PEACE RESEARCH IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Leon Miller

RELIGION, PEACE AND THE POST-SECULAR PUBLIC SPHERE
Thomas G. Walsh

NON-PROLIFERATION REGIMES, IMMORAL AND RISKY: A GAME-THEORETIC APPROACH
David Koepsell and Kateřina Staňková
RELIGION, PEACE AND THE POST-SECULAR PUBLIC SPHERE

Thomas G. Walsh

Thomas Walsh is President of the Universal Peace Federation. He earned his Ph.D. in religion at Vanderbilt University. He has been a teacher, author and editor, specializing in areas of interfaith, religious studies, peace studies, philosophy, and social theory. He is Publisher of UPF Today magazine and Dialogue and Alliance, a scholarly interfaith journal. He has contributed to and edited more than twenty books related to interfaith, peacebuilding and renewal of the United Nations. He serves on the International Council of the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, and on the board of directors of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom.

Religion is often cited as a source of conflict and violence, but it also serves the cause of peace in significant ways, including its calls for non-violence, unselfishness, forgiveness, reconciliation, and just war theory. The European Enlightenment caused many to discount religion's role in public affairs, but this is changing for multiple reasons, including the fact that attempts to build a good society without religion have been unsuccessful.

This article draws attention to the more recent “post-secular” thought of Jurgen Habermas, a leading intellectual dedicated to “the Enlightenment project.” He represents a significant post-secular development in social theory with his awakening to religion’s significance in his ideal of the public sphere. The United Nations, too, is reassessing the role of religion. Approaches to peace that remain religiously illiterate will fail to yield either accurate assessments or fruitful outcomes.

If we consider the quest for peace throughout history, we should not ignore the role of religion. While religion is often cited, quite accurately, as a frequent contributor to conflict and violence, it has also, and more substantially served to advance the cause of peace in many profound and substantial ways, including its calls for practices such as non-violence, restraint of acquisitiveness, forgiveness, reconciliation, and just-war theory. The human aspiration for peace has roots in religious ideals that are widely shared among the world’s religions, and which long pre-dated modern secular movements or ideologies.

There are two good reasons to recognize religion’s role in matters of peace and security. First of all, it is simply more truthful and scientific to acknowledge the power of religion in
world affairs. Secondly, by recognizing and understanding religion’s role, one is better positioned to mitigate religion’s negative impact and, at the same time, encourage its positive potential.

If we attribute the discounting of religion’s role in public affairs to the European Enlightenment, and that intellectual and social movement’s legacy, as expressed in Marxism, Darwinism, scientific reductionism, positivism, methodological atheism and secularization theory, it may be said that the widespread denial of religion’s significance is a fairly recent phenomenon, dating back only a few hundred years.

Moreover, recent trends, since the end of the Cold War Era, have been precisely moving in a direction that acknowledges religion’s ongoing role in human affairs. This new emphasis has multiple causes; two are obvious. First of all, perspectives which attempted to build the good society without religion have been unsuccessful, or at least equally as unsuccessful as attempts by religious believers. Secondly, there is the obvious empirical fact that religion continues to be a major force in the lives of individuals and, taken in the aggregate, in world affairs. Statistics show that there are approximately 2.2 billion Christians, 1.6 billion Muslims, 1 billion Hindus and 400 million Buddhists in the world. One would have to live in a state of serious denial to fail to observe this reality. Moreover these believers are active in the world as citizens, government leaders, scientists, educators, intellectuals, artists, and more. They impact the social, political, and economic world.

Stated a bit differently, predictions of the withering away of religion as a necessary consequence of the rise of science and rationality have not proven to be prophetic. In fact, post-Cold War classics such as Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* are illustrative of the formidable presence of religion in the fabric of ordinary life. For billions of people, religion continues to shape social, cultural, ethnic and national identities; as well as moral values and, in turn, human practices in the world. Consider also Francis Fukuyama’s recent study of the *Origins of Political Order*.

---

By recognizing and understanding religion’s role, one is better positioned to mitigate religion’s negative impact and, at the same time, encourage its positive potential.
Fukuyama underscores the religious origins of the rule of law in the West.\(^2\)

Efforts to build a world of peace without an understanding of religion’s power and relevance are impoverished, and there is a growing awareness of this reality. Increasingly, those who are committed to peace are coming to recognize the limitations of a perspective that fails to include an appreciation of the religious factor.

