on the threshold of a new age,

requires equality in communication competence and in access to the means of communication. However, the new civilization is rapidly creating a digital divide leading to a global neo-feudalism of information rich and information poor. Such a world cannot be harmonious and peaceful (15).

The remainder of the articles in *Dialogue of Civilizations* provide commentary on Tehranian's introductory essay and fall into one of two sections. Part One, entitled, "Science, Religion, and Civilization," is made up of eight articles written by eminent scholars representing the world's major religious traditions. The articles in Part One, which examines the relationship between particular traditions and the creation of civilization, form the foundation for the practical proposals presented in Part Two, "Peace and Policy Agendas."

In a very strong essay ("Science and Civilization"), Sir Joseph Rotblat, a Fellow of the Royal Society, Emeritus Professor of Physics and winner of the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize as co-founder of the Pugwash Conferences, examines significant data from United Nations and other sources to highlight the growing discrepancies between rich and poor and the uneven benefits of science and technology. As he observes, "the richest 225 people in the world now have more personal wealth than one half of the entire world's population" and "[m]ore than a billion people live on less than a dollar a day."

Regarding the development of both biotechnology and information technology, he claims that

the most revolutionary aspect of this development will be the breaking down of national boundaries: communicating with one another in the world, people will ignore geographic frontiers and ethnic or ideological divides. The role of the nation-state will gradually diminish. People will cease to see themselves primarily as subjects of a state; instead their status as individuals will come to the fore; they will become world citizens, member of the species of Man [*sic*] (45).

However, this ideal state is not inevitable: the inequalities resulting from the uneven distribution of wealth may continue. Will technology-rich

nations make the means of communication accessible to the technology-poor? And at what price?

Social anthropologist Nur Yalman ("Religion and Civilization") questions the "optimism of scientific progress and rationality" underlying so many secular social agendas and reminds us of the great "contribution" that religion has made to man's inhumanity to man. His article emphasizes the mutual dependency of religion and the processes of governments and other social institutions. The future is yet to be created and civilization, informed by religion and other "'legitimate' institutions based in the rule of law," can either exacerbate individuation and alienation or it can, "through a sense of identification with the notion of the sacred, . . . provide a sense of reintegration into an 'imagined community'" (65). A positive outcome can only be assured through more open and representative governments, "universal human rights backed by effective institutions of justice," educating our children at the earliest age for peace and "more transparent and more socially responsive economic regimes" (66).

The choice of T. H. Chowdary to represent Hinduism ("Hinduism and Civilization") is somewhat puzzling. His credentials as a technocrat with expertise in Information Technology are impressive, but the stereotypical way in which he views both Christianity and Islam serves to weaken his otherwise helpful insights. His thesis is that "in the Hindu view, scientific experimentation—including nuclear fission and fusion and genetic engineering—are pursuits for truth" (79) and are, therefore, consistent with Hindu theology. His essay relies heavily upon the use of the subjunctive ("scientific experimentation . . . should be used for the good of the people and society and humanity" [79]) and the imperative ("nations must learn to live together" [81]), without a real understanding of how one moves from 'should' to 'must.' Moreover, he mischaracterizes the *Chandogya Upanishad's* assertion of *tat tvam asi* ('You are That!') for all creation, being unwilling or unable to deal with another emphasis within Hinduism, namely, the destructive forces inherent in creation. Human beings, however, are not necessarily part of an evolutionary progression. So when he closes with the statement, "technical knowledge wedded to social and moral evolution can make us men into supermen, drawing us ever closer to the realization of divinity that is inherent in every creation" (81), he reminds us less of the Upanishadic ideal than Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the personification of civilization's nadir, and leaves us uncertain about the resources that Hinduism can call upon to enhance the 'new peace agenda.'

With characteristic concision and insight, Harvard University's highly-respected scholar of Confucianism, Tu Weiming, discusses ("Confucianism and Civilization") four currents of thought that he sees

as critical to the twenty-first century global community: ecological consciousness; feminist sensitivity; religious pluralism; and global ethics. He contends that the world's ethical, spiritual and religious leaders must address these issues if they are to be taken seriously as intellectual forces for good and must avoid making any real or perceived allowances for "massive destruction of society and nature, gender and racial discrimination, gross inequality, abject poverty, deterioration of family cohesiveness, or ecological degradation" (84).

