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Keywords

religion, violence, secularism, Enlightenment, neo-Weberianism, common good, (popular) casuistry, mission, religious freedom

The preoccupation with religion and violence in both scholarship and public debate is a vestige of Enlightenment thinking that took on new force after the end of the Cold War and again after 9/11/2001, as several of the contributors to the *Millennium* special issue on religion published in 2000 (prior to the events of 9/11/2001) demonstrated.¹ Contributors to that issue argued that, while there are certainly religious interpretations and practices that condone or even promote violence, the fixation with the idea that religion causes violence needs to be examined because it shapes the kinds of questions we ask about religion as well as the answers we expect to receive. In this contribution, I argue that the neo-Weberian approach to religion provides a way to avoid problematic assumptions that *a priori* connect religion to violence, but still allows us to understand the bases of religion/violence connections where they exist.² This is because neo-Weberianism first situates religious actors and practices in relevant social, economic, political, and historical contexts, drawing from constructivist insights and the methodology of Max Weber's *Sociology of Religion*.³ But, while Weber emphasized the ethical problems confronted by religious groups in the process of rationalization, he focused primarily on interpretation through constructing ideal-types instead of looking at the process of negotiating ethical struggles

1. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, 3 (2000).
2. Cecelia Lynch, "A Neo-Weberian Approach to Religion in International Politics," *International Theory* (IT) 1, 3, (2009): 381-408.
3. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963/91).

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in specific instances.⁴ To address this issue, the neo-Weberian approach to religion incorporates concepts and strategies that bridge the gap between religious doctrine and practice by analyzing these ethical struggles. The concepts and strategies developed in the approach build on understandings of the “common good” and “tradition” to analyze how religious actors interpret what is ethically required in particular situations. Drawing from Jonsen and Toulmin’s work on casuistry as a form of moral reasoning, I call this process of ethical struggle “popular casuistry” in most instances; however, the debates examined in this article took place during a period marked by “high” (or “elite”) casuistry.⁵ The result of these casuistic processes might be violent action, but it also might be one of a range of other possibilities. This approach, I argue, allows us to understand the full complement of ethics and action of religious actors and exit, at least to a degree, from the Enlightenment legacy of *a priori* assumptions that link religion primarily to violence.

This article first discusses why the religion/violence relationship is important to dissect in the context of the return to the study of religion in international politics, and it also pays attention to why an exclusive focus on the religion/violence nexus is problematic. Second, it develops the neo-Weberian approach and assesses its conceptual contribution for studying Christian rationales for and against violence during the conquest of the Americas, relating them to subsequent debates about missionizing. Finally, it compares the neo-Weberian approach to other contemporary frameworks, including securitization theory and the sociological approach discussed in this symposium. I conclude that neo-Weberianism provides a critical path for understanding the religion/violence nexus, but it is not designed to tell us precisely who will commit violent acts or when they will occur. Some might see this as a limitation; others, however, place more value on the development of an *approach* (or “perspective”) rather than “grand theory.”⁶ Either way, in relation to other frameworks, neo-Weberianism has the advantage of going beyond the relationship between religion and violence to aid our understanding of religion and peace, secularism, modes of economic organization, and other ethico-political constructs that are necessary for avoiding oversimplification of the relationship between religion and violence.

Scholarly Attention to Religion and Violence

The relationship between religion and violence is a critical one. But so is the relationship between secularism and violence, and religion and peace. Stating each of these

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4. Ultimately, what is at stake is not simply devising an economic ethic from understanding processes of rationalization, but the ethical struggles that occur over the “common good” and interpretations of religious tradition in given contexts. These ethical struggles can, I assert, produce meanings that do not sit easily in ideal-typical analysis. Weber’s approach and methodology for studying religion can also be found in *From Max Weber: Essays on Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), and his *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, Ch. 6, and Vol. II, Ch. 8.v., (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1978).
 5. Albert R. Jonsen & Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988): 144-145.
 6. Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Puzzles of Politics: Inquiries into the genesis and transformation of international relations* (New York: Routledge 2011), *passim*; Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949): 81. c.

relationships abstractly does violence to complex political, social, economic, and cultural contexts, in that it erases or eliminates these contexts from view. Nevertheless, especially since the end of the Cold War and the rise of debates about the “resurgence” of religion in international politics, the question of whether religious identities make violence more likely has permeated the field.⁷

Two catalytic events prompted re-evaluation of the role of religion in international politics: the end of the Cold War and September 11, 2001. The first prompted several trends, including assertions of a resurgence of religion and the de-secularization of the world, the charge that civilizational conflict, framed by religion, was replacing interstate conflict, and attention to the growing importance of transnational religious commitments and groups. Some were agnostic about whether the significance of religious commitments had increased, or whether scholars were simply taking more notice of religious communities and their practices once the Cold War military struggle between the US and former USSR had been removed from the picture.⁸ But scholars on all sides of these questions agreed on two things: that *scholarly attention* to religion had increased, and that this attention was overdue.

Despite the growing scholarly attention to religion by social scientists in the post-Cold War era, the primary preoccupation quickly became centered on the religion/violence nexus. Several empirical and conceptual tendencies came together to shape this confluence: the outbreak or intensification of numerous conflicts deemed religious, ethnic, or both in the Balkans, Central Asia, and elsewhere, the dominance of the Enlightenment narrative promoting secular politics as inherently more peaceful than religious politics, and the (over)simplifying power of the Huntingtonian “clash” idea that, according to some scholars, replaced fear of the Soviet Union with fear of Islam, frequently identified with extreme forms of Islamic radicalism.⁹ The Huntingtonian idea, as is now well-noted, promoted a primordial view of religious identity as the major cause of violence in the post-Cold War era.