To illustrate this point, I want to draw attention to the more recent “post-secular” thought of Jurgen Habermas. As a leading intellectual who has dedicated his life to fulfilling the aspirations of “the Enlightenment project,” he stands as an important indicator of a significant post-secular development in the history of ideas and social theory. In his words, the “conceptual triad” that dominates his own intellectual project over the past 60 years centers on “public space, discourse and reason.”\(^3\) That is, he has focused on the ideal of a society shaped by reason, a quest that has been at the forefront of thought from Plato to Kant. To some extent this ideal has manifested itself in the rise of modernity, wherein, according to Habermas, reasoned discourse among communication partners forms a public space where truth claims, normative claims and various problem-solving proposals can be discussed and debated, leading toward a consensus formed by the “unforced force of the better argument.”\(^4\)

While admittedly more concerned with the enlightenment of reason than the enlightenment of faith, in his efforts to preserve and protect the public sphere as the locus of democratic will-formation, Habermas has more recently taken a keen interest in religion. I believe this reflects a growing recognition on his part, as well as among many secular intellectuals, that religion continues to function quite powerfully in the 21st century as a significant social, moral and ideological force.

Habermas is not a “believer” in any traditional sense. Like Max Weber, he considers himself “religiously unmusical.” And yet he acknowledges the ongoing relevance of religion, in the midst of modernity, in shaping the
solidarity of moral communities and engendering human commitments to the good life. Rationality alone has been unable to furnish modernity with the substantive moral passion required to sustain moral commitments. As such, religion has yet to be superseded, and no suitable replacement has been found. As such, efforts to build the good society and a world of lasting peace must take religion seriously. Perspectives on or approaches to peace which remain religiously illiterate or in denial of religion’s relevance will fail to yield either accurate assessments or fruitful outcomes.

When we consider issues of peace and security, analysis of the religious factor should not be ignored. Who could deny the relevance of religion in understanding conflicts in places such as Israel and Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Kosovo, Mindanao, southern Thailand, Somalia, Sudan, or Tibet? Who can deny the relevance of religion in the analysis of the motives and the logic that underlies the passion, commitment and ideology of terrorists. Moreover, who could deny the relevance of religion in understanding attitudes, whether we like them or not, toward violence, toward women, toward citizenship, toward education, toward ethnocentrism, or toward human rights. As such, it’s quite difficult to conclude that religion has little ongoing relevance within the public sphere of life.

Consider the way in which citizens of almost any democratic country discuss matters such as abortion, stem-cell research, gay marriage, taxation, distribution of goods and services, public education, sex education, etc. It is very difficult to imagine any of these debates taking place without religious factors being at play. Religion simply cannot be excluded from democratic decision-making processes, neither at the national level, nor at the international level. For example, even the world’s pre-eminent global institution dedicated to peace, the United Nations, must, and in fact is, reassessing the relevance and significance of religion. In my conclusion, I will comment on the relevance of Habermas’ ideal of the public sphere, and his own re-awakening to religion’s social significance, to the work of the United Nations.
RELIGION AND PEACE

Any student of religion knows that the concept of peace is not merely a political concept, nor merely a secular moral concept. Islam, for example, is not only a religion that affirms submission to the will of Allah; in principle, if not always in practice, it is a religion dedicated to peace. Christianity’s emphasis on love of God and love of neighbor is understood by believers as the essential prerequisite for building the Kingdom of God, which is a world of peace and justice. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount includes the well-known phrase (Matthew 5.9), “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God.” Jainism and Hinduism, are legendary for their emphasis on non-violence, ahimsa. Hinduism’s “peace chant” from the Isha Upanishad reads, “All this is full. All that is full. From fullness, fullness comes. When fullness is taken from fullness, Fullness still remains. Om. Peace, peace, peace.” In the Talmud, we read, “Our rabbis have taught, We support the poor of the heathen along with the poor of Israel, visit the sick of the heathen along with the sick of Israel, and bury the poor of the heathen along with the dead of Israel, in the interests of peace.” And Buddhism enjoins us all to a life that turns away from the desires that would lead to violence and conflict. In the Anguttara Nikaya of Buddhism, we read, “This is Peace, this is the excellent, namely the calm of all the impulses, the casting out of all ‘basis,’ the extinction of craving, dispassion, stopping, Nirvana.” In Sikhism’s Adi Granth, we read, “Now is the gracious Lord’s ordinance promulgated, No one shall cause another pain or injury; All mankind shall live in peace together, Under a shield of administrative benevolence.