The Buddhist peace scholar, Yoichi Kawada draws upon the model of the Soka Gakkai (SGI) Movement in Peace Education ("Buddhism and Civilization") to elaborate upon traditional Buddhist imagery in the Flower Garland and Lotus Sutras and their potential to create the conditions for a "culture of peace." He reminds the reader that "the challenge is to find ways to transform into social action the internal ethical values, moral sense, and fruit of wisdom that grow with the attainment of inner peace" (98). Means are as important as ends, for justice and peace in society and world cannot come from those whose hearts are not at peace or from individuals alone. SGI members, he tells us, "live the equality they believe" in an open community and in human solidarity. All of their programs in the three related spheres of peace, culture and education, whether aimed at banning or reducing the number of nuclear weapons or educating students in Soka Gakuen schools and Soka University, manifest the plant and flower imagery found in the above-mentioned Buddhist texts, which is "symbolic of 'culture,' . . . a culture of peace characterized by a symbiosis of manifold cultures, each exhibiting its uniqueness" (92-93).

Rabbi Yosef Wosk ("Judaism and Civilization") suggests that "the Biblical account of creation, describing the essence of one equal humanity is perhaps Judaism's most profound contribution to the greater world civilization that is increasingly embracing a global perspective" (108). This contribution includes the understanding that human beings are created in the image of God and are "therefore entitled to dialogue," not only with each other, but with God as well. In this 'covenantal relationship,' God may make requests of human beings, but people may also challenge God. Other Jewish concepts relevant to a new peace agenda include shalom as a holistic and communal concept, as well as a personal one, and the prophetic idea of "identifying with those who are dispossessed and living on the edge."

Notre Dame Professor of Political Theory Fred Dallmayr reminds the reader ("Christianity and Civilization") that "Western civilization is at least as much Graeco-Roman as it is Judaeo-Christian" (130). Dallmayr sees Augustine's 'two cities' paradigm—the temporal, earthly city and the spiritual, heavenly city—as still operative within a Roman Catholicism

that “was structured, and continues to be structured, on the model of the Roman Empire” (131). By contrast, “Protestantism adjusted itself too well to secular liberalism, thereby endangering its capacity to challenge secular abuses and to serve as ‘prophetic witness’ to messianic faith” (133). In comparison to the other essays in this volume, Dallmayr’s is unique and provocative in that it offers a critique of the religious tradition that forms his subject. He re-emphasizes the need for a serious inter-civilizational dialogue that recognizes the multi-dimensionality of peace in the global city: “peace with ourselves, with nature, and with the divine (no matter how the divine is doctrinally formulated)” (137).

Professors Ali Mazrui and Alamin Mazrui (“Islam and Civilization”) make clear from the outset that the pursuit of a creative synthesis of “ethics and knowledge, religion and science, Islam and other cultures” (139) is natural for Muslims because Islam is a civilization based in a religious synthesis. Historically, Muslims have had no difficulty placing revolutionary discoveries in such fields as science, linguistics and communication technologies into an Islamic framework.

However, what of the Informatic Age? “Will the impact of the new revolution of information include a momentous movement of Islamic Reformation” (147)? The authors find a precedent in the Prophet’s mystical Night Journey and Ascension, in which he “breaks at least three sound barriers of cosmic experience”: the distance between Mecca and Jerusalem, between earth and heavens and between past and present. However, they also see practical challenges to Islamizing the internet, especially the “hegemonic status of the English language” in software. “The Internet software continues to be relatively unfriendly to scripts that are not Roman-based . . . Is this Anglocentricity in software, . . . this Arabic marginalization in cyberspace, therefore, likely to undermine the potential of computer communication to recreate the transnational *umma*” (155)? They hope that the Informatic Age will provide for an Islamic renewal that recaptures the original openness and inclusivity of Islam, a “transnational universalism” (49), making it ready for its next *hijra*—this time, via the information super-highway.

In the second part of the volume, Russian diplomat Alexander Nikitin (“Analyzing the Causes of War and Peace”) and American Ambassador Jonathan Dean (“Ending Wars”) suggest that, by understanding the roots of war and violence, governments and others can deliberately set a course to end all war. They both agree that war is a “conflict of interests” (Nikitin, 163), a “learned behavior” (Dean, 179), and that it is, therefore, possible to “change the pattern of learning and also make it more difficult through improved prevention and disarmament for hatred, greed, and desire for power to lead to war” (Dean, 180). The solution offered by the two authors is the intervention of organizations

representative of the world community—not only after the fact, but also in the form of mediation, negotiation and economic assistance—as well as a standing United Nations peacekeeping force.

