

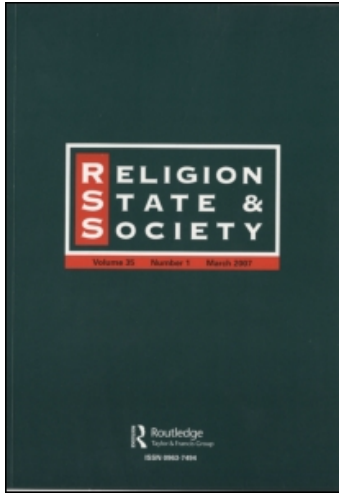
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World Religions and Norms of War

Jennifer Jefferis^a

^a National Defense University, Washington, DC, USA

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Book Reviews

World Religions and Norms of War, edited by Vesselin Popovski, Gregory M. Reichberg and Nicholas Turner. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009, xiv + 335 pp., ISBN: 978-92-808-1163-6.

World Religions and Norms of War offers an intriguing and original examination of the relationship between nine different religions and their respective conceptions of violence. Popovski, Reichberg and Turner successfully identify several core principles present across religious traditions that inform the conditions in which war will be declared and the manner in which it will be fought. This volume fills an important function in the studies of religion and war by eschewing the more glamorous study of religious radicalism and violence, or the more politically correct link between religion and pacifism, in favour of an insightful examination of the well-trodden path of moderatism that lies between the two extremes.

In the introduction, Popovski argues that comprehending the norms of war from different religious perspectives can aid in understanding current threats to peace and inform the way responses are structured. He elaborates on this argument in the first chapter by pointing out that to classify religions as either 'pacifist or bellicose' is to neglect the more useful insight that comes from asking not whether religion leads to war, but rather when, for what purpose and in what way. In the chapters that follow, violence is examined in the context of Hinduism, Buddhism, Japanese religion (defined by Robert Kisala as an amalgam of Buddhism, Shinto, Taoism and Confucianism), Judaism, Christianity (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant) and Islam (Shia and Sunni). Each of the chapters could successfully stand on its own as a perusal of the relationship between violence and the respective religion.

Kaushik Roy's chapter on norms of war in Hinduism stands out among the examinations of eastern religions for its clarity and relevance. Early in the chapter Roy introduces the 'twin opposing concepts' of *dharmayuddha* (war against injustice) and *kutayuddha* (unjust war) and follows these ideas throughout 3500 years of history. Roy manages to cover an impressive span of history with an ideal depth of analysis, artfully keeping the reader from becoming too bogged down in detail, while still demonstrating a nuanced understanding of Hinduism and its impact. Roy concludes the chapter with an assessment of Hinduism's impact on nuclear development in India and argues that pacifism is a recent trend in Hinduism rather than an informed consequence of its tenets.

Jack Bemporad's chapter on norms of war in Judaism provides an appealing biblical exegesis neatly tied to present-day consequence. Highlighting text from Deuteronomy, he argues that the Jewish tradition of war is heavily reliant on an understanding of God as the primary warrior and suggests that the consequence of this understanding is the realisation that peace is the 'ultimate Jewish tradition'. Bemporad's engaging writing style does not mask the normative position he clearly

brings to his analysis of Judaism and his rejection of the *Realpolitik* approach that is sometimes present in modern Israeli policy.

In contrast to Bemporad's effort to situate his biblical analysis firmly in present-day relevance, Gregory Richberg offers an historical assessment of the development of norms of war in Roman Catholicism. He does an excellent job of mixing political context with the development of religious norms, particularly in his explanation of the evolution of Christian pacifism to Augustine's understanding of Just War. While Richberg's analysis stops short of the present period, Yuri Stoyanov delves deeply into the evolution of norms of war in Eastern Orthodox Christianity through the Yugoslav wars of the late 1990s and the statement of faith issued by the Russian Bishops' Council in 2000. Perhaps because of what Stoyanov acknowledges as a limited pool of information on norms of war in Eastern Christianity, this chapter highlights more parallels between developments in different religions than the other chapters do. The result is that readers can see the clear linkages between the development of the western concept of Just War and the concurrent development of the eastern assessment that war can almost never be theologically justified.