Nevertheless, a barrage of critiques charging the Huntingtonian thesis with problems from oversimplification to faulty empirical analysis to racism, and the concomitant increase in empirical scholarship on a wide range of religious ethics and practices, continued to motivate new substantive and empirical work on religion throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium.¹⁰ This work strongly challenged Huntingtonian

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7. Scott M. Thomas, “Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, 3 (2000): 815-841; *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).
 8. Cecelia Lynch, “Religion, Identity, and the ‘War on Terror’: Insights from Religious Humanitarianism,” in Patrick James, ed., *Religion, Identity, and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence, and Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).
 9. John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 218.
 10. Hayward Alker, “If not Huntington’s Civilizations, then Whose?,” *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center), 18, 4 (1995): 533-562. Reprinted in French as “Pour qui sont ces civilisations?,” *Cultures & Conflits* 19/20 (1995); and in the *Romanian Journal of International Affairs*, 3, 4, (1997).; Shireen Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful*

primordialism in favor of Weberian/constructivist, comparative, English-School, quantitative and other sociologically or anthropologically-inspired approaches to religion. Comparative research analyzed the intersection of religion, economy, and politics, English-school and constructivist-leaning work noted the problematic nature of Enlightenment assumptions, other critical and constructivist work conceptualized international relations as “international political theology” or addressed historical and contemporary trends in religious pluralism and syncretism, and statistical analyses dissected the relationship between ethno-religious conflict and discrimination.¹¹ As a result, by 2000/2001, the Huntingtonian thesis which tightly connected “non-Western” religion to violence had been largely discounted.

Of course, this situation did not last. The events of September 11, 2001 immediately raised the profile of the “clash” thesis once again, soon prompting additional rounds of detractors as well as proponents.¹² This round of debates held similarities to those of the 1990s, but also differences. The shock of 9/11 brought to the surface a much greater degree of latent anti-Islamic sentiment, working it into violent and discriminatory actions in many parts of the West.¹³ As a result, connections between religion, especially Islam, and violence were again greatly oversimplified, and many tendentious

Coexistence? (Westport: Praeger, 1998); Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). Less targeted specifically against Huntington, Talal Asad’s work was instrumental in reconfiguring the entire approach to the construction of “religion” as an historical artifact and topic of study: see *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

11. Rudolph, Susanne, and James Piscatori. *Transnational Religions and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997); Peter Berger, ed. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, D.C. and Grand Rapids, MI: The Ethics and Public Policy Center and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999); the articles in the 2000 Millennium special issue, revised and reprinted in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2003), especially the following (citations are from the edited volume): Scott M. Thomas, “Taking Religion and Cultural Pluralism Seriously”: 21-54; Vendulka Kubáľková, “Toward an International Political Theology”: 79-105; Cecelia Lynch, “Dogma, Praxis, and Religious Perspectives on Multiculturalism”: 55-7; and Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict”: 107-146; Jonathan Fox, “Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 3, 3 (2001): 53-73; and John Esposito, cf. 6.
12. A considerable literature on religion and violence has arisen in the wake of Huntington, yet the genealogy of the “clash” thesis is important for understanding trends in the development of literature on religion and international relations as a whole. For more recent developments in the debate, see, for example, Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), contrasted with William Cavanaugh, “The Myth of Religious Violence,” in Andrew R. Murphy, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 23-34.
13. One of the first to analyze this phenomenon in Political Science was John Esposito, cf. 6.

claims obtained. Moreover, the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003 seemed to provide empirical support to the erroneous thesis that religious violence was largely confined to Muslim-majority societies.¹⁴ As a result, scholars dismayed by the apparent reversals in understanding the multifarious connections between religion and politics began to develop additional critiques of the problematic assumptions that focused the religion/violence nexus almost exclusively on Islam. Because it was undeniable that adherents of a wide variety of different religions, including but certainly not limited to Islam, espoused violence in the name of particular interpretations of religious doctrine, Mark Juergensmeyer and Scott Appleby forged innovative paths both before and after 9/11/2001 in developing a sociological understanding of religiously-articulated violence.¹⁵ Jonathan Fox used statistical analysis to refute simplistic claims that a religion/violence causal path existed, arguing instead that relationships between religious and ethnic affiliation had to be analyzed vis-à-vis deprivation and oppression. Robert Pape disputed the idea that religion was a major cause of most cases of suicide bombing. Still others analyzed religion's alleged "other," secularism, to argue that violence historically has been perpetrated at least as much by secular as by religious regimes.¹⁶ This work prompted a new round of inquiries into the nature and typologies of secularism that challenged its supposedly ahistorical and apolitical characteristics.¹⁷

Many scholars who charge that the religion/violence nexus has been reified and oversimplified trace the problem to Enlightenment assumptions.¹⁸ Following the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), emerging nation-states in Europe instituted the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, conferring on the ruler the right to

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14. For a discussion see Esposito, *ibid.*; and Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine, eds, *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
 15. R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: the global rise of religious violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State: From Christian Militias to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
 16. Jonathan Fox, *Ethnoreligious Conflict in the Late Twentieth Century: A General Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion* (2008); Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (The Wellek Library Lectures) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The strategic logic of of suicide terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).
 17. See, for example, Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009); and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Here the debate about the Habermasian concept of the "postsecular" should also be engaged: see Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, "The postsecular in international relations: an overview," *Review of International Studies* 28, 5, (2012): 931-942.
 18. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously," (2000/2003), and Lynch, "Dogma, Praxis, and Religious Perspectives on Multiculturalism," (2000/2003).