What is appealing and convincing in both of these essays is the authors' shared belief that the implementation of a peace agenda is not only non-utopian, but also very achievable through the practice of *realpolitik*. Noting what he calls Chekhov's Law ("If in the first act of a play there is a rifle hooked on the wall, it will be fired in the last act"), Nikitin argues that nations need help in strengthening democratic controls over their militaries and lists measures that might assist in achieving this goal:

transparency and accountability, strong parliamentary oversight over military structure and defense budgets, involvement of the media, civil society and NGOs . . . in control over the military and wide-open debates on national security policy goals and means (175).

For his part, Dean proposes that a campaign of Global Action to Prevent War be implemented over the next 20 to 30 years consisting of a complex process of disarmament promoted internationally by a worldwide coalition made up of religious organizations; banks and other financial institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund); the United Nations; large voluntary associations (for instance the Red Cross and Red Crescent); and interested governments. What characterizes his optimistic program and Nikitin's is the belief that "[t]he world already has the resources and the knowledge to do this. What has been missing is the application of these resource in a systematic, sustained way" (190).

Three of the essays in this section are focused upon economic development: Lori Noguchi's "Promoting Participatory Development," N. Radhakrishnan's "Humanizing the Economy" and Stuart Rees' "Creating Full Employment." These authors share the thesis that economic and social development are mutually interdependent. Noguchi quotes a study by David Korten, who defines development as

a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations (198).

She also cites the Baha'i International Community's *Prosperity of Humankind*, which sees the common objective as:

equipping people and institutions with the means through which they can achieve the real purpose of development: that is, laying foundations

for a new social order than can cultivate the limitless possibilities latent in human consciousness (Noguchi, 198).

One cannot, for example, adopt a strict capitalist market economy without realizing, first, that “economics is not a science, but politics in disguise” and, second, that such

rational economics . . . turns out to be a moral prescription for individual behavior. It sets people against one another, the worthy compared to the unworthy, the deserving versus the undeserving, winners against losers, the apparently lean and efficient companies versus allegedly profligate and irresponsible trade unions (Rees, 238).

Economic development, social development and political decision-making are value-laden in themselves: consequently, all three must advance together within a moral framework and structures that “promote the value that individuals of working age can only participate fully as citizens if they have opportunities for personal development and the prospect of security” (Radhakrishnan, 241).

Models for the juxtaposition of moral, social, and economic development given by these authors include universal literacy and health care, broad-based educational efforts, understanding the media as an agent of change and participatory development methodologies in emerging societies that include women—“a change that cannot be brought about only by changes in national policies and laws, important as those are, but which must include a profound change in the norms, values, and patterns of behavior of peoples throughout the world” (Noguchi, 193).

Participatory development stands the greatest chance of success because it recognizes the fundamental human rights of developing societies. What is needed in the West, according to F. E. Schumacher, is “technology with a human face.” Again, Radhakrishnan, quoting Schumacher:

[I]nstead of listening to Gandhi, are we not more inclined to listen to one of the most influential economists of our century, the great Lord Keynes . . .? Is there enough to go round? Immediately we encounter a serious difficulty. What is “enough”? Who can tell us? Certainly not the economist who pursues “economic growth” as the highest of all values and therefore has no concept of “enough.” There are poor societies which have too little, but where is the rich society that says, “Halt! we have enough!” There is none (229).

Another three articles coalesce around specific models involving human rights issues and peace education: Haunani-Kay Trask’s “Indigenizing Human Rights,” Zhao Lianqi’s “Pluralizing World Power Centers”

and Sulak Sivaraksa's "Educating for Peace." Relying upon the United Nations Charter, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, and the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Trask, who is both professor and poet, draws upon her own experience as an indigenous Hawaiian to detail the long-overlooked imperial policies of the United States in the Islands and the continuing grievances of citizens there against the mainland government.

