

Religion and Conflict

Introduction

- Neurotheology
- What is religion
- Religion, politics and cultural identity
- Lawyers, peacemaking and religion

Neurotheology

- Neurological study of religious experience
- Two aspects
 - The causal imperative
 - Altered states of consciousness
- Religious experience is the interplay of the causal and holistic operator
 - Causal operator → myths → concept of deity
 - Holistic operator → self-transcendence

Myths

- **Formed from basic analytical relationships**
 - Dyads such as good-evil, heaven-hell, life-death, salvation-damnation
- **Two elements**
 - Mythical problem
 - Mythical solution
- **From myths come explanations of ultimate reality**

Myth and Conflict

- **If people see reality through differing myths, their interpretations of experience will be different**
- **These differences provide a fertile soil for misunderstanding and conflict escalation**
- **Accepting the myths of beliefs of others is an essential step in peacemaking**

Mystical States

- Interaction of arousal and quiescent systems
- Under hyperstimulation of one system, the other system is also stimulated
- Hyperarousal → sense of flow
- Hyperquiescence → oceanic tranquility
- Hyperarousal + hyperquiescence =
 - Experience of Absolute Unitary Being

Mystical States

- **Baseline reality**
- **Aesthetic experience**
- **Intense romantic experience**
- **Visions of divinity**
- **Cosmic consciousness**
- **Progressive trance states**
- **Absolute Unitary Being**

Achieving Mystical States

- **Top-down**
 - Meditation
 - Very slow ritual
 - Chanting
- **Bottom-up**
 - Ritual, such as liturgy
 - Group events
 - Intense physical activity (Sufi dancers)

Mystical States and Conflict

- Many reported anecdotal experiences
- Interpretation of experience varies greatly
- Conflict arises from differing interpretations of neurotheological experience

What is Religion?

- Beliefs, symbols, and rituals used to describe religious experience
- Rules of life
- Explanations for the meaning of life
- Creation of ultimate values
 - Ultimate values validate life
 - Give meaning to all else
 - Answers question, “Why am I here?”

Ultimate Values

- **Cosmology → Creation stories**
- **Salvation → Transcendence to a better life**

Religion and Cosmology

- **The Binary View: Good Versus Evil**
- **The Abstractive View: Evil as the Corruption of Good**
- **The Holistic View: The Unitary Universe**

Cosmology and Conflict

- **Creation stories create different experiences of reality**
- **Differences are fundamentally based on which cognitive operator dominates in the creation story**
- **Understanding these factors makes many conflicts understandable**

Salvation

- **Judaism and Salvation**
- **Christian Salvation**
- **Islamic Concepts of Salvation**
- **Hindu Concepts of Salvation**

Religion, Politics, and Cultural Identity

- Judaism → life based on the law
- Early Christianity → peace to the point of martyrdom
- Church-type Christianity → military power, politics, legal authority
 - Just War Theory
- Islam → socio-politico-economic order based on Qu'ranic teachings

Religious Conflicts

- Current conflicts parallel scriptural struggles
- Scriptural quotes describe current conflict
- Resentment of other faiths creates feelings of persecution
- Singular focus of monotheistic faiths makes co-existence difficult
- Aggression against religious “others” is justified by initial phase of religion that included contention with other beliefs

Religious Conflicts—Similarities

- Exile-Holocaust
- Persecution-Cross Bearing
- Lesser Jihad-Greater Jihad
- Each faith experiences conflict as repetition of previous historical and mythical struggle

Law, Peacemaking, and Religion

- Separation of church and state
 - What is a religion?
 - Is the religion legitimate enough to be protected?
- No attention to underlying conflicts of faith
- Legal remedies inadequate for religious conflicts

Religion as a Resource in Peacemaking

- Each faith embraces the Golden Rule
- Each faith professes peace
- Each faith places relationship at the top of religious achievement



The End