choose the religion of the land.¹⁹ The dominant narrative is that religion caused the bloodshed of the Thirty Years' War, which European nation-states finally resolved through widespread adoption of secular forms of government. These forms of government reflected the power of developing Enlightenment principles of individual reason, citizen rights, and governmental responsiveness to citizens. Religion, in this narrative, produced attachment to an incendiary combination of the magical, emotive, irrational, and dogmatic, while the exercise of individual reason produced rationality and logic. Each religion was inevitably exclusivist, justifying repression and violence against pagans, nonbelievers, and assorted others (all who did not adhere to its tenets), while its absence, increasingly defined as secularism, produced tolerance and the capacity for pluralism. José Casanova has detailed the problematic nature of this metanarrative while showing how it continues to inform assumptions about religion across Western Europe.²⁰

The location of governmental authority in the enlightened "citizen" of the new republics (French and U.S.) of the late 18th century continued to reinforce the narrative linking religion to violence and secularism to peace. Not much was said about the Haitian Revolution that immediately followed, because it would complicate enormously the progressivist story of democracy and secularism that is deeply embedded in the U.S. and French narratives of their revolutions. Republican France and the new United States, ironically, did all they could to crush the demands of the slaves in Haiti to be treated as full persons and granted democratic rights, and syncretic Haitian religious practices were demonized. But the growing belief that "democracy" required a secular state continued to take root and flourish, despite the fact that the newly democratic U.S. and France attempted to prevent the growth of democracy in places where Catholicism and indigenous religions prevailed, and that the forms of secularism in both France and the U.S. varied considerably. Nevertheless, the dominance of the French/U.S. narrative resulted in the conviction that strong religious commitments enacted in the public sphere were problematic for democratic growth. Consequently, the religion/democracy relationship is today second only to the religion/violence relationship as the major preoccupation of international relations scholars. Moreover, many analysts see the two as connected: if religion causes violence, then it is problematic for democracy. Logically, the inverse could also obtain – if religion causes democracy, then it is problematic for violence – but this possibility is rarely discussed. Other actual or potential relationships, including those between religion and peace, religion and secularism, and religion and neo-liberalism, tend to receive less attention in the field, both before and after the events of September

19. Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Thomas, *Global Resurgence of Religion* (2005); Daniel Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

20. Most of this paragraph is taken from Cecelia Lynch, *Interpreting International Politics* (New York and London, Routledge 2014): 89-90. See José Casanova, "The problem of religion and the anxieties of European secular democracy," paper presented at the 25th Jubilee Conference on Religion and European Democracy, Jerusalem (September 2007). For an interesting treatment of the changes wrought by Enlightenment attitudes towards religion, see John M. IV Owen, 3rd, and J. Judd Owen, eds. *Religion, the Enlightenment, and the New Global Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

11, 2001.²¹ Instead, religion became an identity-marker that, for many scholars, was inherently less amenable to change than others.²²

Yet, despite the increased emphasis on and challenges to the religion/violence nexus, this relationship still poses conceptual, methodological, and empirical challenges. It is critical to avoid both essentializing religion and treating it as epiphenomenal.

Essentializing and strictly demarcating religion leads to treating it as a rigid, unbending, and unevolving primordial identity or as a fixed ensemble of doctrinal rules that are imposed on adherents externally by a religious authority that is itself understood ahistorically. The hermeneutic quality of all religious guidelines is completely lost in such an approach. Where Islam is concerned, Sheikh, following Hunter, calls this the “neo-Orientalist” interpretation because it imposes not only an identity but specific forms of action that flow from it on Muslims. This “cultural determinist” approach believes that “Muslims think and behave in certain ways because they are Muslims”: as Sheikh points out, scholars adhering to this approach urge “strategies of resistance, suppression and containment” of Muslims and Islam.²³

Yet another danger that happens all too easily in attempts to avoid the primordial approach is to fall into the trap of instrumentalism. Instrumental views of religion might suggest that some – usually powerful elites – succeed in getting people to subscribe to religious beliefs by force or by enticing them with the promise of present or future rewards. Many read Marx’s identification of religion as an “opiate of the people” in this way. Other forms of instrumentalism blame the analyst, rather than alleged believers, for mistakenly ascribing causal power to religion rather than other, “real” political or economic factors. Hunter and Sheikh call this type of materialist view “Neo-Third Worldist when applied to Islam, because it focuses on “economic deprivation, social alienation, and political disenfranchisement” as providing the causes for contemporary political Islamism.²⁴

Instrumentalism, then, treats decisions as based on a cost-benefit analysis that excises ethical action out of the picture, or supports the view that religion plays no role in people’s decisions about war and peace. We are left with the question of how we can take religion seriously and understand its role in justifying, promoting, and legitimizing both

21. See Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) for a recent exception.

22. Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproductions,” in Amy Gutman, ed., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994): 150; for a challenge to this argument, see Cecelia Lynch, “Dogma, Praxis, and Religious Perspectives on Multiculturalism” (2000).

23. This paragraph is taken from Lynch, *Interpreting International Politics*: 90. See also Shireen Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West* (1998): 71; Mona Sheikh “Guardians of God: Understanding the religious violence of Pakistan’s Taliban.” Ph.D. thesis. University of Copenhagen, Department of Political Science (2011): 16-17.