Zhao's essay is an exercise in apologetics that posits modern China as an extension of ancient Confucian principles. While he rightly advocates respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful coexistence among nations with differing philosophies and the peaceful management of disputes, he also exhibits a complete lack of the self-reflection or self-criticism (or even their necessity) exhibited by the authors of many of the other essays. He oversimplifies Deng Xiaoping's "brilliant" Taiwan policy and glosses over any negative outcomes of Chinese Communist rule. And, most surprisingly, he can repeat without any qualification Chairman Mao Zedong's observation that "China never seeks for hegemony and is never to be a superpower" (251). I suspect that the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people, not to mention the Taiwanese, might have a different response to Chairman Mao's remarks than the party line espoused by Zhao.

The powerful contribution by social activist Sulak Sivaraksa builds upon liberation theology and its accompanying pedagogical movements over last forty years. Employing a hermeneutic "from a position *below* 'the powers that be,'" he adopts Edward Said's critique of the Western (or Northern) ideology of dominance which uses a subservient media, the language of consumerism and, especially, elite educational structures to co-opt the very peoples that they oppress and dominate. In his opinion, any progress, slow as it might be, will necessarily come from indigenous peoples:

The only time that there began to be changes inside Europe and the United States was when the natives themselves in the colonies began to revolt and made it very difficult for these (redeeming) ideas to continue unchallenged (quoting Said; 258).

A "new form of literacy" is needed that intrinsically advocates a "culture of peace"—one which "facilitates the realization of the individual's full potentials holistically, to heighten empathy and compassion for others, and to nourish diversity in social relations and in relations with nature" (263). It is antithetical to a consumerist educational system that defines prosperity in terms of "more having"; instead,

this new form of literacy . . . is more conducive to the flourishing of alternative realities and to the “more being” of individuals and society . . . , learning from the poor and the weak, enabling them to represent themselves and achieve self-determination, thereby helping make domination, oppression and exploitation less thinkable and less justifiable (262).

Sivaraksa closes his essay by giving the example, from Thailand, of the Assembly of the Poor and the University of the Poor that bases its pedagogy on dharmic values, traditional Asian wisdom and alternative Western views.

The volume ends with an appendix containing the February 2000 Okinawa Declaration, which was adopted by the peace scholars in attendance at the Toda Institute’s conference. It provides a helpful summary of the general views expressed by the authors and a place to begin a “dialogue of civilizations.”

One final note. The power of a book such as this lies not only in the specific proposals made by contributors, but also in their broad, common diagnosis of the present age and prognosis of the steps, big and small, that will lay the foundation for a “new peace agenda.” Answers, such as they are, are given in terms of steps to be taken as part of an over-arching program. In particular, this is the strength of the second part of the book. Almost every author takes great care with regard to process, acknowledging that peaceful and just ends can only result through well-planned and thorough means. The emphasis throughout is on dialogue, exactly as the title promises.

In his essay on Christianity and civilization, Fred Dallmayr reminds the reader that dialogue is neither mutual monologue nor *di-logue*—conversation between two partners alone. Dallmayr relies upon Gadamer to note that it can only qualify as genuine *dia-logue*, that is, a conversation that “pierces through” the participants, if it meets the following criteria:

[I]nterhuman communication requires a readiness to expose one’s vantage point or interpretive framework to alternative perspectives and broader horizons. . . . Participants in dialogue must allow themselves to be “addressed” and possibly called into question by the “otherness” (*Fremdheit*) of interlocutors and by the demands of the subject matter at hand (*Sache*). . . . [That is,] participants not only argue and raise questions, but are themselves “called into question” (134).

The subtext of this book, and that of the other two as well, is that if we want to understand the truth about humanity in order to survive as a species, to live in peace with one another and to thrive and grow within the human community, we must attempt to make common cause in the midst of our diversity. We can, we must, learn from each other—not

because we want to erase our differences, but because our encounters and dialogue with the 'other' will help us to become more authentically ourselves, while celebrating our diversity.

As Alexander Nikitin puts it,

[p]eace is not the absence of war, not a short interim period between regular conflicts. Peace is a complex process of positive relations inside societies and among the states in the international arena. The most effective way of 'fighting against war' is to work for peace, justice, dialogue, and mutual understanding. And such positive work cannot be accomplished once and forever. *It is an ongoing and endless process, which requires every generation to combine its best efforts to gain peace, to create peace and to enjoy peace* (178; emphasis mine).