In the chapter on norms of war in Protestant Christianity, Valerie Morkevicius effectively highlights the tension that dominates the Protestant view of war as a necessary evil. Morkevicius presents an engaging synopsis of Reinhold Niebuhr's influence on theological understandings of war, and in so doing calls attention to the relationship between equality and peace. Niebuhr's conclusion is that equality is a prerequisite for peace, and therefore should always be pursued more actively. In her conclusion Morkevicius notes that the issue of Just War is far from resolved in Protestant thought. She argues that the development of nuclear weapons has led to an assessment that while violence is not always unjust, 'modern weapons may make the use of just violence impossible'.

In the chapter on norms of war in Shia Islam, David Feirahi argues that while jihad has a prominent place in understandings of war, in Shia Islam jihad can only be waged defensively. Feirahi says that offensive jihad cannot be conducted without the express permission of the Infallible Imam, who is currently in Occultation. As a result, according to Feirahi, any war that is not defensive in nature cannot be just according to Shia Islam. Unlike the other chapters in the volume (with the possible exception of the chapter on Judaism) this chapter is written with a more personal interest in the subject. Whereas most of the other authors offered sustained analysis of competing and evolving narratives of war, Feirahi sometimes strays from straight analysis into advocating his own reading of the issue. Far from undermining the strength of the chapter, Feirahi's personal style makes for a more engaging, if somewhat uneven, read.

Amira Sonbol's chapter on norms of war in Sunni Islam stands out as one of the best in the volume. The chapter is the shortest of the set, but offers a clear and incisive picture of the relationship between political context and understandings of just war in Islam. She is particularly effective in addressing issues of diversity head-on, in contrast to some of the authors' tendency to ignore these challenges. Sonbol contrasts the rhetoric of Osama Bin Laden and Hassan Nasrallah to argue that 'although there is a basic formula that one can call a classic theory for waging war in Islam, the reasons and methods of war ethics are connected to time and place'. She highlights the principles of justice that are clearly entombed in Islamic texts, but notes that egregious violations of justice will frequently lead to a lower value placed on their implementation. Her analysis is tempered by her understanding that religion is influenced by context and her underlying argument is that manifestations of violence in Islam are the consequence of violations of the rights of Muslims.

The volume concludes with a compelling reminder that while religions may embody remarkably divergent belief systems, they still consistently address similar issues of justice and morality in war. Reichberg, Turner and Popovski identify several consistent themes that are present in all the world religions studied, including the right of defensive action, the importance of violence as a last resort, and the avoidance of noncombatants.

More importantly the editors address the issue that up to that point was the greatest weakness of the volume: while the authors all presented extensive historical and contextual analysis of major world religions, none sufficiently acknowledged the diversity of interpretation that was being condensed into the broad categories of 'Protestantism', 'Japanese religion' and so on. And given that the events of the day are what make this book important and timely, this omission was glaring. However, the editors offer a unique explanation for their method, saying that moderatism in religion works in tandem with international law and vice versa. Thus the editors argue that while the moderatism they highlight in this volume is not as flashy as the extremism that dominates the news, it is the most likely to endure thanks to the symbiotic relationship it shares with international norms and laws.

The book is not perfect, but it is certainly important. Most of the chapters draw insightful connections between religious doctrine and current political development. The detailed, if sometimes uneven, history of the evolution of concepts of violence across such a variety of religious doctrines will be useful to scholars of sociology, political science, international relations and theology.

The editors note that 'throughout history war, an inherently political activity, has needed religion much more than religion has needed war', and this quote gets at the heart of what this book offers the academic community. Much effort has been undertaken to understand when religion leads to violence – and implicit in these studies is the assumption that the relation between religion and violence is unidirectional. The editors turn this assumption on its head and remind their readers that while violence may sometimes be a tool of the religious, religion is equally often a tool of the violent.

JENNIFER JEFFERIS

National Defense University, Washington DC, USA

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Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place, edited by Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006, 280 pp., \$24.95, ISBN: 978-0-253-21864-3 (paperback).

The editors of this volume articulate their aim as advancing the idea that 'memory is an essential dimension of religion', and that 'religion is an essential component of memory'. A review is not the place to unpack either of these weighty notions, but a great deal depends on one's definitions of both memory and religion. This collection addresses memory 'as a cultural product emerging from the negotiation and contestation of meaning within religious frameworks at specific sites marked by violent histories' (p. 6).

The collection is therefore an exploration of commemoration rather than of recollection; of historical or collective memory rather than of the memories of