24. Hunter, *ibid*, 72-73; Sheikh, *ibid*, 17. For a discussion of primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, see Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger. “Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict” (2000).

violence and non-violence, war and peace, as well as a range of goals that might not be easily characterized by either.

The Neo-Weberian Approach

I argue that a neo-Weberian approach to religion is critical for understanding the bases of the connection between either religion and violence or religion and peace. The neo-Weberian approach that I articulated in a 2009 article in *International Theory* represents a form of constructivism that focuses first and foremost on how religious actors (especially groups but also individuals) bridge the gap between doctrine, ethics, and action in particular contexts.²⁵ I differ, therefore, from those who assert that constructivism either has not or does not provide sufficient analytical purchase for analyzing religion (or secularism).²⁶ The first provides a curiously limited review of the literature that ignores the contributions made by constructivist scholars; both critiques articulate an overly circumscribed and homogeneous version of constructivism that ignores its multifaceted nature.²⁷ The neo-Weberian approach does not assume *a priori* that religion motivates either peaceful or violent intentions and actions. In fact, we cannot make such an assumption because there are no logical grounds to do so. Instead, we must first assess what religious guidelines suggest for particular situations, and then look more deeply into how religious actors interpret those guidelines – how they bridge the gap between religious rules and particular situations to decide how to act.

Neo-Weberianism, like many of the sociological and anthropological studies of religion, connects religious practices to their social, political, and economic contexts.

25. Lynch, “A Neo-Weberian approach”. This form of constructivism aligns with the work of Friedrich Kratochwil and Nicholas Onuf, in different ways, more than the post-1992 work of Alexander Wendt. From Kratochwil, it draws on the importance of reasoning and argumentation, as well as the enabling characteristics of norms and law. From Onuf, it draws on the social construction of rules, order, and “rule,” but emphasizes the contested nature of each. For recent elucidations, see Kratochwil, *The Puzzle of Politics* (2011); and Nicholas Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds: Constructivism in social theory and international relations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

26. The first charge is made by Jack Snyder in his edited volume, *Religion and International Relations Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), the second by Scott Thomas in his 2000 contribution to the 2000 Millennium special issue and subsequent volume edited by Petite and Hatzopoulos, and in a very different way by Terry Nardin, “Epilogue,” in the 2003 Hatzopoulos/Petite volume. Scholarship articulating various strands of constructivist work on religion go back at least to 2000, and includes the contributions by Vendulka Kubáľková, Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, and Cecelia Lynch (all in the Millennium special issue and the subsequent 2003 edited volume), and individual work since that time by these and several other authors.

27. See Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2007), for a more expansive view of constructivist approaches. For a critical approach to religion that has resonances with the one developed here, see Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. Chapters 2 and 3.

Beginning with Weber's insights in *Sociology of Religion*, it provides a constitutive understanding of religious belief and economic, social, and political practice. For Weber, religious doctrine, economic development, political change and social forms of behavior all interact, producing relatively stable forms of religious practice as well as breakthroughs and gradual evolutions toward new religious sects and "economic ethics" such as "the spirit of capitalism."²⁸

This means that doctrine, while important, does not "determine" action in a mono-causal sense. As a result, I argue that we need to analyze religion as *practice*. Practice concerns the development and reproduction of "tradition" in the sense espoused by Alasdair MacIntyre and others – that is, as a living repository of intersubjectively shared guidelines and rituals that are passed from generation to generation but can also be transformed to meet changing circumstances. Carrying out tradition, in other words, is equivalent to practicing doctrine. Just as "discourse" as articulated by Michel Foucault incorporates both language and material artifacts of techniques of power, and is subject to contradictions and points of rupture, religious tradition and doctrine incorporate sacred texts or text-analogues, rituals, prayer, and/or other forms of worship and religious expression, and are subject to hermeneutical needs and pressures.²⁹

Religious doctrine, then, is not static; rather, it is practiced by carrying out traditions of ritual, prayer, sacrifice, penance, and the ensemble of private and public actions that may be ethically required in particular contexts. Re-interpretations, or changes, necessarily occur when new circumstances arise. These are most often prompted by the "problem of theodicy" that was critical to Weber's conceptualization of religion's economic ethic. Theodicy, as articulated by Leibniz, concerns the problem of how to reconcile the existence of God with sin, evil and suffering in the world; Weber showed how religions cope with the problem of theodicy by changing religious beliefs, doctrines and rituals to resolve inconsistencies. For example, if the "magician" engages in specific rituals to bring rain and instead drought, famine and suffering continually result, the religious community is faced with a contradiction that it generally attempts to reconcile. It could desacralize and banish the magician, alter the ritual, or blame itself for not living up to its ideal of the good. It could also attempt to withdraw from worldly interactions. This long-term process of reconciling evil and suffering with the goodness and power of God or gods resulted for Weber in the "rationalization" of religions, underpinning his evolutionary theory of doctrinal and practical change.³⁰

Weber's insights help us understand that religious ethics must make sense to adherents given their historical, political, and social contexts. This is the "living" nature of

28. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, transl. by Talcott Parsons (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003): 302-322.

29. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). I use Paul Rabinow's discussion of Foucault's concept of discourse here. See Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

30. Weber, *Sociology of Religion* (1922/1993); Michael Murray, "Leibniz on the Problem of Evil", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/leibniz-evil>, accessed 5.12.

religious tradition – rituals and religions will die out if they are not rooted in experiential as well as ethical webs of meaning. As a result, religious adherents constantly navigate experiential, ritualistic, and doctrinal terrains in deciding how to act. Sin and evil, moreover, exist, and religious communities must not only condemn them but also learn to cope with their implications. But doctrine and tradition are supposed to do more than attempt to circumvent evil and death: they are also supposed to achieve the *common good*. Religions define some goods as superior to others, and the religious practices of individuals and groups are designed to lead toward them and achieve them in either an immanent or transcendent context. As a result, what is accomplished by reinterpretations of tradition and the creation of new practices? They reconcile religious guidelines with new situations, and enable adjusted or new practices to achieve the common good. They do so through processes of casuistry that work together with interpretations of the common good to underpin the processes of ethical action that Weber suggests but does not sufficiently articulate or develop.³¹

Juridically-informed decision-making according to a formal, “case-law” methodology, called “casuistry,” was developed by medieval Catholic theologians.³² This process of assessing the worth of an argument by tacking back and forth between interpretations of doctrine, precedent, and the situation at hand is much more informally and intuitively practiced by all religious (and non-religious) adherents. This process, which I assert is a form of casuistry, concerns how religious adherents attempt to enact or bring about the common good. In most cases, I have called this process “popular casuistry,” to draw attention to the fact that all religious adherents engage in ethical meaning-making in their worlds, whether they do so formally or informally. In the case at hand, however, the ethical struggles were argued out by religious leaders of the times, although they occupied very different types of positions of authority. Jonsen and Toulmin point out, the debate over Spanish colonial policy took place during the period of “high casuistry” in the mid-16th century.³³ Thus, I suspend the modifier “popular” in discussing the casuistic processes in this debate, even though the distinction should not be overdrawn. This is because in the “neo-Weberian” construct, people’s ongoing development of phenomenological and hermeneutic understandings – their melding of experience and consciousness, and interpretation of sacred texts and text-analogues – becomes an integral part of the process of deciding what is required to do for the common good. Authority figures

31. This point might be considered debatable. Weber, of course, developed the concept of “economic ethic” which enabled him to pursue his inquiries into the ethical forms taken by ideal-typical religious practices. In addition, he was concerned with the development and rationalization of religious as well as secular forms of law. In this sense, he could be seen to connect the common good with religious tradition (see *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1978):809-830). Nevertheless, in parsing legal traditions as “Islamic Law,” “Jewish Law,” “Canon Law,” etc., he tends to solidify tradition rather than emphasize its continual interpretation and negotiation, including among traditions themselves.

32. For a discussion of Pascal and others’ criticisms of casuistry, see Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, (1988):esp. 229-249, and Lynch, “A Neo-Weberian Approach” (2009).

33. Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*: 145.

did and do, however, possess more power to generalize their ethical counsel in the form of mandates for others to follow, however imperfectly, and this power also needs to be recognized in the framework.

Casuistic processes entail ethical struggles, because the stakes involved in coping with the problem of theodicy are often quite high. Despite Weber's insistence on contextualizing the economic, social, and political aspects of religious ethics and action to avoid oversimplification, and his drawing attention to the serious problems posed by the intersection of theodicy with new social circumstances, he does not capture the religious struggles and intentionality involved in ethical action in favor of some notion of the common good. Conceptualizing the constitutive nature of the common good and casuistic processes (popular or formal) provides the necessary link in this process.

Given the problem of sin and the attachment to the common good and the means of achieving it, the ethical imperative involved in religious action is paramount. This is not unique to action on the part of religious adherents, but because religious guidelines are often seen, erroneously, as unchanging and brooking no dissent, religious ethics are too-often understood to be unalterably rigid. This simplistic understanding of doctrine, in turn, leads too easily to a misunderstanding of the common good that religions seek to attain. The definition of the common good generally includes several components that may remain more-or-less the same despite changes in practice, or may evolve with changing practices. For example, one of the central debates among Christians historically as well as today concerns what mixture of virtue, justice, and love constitutes the "kingdom of God." Moreover, debate is rife concerning whether bringing about the kingdom requires active evangelism and proselytizing of non-Christians or simply living out to the best of one's ability Christian ethical imperatives of loving God and neighbor.

This approach, I argue, provides a productive way to understand how religious adherents connect guidelines to moral action without the essentialization of religion which is often characteristic of other perspectives. Taking ethical struggles seriously and understanding their stakes requires several steps, including situating the practices and traditions of a religious group (or individual) within the historical and geographic context of its adherents, probing how the common good is articulated as well as assessing tensions that surround its component parts or ways to achieve them, and understanding the ethical salience of the universe of "cases" used by adherents as precedent for assessing the possibilities for action. Because these steps involve constitutive and not discrete factors, they are not linear. The researcher may cut in to the content of religious ethics at any point, provided that each of these steps is addressed. Generally there exist both commonalities and contestation about the content of the common good (or goals to be achieved), the most relevant precedents or examples for how to act in a given situation, and the range of ethical actions possible. Each of these types of contestation should be taken into account in order to understand the struggles over religious ethics that are masked by primordialist and instrumentalist approaches to religion.

How can the neo-Weberian approach help us understand why some religious actors legitimize or condemn violence, or justify something in-between? It is certainly the case, as numerous scholars who do not essentialize religion have pointed out, that actors employ religious

justifications to engage in violence.³⁴ A genealogy of Christian missionary activity offers illustrative examples of the neo-Weberian approach to studying religious propensities towards violence and non-violence while also providing a counterpoint to studies preoccupied with Islam. This is because Christian missionary activity can be seen as promoting a range of practices from violent and anachronistic to necessary and salvific, with many positions in-between these poles. It also has had an intimate relationship historically with the expansion of state power, and acquiescence in this expansion and resistances to it play a significant role in the legitimation or non-legitimation of violence. I revisit the debates among early modern thinkers, including Francisco de Vitoria, Ginès de Sepúlveda, and Bartolomé de las Casas, regarding the legitimacy of using force against Amerindians in order to conquer, colonize, and convert them, and extend this to a brief discussion of subsequent missionary activity. I emphasize how Christians grappled with the content of the common good and questions of conversion vis-à-vis imperial expansion and conquest, highlighting the resulting ethical tensions over the use of violence.

Debates about Mission and Alterity During the Conquest Period vis-a-vis Today

The violence of the Conquest period is undeniable.³⁵ Imperial expansion into the Americas took place in a context of power struggle between the Papacy and monarchs, Catholics and Protestants, and Christians and non-Christians across Europe. The Pope sent Jesuits and other missionaries to all parts of the globe, while monarchs sent explorers and traders. The resulting goals of conversion, conquest, and colonization were often viewed as intertwined by all parties involved. Many scholars have examined in depth how the colonizers viewed the Amerindians in an attempt to understand how constructing the “other” as less than fully human enables such widespread violence; my intention here, however, is to highlight the hermeneutic and constitutive nature of the range of interpretations of violence on the part of Christian missionaries and thinkers.

Francisco de Vitoria, whose 1532 treatise “Of the Indians Lately Discovered” grappled with the intra-Catholic tensions related to colonizing the Americas, was a prominent 16th century Catholic theologian and legal scholar. For Vitoria, the ethical challenge was to provide support for Catholic moral universalism, Spanish imperial claims and Christian conversion efforts while placing constraints on violence and cruelty and promoting the

34. Juergensmeyer, Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000); Sheikh, Sheikh, *Guardians of God: Understanding the Religious Violence of Pakistan's Taliban* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Department of Political Science, 2011). (2011); Théo Tschuy, *Ethnic Conflict and Religion* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1997).

35. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de las Casas, Indigenous Rights, and Ecclesiastical Imperialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), and Daniel Brunstetter, *Tensions of Modernity: Las Casas and His Legacy in the French Enlightenment* (New York and London: Routledge 2012).

concept of sovereign rights through appealing to *ius gentium* (the law of peoples/nations).³⁶ As an advisor to the Spanish King, he rejected the claims of the Papacy to grant titles to land in the Americas to the Spanish (or Portugese). Natural law did not automatically confer territorial decision-making authority to the papacy. Vitoria therefore privileged Catholic rule when exercised by the Spanish King (rather than the Pope). However, his assumption of “common good” included the right to travel, engage in trade and profit from commerce, and engage in efforts to convert the Amerindians to Christianity. These provisions all formed part of natural law (foregrounding contemporary human rights debates), and if the Amerindians refused these rights, the Spanish were justified in waging war against them.³⁷ While affirming the full humanity of Amerindians, Vitoria also articulated a concurrence between the common good and natural law that permitted the colonization, conversion, and conquest of the Amerindians if they did not accept this version of law and the good. Vitoria’s insistence that the Church had the right to evangelize but not to confer territory, and his argument that all humans were rational beings, are the basis of his reputation as the first major figure to lay the foundations for modern laws of sovereignty and notions of cosmopolitanism. However, his justifications for war against the Amerindians if they did not agree to European-designed legal and theological codes led Gustavo Gutierrez to contrast him with Las Casas, asserting that “on the questions posed by the conquest of the Indies, Vitoria only goes half-way. He energetically refutes the reasons brought forward for making war and subjugating the Indians. But he reintroduces the possibility by drawing up a list of hypothetical reasons that would justify such wars in other, theoretical, cases. . . . Anyone familiar with the situation of the Indies knew the hypotheses were false.”³⁸ In sum, Vitoria’s understanding of the common good was shaped not only by an affirmation of the humanity of the Amerindian “other” and the “right” of the Church to evangelize, but also by his support of the Spanish monarchy and articulation of emergent cosmopolitanism, especially for economic benefit.

The strongest apologist for violence on religious grounds was Ginès de Sépulveda, a Spanish royal historian (and therefore an elite, but not a theological authority). Las Casas defined him as an apologist found by slave traders to appeal the Spanish King’s edict that enslaved Amerindians be restored to freedom.³⁹ Sépulveda came down clearly on the side of conquest and colonization, using Aristotle’s argument that some men (extended by Sépulveda to the Amerindians) were “natural slaves.” This assertion reinforced a hierarchical understanding of natural law and sovereignty. Once natural law was defined in this way, Sépulveda then appealed to Saint Augustine to argue that natural law was God’s will, or divine law. Given that the Amerindians had violated divine law through their

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36. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking 2010): 693.
37. Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006): 16.
38. Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983): 196.
39. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999): 7-8.

pagan practices (including idolatry and human sacrifice), and that they had used violence against the colonizers, their enslavement by force was justified. Moreover, using the example of Constantine, S epulveda argued that the goal of spreading the Gospel justified compelling the Amerindians to convert to Christianity.⁴⁰ Each of these aspects of S epulveda’s articulation of the common good reinforces the other; each justifies the use of violence to compel the trinity of conquest, colonization and conversion.

The debate in 1500-1551 in Valladolid, Spain, between S epulveda and Bartolom e de las Casas is legendary, and previews a fairly consistent relationship between Christian missionizing and great power expansion from the early modern period to the present. Originally a colonial plantation owner who became convinced of the wrongs done to the Amerindians and joined the Dominican order as a priest, numerous analyses of Las Casas grapple with his legacy as humanitarian and would-be liberator, while others cite his political failures and note that he remained an apologist for Christian superiority, endorsed the replacement of Indian by African slaves, and denied religious respect to Muslims and Jews.

Las Casas argued strenuously against the use of force and in favor of granting rights to and respecting the dignity of Amerindians. He rejected each of S epulveda’s arguments in favor of force as antithetical to Christ’s example and the Christian ethic of love of God and neighbor. He also, however, considered the religious formation of Amerindians to be childlike, not fully formed, and hence inferior to that of Christianity. Although he insisted that the Amerindians and their religions were still deserving of respect, he promoted assimilationism to bring them peacefully to Christianity. Todorov argues that Las Casas in his later years began to distance himself from this assimilationist stance (which Todorov calls perspectivism), and this change also entailed rethinking his justifications for Spanish territorial conquest and control. “Even as he asserts the existence of one God, Las Casas does not a priori privilege the Christian path to that God.”⁴¹ Las Casas’s religious epiphany also led to a change in his political stance:

The solution Las Casas favors is to preserve the ancient states, with their kings and governors; to preach the Gospel in them, but without the support of arms; if these local kings seek to form a kind of federation presided over by the King of Spain, to accept it; to profit by their wealth only if they propose such a thing themselves In other words, Las Casas suggests to the King of Spain that he renounce his transatlantic possessions, no more and no less. And the only war he envisages would be the one waged by the King against the Spanish conquistadors (for Las Casas suspects that the latter will not be willing to renounce their holdings of their own free will).⁴²

Todorov demonstrates that the conception of the “common good” articulated by Las Casas enlarged substantially to include the religious practices of Amerindians. Such an enlargement of necessity incorporated critical additional factors into Las Casas’s process of reasoning.

40. Ibid: 12-14.

41. Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 190; see also Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

42. Todorov, *Conquest*, 193.

Yet, despite the evolution in Las Casas's views of the common good, Martin Marty writes in his 1999 Foreword to *In Defense of the Indians* that Las Casas suffered from a "cosmic flaw," which was to play "a brief part in legitimizing black slavery," even while he was promoting the full humanity of Amerindians. Marty states that Las Casas proposed a communal system for the "New World" in 1516 "that had enormous consequences" by stating

'If necessary white and black slaves can be brought from Castile.' Two years later he shortened this proposal to simply 'Negro slaves.' ... Here, too, Las Casas's insistence on Christian love as the basis of the common good eventually motivated him to "reverse his stand. In his *Historia* he, almost alone in his time, said that 'the same law applies equally to the Negro as to the Indians,' but by then it was too late.⁴³

Thus the tragedy of the Conquest and the tragedy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade were intertwined, with Christian appeals to Aristotle attempting to justify extreme violence towards African as well as Amerindian populations.

Still, despite his change of heart regarding the slave trade, Las Casas remained unsympathetic to Jews and Muslims. In this respect he did not provide any moral advance over the prejudices of his time. While not justifying their enslavement, his stance towards Muslims and Jews also demonstrates the severe limits to inclusion in his conception of the common good and Christian love. Muslims and Jews, unlike the Amerindians in his reasoning, had been exposed to the Gospel and had rejected it. They therefore could not be considered merely immature in their religious development, but instead were infidels against whom war and violence were justified.

Each of these figures was key in the ongoing development of law and Christian ethics, and their reasoning shows how the encounter injected new tensions into definitions of the common good. More specifically, their attempts to categorize the experiences of conquest, colonization, and conversion in the midst of growing intra-Christian tensions in Europe (both Catholic/Protestant, intra-Catholic and intra-Protestant), as well as the decline of the Catholic Church's temporal power, produced critical outcomes for the relationship between Christianity, mission, and the developing "law of nations" that would continue to reverberate into the so-called modern era.

The writings of Vitoria, S epulveda, and Las Casas, moreover, reveal multiple intersecting tendencies regarding Christian ethics on the relationship between violence, the state or empire, and the common good. The ethical struggles of Las Casas, in particular, represented a microcosm of the forms of popular casuistry taking place among missionaries throughout the Americas and much of Asia. The trinity of "conquest, colonization and conversion" was not questioned by most missionaries, although some deplored the use of violence to attain it. Similar debates rose again in the European competition of the 19th century and early 20th centuries to conquer, colonize, and convert territories and kingdoms across Africa and East Asia.

In the late twentieth century, mainline Christian churches began to reexamine their mission legacy, including the churches' role in condoning violence. One commentator

43. Martin Marty, "Foreword" to Bartolom e de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (1999): xvi.

asserts that the churches “must be helped to face frankly their historical responsibility for the incendiary and often messianic fanaticism which they have implanted within society and whose cultural and political after-effects remain alive.”⁴⁴ The World Council of Churches initiated a program in the 1990s to remind churches of the relationship between missionary goals and colonial expansion.⁴⁵ Missionaries across a wide spectrum of Christian churches continue to debate and redefine the “common good” to be gained from mission in a multi-cultural and increasingly globalized world. Christopher Duraisingh, for example, argues in favor of a rearticulation of mission as “a habitus, a way of being,” strongly criticizing “the urge to colonize other countries and ‘civilizing’ other peoples and conquering other religions.” The common good, in this view, is founded on respect and dialogue with others that allows for syncretism and participation in local struggles for justice – leading to “liberation” – rather than triumphalism.⁴⁶

These debates about the content of the common good represent an important trend in contemporary Christianity in many parts of the world. In addition to these efforts to critique and reconceptualize definitions of the common good that linked Christian missionary activity to imperial expansion and violence, however, new Christian missionary efforts have been expanding rapidly over the past several decades, especially on the part of Christian evangelicals and Pentecostals. It is important to note that these mission efforts are not simply uni-directional from the Global North to the Global South – indeed, a “reverse missionizing” phenomenon is frequently noted today.⁴⁷ Yet, in the U.S. especially, a significant segment of both evangelical and mainline churches has become involved in the promotion of “religious freedom” through supporting the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and the ongoing Commission that was created as part of the Act. The IRFA is designed to link U.S. foreign policy explicitly to the protection of religious freedom, i.e., the freedom of religious minorities of any kind, anywhere in the world, to practice their religion freely and without oppression by the host state. While the stated purpose is to assist victims of state violence against religion, part of the definition of religious freedom promoted by the Commission concerns the right to evangelize abroad. The explicit language requiring the U.S. to take measures to protect religious minorities abroad is hotly debated within the Christian, interfaith, and academic communities.⁴⁸ Once again, the common good is articulated in such a way to link religion and

44. Théo Tschuy includes in this reexamination the history of persecution of Christian heretics, Jews, and witches. Tschuy, *Ethnic Conflict and Religion* (1997): 140.

45. S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture: An Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement*, Pamphlet 1, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994): xii, 2-3.

46. Christopher Duraisingh, “From Church-Shaped Mission to Mission-Shaped Church,” *The Anglican Theological Review* 92, 1 (2010).

47. Donald Miller and Tetsuano Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

48. Numerous sources, blogs, etc., are debating the issue of religious freedom. See, among others, the special issue on religious freedom in *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 6 (2008), which includes both proponents and critics; for proponents, see Brian J. Grimm and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: religious persecution and conflict in the 21st century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); for critiques, see Peter Danchin,

the purposes of the state in ways that can easily result in violence. The redefinition of mission combined with the creation of the International Religious Freedom Commission represent strong tensions in contemporary Christian processes of popular casuistry that can have serious consequences for the relationship between religion and violence.

The Contributions and Limitations of the Neo-Weberian Approach to Religion and Violence

Neo-Weberianism has several commonalities with the sociological, securitization, and anthropological approaches to the study of religion and violence outlined in this symposium, but it also has differences. For example, the sociological, anthropological, and securitization perspectives all reject an easy relationship between religion and violence. Talal Asad has used anthropological insights to change the way not only scholars in his field but also many others view religion, especially including its development as a historical category. His work deconstructing suicide bombing in comparison to statist forms of terrorism, moreover, expands on Juergensmeyer's concept of "secular nationalism" to account for the silences in academic discourse vis-à-vis the extreme forms of violence enabled if not promoted by the secular Western state.⁴⁹ Juergensmeyer and Sheikh in this symposium outline how a sociological approach to the religion/violence nexus can help explain the self-understandings of actors who employ violence for religious ends, rather than assuming that all actors of a certain religious "type" use or justify violence.⁵⁰ Finally, securitization theory focuses on how perceptions of threat become "referent objects" that need to be securitized, resulting in defensive and offensive moves to protect against threats or act against those perceived to be the threatening. Here again, there is no *a priori* assumption that "religion" as such produces threats or violence. Instead, the theory analyzes what happens when actors extend the perception of threat to new areas.

Neo-Weberianism, however, also differs from these approaches. While understanding "religion" to be a historically constructed category that has imposed politicized meanings on some religions more than others, it also understands the relationship between faith and ethical action to be a matter of investigation in particular temporal and spatial contexts. While it supports the social-psychological task of understanding the individual rationales that interpret religious guidelines as legitimizing or even requiring violence, it

"Of Prophets and Proselytes: Freedom of Religion and the Conflict of Rights in International Law." *Harvard International Law Journal* 48 (2008): 249-321, and the website, "Politics of Religious Freedom: Contested Norms & Local Practices," at <http://iiss.berkeley.edu/politics-of-religious-freedom>. On debates on religious freedom among Christian humanitarians, see Cecelia Lynch, "Christian Ethics, Actors and Diplomacy: Mediating Universalist Pretensions," *International Journal*, (2011): 613-628; on the role of Christianity in politics today, see Erin Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); on the relationship between "religion" and the "secular" project of human rights, see Friedrich Kratochwil, "Politics, law, and the sacred: a conceptual analysis," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16 (2013): 1-24 .

49. Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

50. Carsten Bagge Laustsen, and Ole Wæver, "In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, 3 (2000): 705-39.

understands religious ethics as constitutive of social, economic, and political practices that require formal or informally-articulated casuistic processes to interpret in particular situations. Finally, neo-Weberianism might be seen as a prelude or complement to the securitization approach, allowing a better understanding of the range of ethical possibilities that are constitutive of defensive or offensive forms of securitization. Moreover, similar to securitization theory, the discussion of missionizing also requires examining the relationship between religious adherents and the state, or political unit. In each of these comparisons, moreover, neo-Weberianism emphasizes the possibility of a range of ethics and actions that may or may not include the use of violence.

In sum, neo-Weberianism, like each of these approaches, is important for challenging facile perspectives that assume that something called “religion” will produce violence. The sociological and securitization frameworks work to specify in more detail the links between enabling conditions and the individual rationales that motivate acts of religio-political violence. Neo-Weberianism, however, appears to go beyond other approaches in examining the constitutive nature of the relationship between religious traditions and the ethical guidelines for all aspects of economic, political, and social life. This opens up our understanding of religion’s role historically and today to the full range and richness of ethical possibility and the meaning of ethical struggle.

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