At the same time and with all due respect, we also recognize that the absolute commitments that religion often inspires have frequently had unfortunate, unintended consequences, including violence, intolerance, and supremacist perspectives. This is by no means to suggest that secular or militantly atheistic worldviews have not had similar or even more horrible outcomes. The legacy of Marxist regimes is there to remind us that the pathological tendencies of human beings are not erased by espousing atheism or humanism. But leaving that issue aside, reasonable believers, as well as those who have no time for religion, acknowledge that religion has at times generated, in addition to violence, regressive, anti-intellectual,
authoritarian and polemical attitudes and practices. The pathologies of religious practice have caused many a thinking person to turn away in disgust, often throwing the baby out with the dirty bath water.

For the above reasons, coupled with direct experience of religion’s pathologies, many concluded that religion was a primitive stage in human development which would naturally and gradually wither away as human beings developed over time. Hence in the 19th and early 20th century, secularization theory became a dominant view among many intellectuals and social scientists. There’s a vast literature involved in the analysis and discussion of secularization, but, risking oversimplification, secularization may be understood as a process whereby the dominance and authority of religious worldviews becomes recessive, as rationality, science, modernization and the exposure to pluralism unfold.

In this process, the sphere of the sacred is gradually differentiated from other spheres of life—the state, the economy, civil society—and marginalized. In turn, religion becomes one discrete sphere of life, largely set apart from the state, the economy, and public life.

Enlightenment philosophers contributed to this discounting of religion, some seeing religion as a tool used by the powerful to manipulate the ignorant and illiterate, or as merely a backward form of superstition that should be rooted out by the light of reason. This perspective reached its high point in Marxist thought, and the entirely dismissive view of religion as the “opiate of the masses” and the “false consciousness” that emerges out of the oppressive substructure of the capitalist system.

The theory that secularization would inexorably spread as human beings grew out of their infancy became widespread in the 20th century. Moreover, the ascendancy of the scientific worldview, and what may be called “methodological atheism,” contributed to the marginalization of religious worldviews; religion was seen by many as either a quaint relic of a bygone era, or a kind of obstruction standing in the way of human emancipation and maturation.
Furthermore, with increasing immigration and advances in communications technologies, there has arisen a growing awareness of the plurality of worldviews that make up our world. This has awakened a sense, among believers and non-believers alike, of the difficulties any one religion faces in attempting to provide an overarching worldview that would attract universal affirmation. At the same time, for believers, it became increasingly difficult to maintain a closed community, devoid of comparative temptations. In addition, there have often been hostile and prejudicial relations among believers of various traditions, especially as they came to share a common space. Given the clash of religious worldviews, science and secular language came to prevail in the public sphere. Religious concepts, in turn, were increasingly cleansed of their religious or sacred significance; oftentimes by a form of translation of religious ideas into secular ideas, e.g., translating the idea of salvation into the idea of emancipation or liberation. At the same time, the social fact of pluralism and the social fact of religion’s pervasive social presence, has made any secularist rejection of religion as a legitimate social force untenable.

Max Weber’s social scientific research was focused on the link between religion and the rise of western rationality, and the subsequent “disenchantment” of the world that occurred as instrumental rationality—as the basis of social organization—became dominant. Unlike Marxists, Weber understood the social and transformative force of religion. In his analysis of the world’s religions, an effort to identify the causal factor giving rise to the goal-oriented, instrumental rationality that guided rational administrative processes and business practices that stimulated manufacturing and trade, Weber concluded that religion was the primary causal factor, and precisely not a by-product of material forces. On the contrary, religion was the linchpin that led to the rise of scientific rationality, the goal-oriented work ethic, the free market economy and efficient bureaucratic administration. At the same time, he recognized that these same offspring of religion gave rise of a type of rationality that often

Weber concluded that religion was the linchpin that led to the rise of scientific rationality, the goal-oriented work ethic, the free market economy and efficient bureaucratic administration.
rejected or marginalized religion, hence the “demagification” or “disenchantment” (Entzauberung) of the world.9

While Weber’s ideas-move-history analysis was diametrically opposed to Marxism’s materialist analysis, his conclusion is somewhat similar, namely, that religion is very likely on its way out, overcome by inexorable conditions of the rationalized, modern, political economic system.

One of the leading social scientific and philosophical movements emerging out of Marxist thought was the school sometimes known as neo-Marxism or critical social theory, most often associated with the Frankfurt School of Social Research. While the primary focus was not on the language of peace, its objectives were couched in the language of emancipation and liberation, and the elimination of the roots of oppression and violence.10

One of the world’s leading contemporary thinkers who emerged from this tradition of critical social theory is Habermas. For example, he served as a research assistant for Theodor Adorno (Dialectic of the Enlightenment) at the Frankfurt School for Social Research in the early 1950s, at the time when Germany was struggling to transition from the legacy of the pathological political nightmare of Naziism, and the intellectual zeitgeist that seemed to provide it the protection it needed to arise. Habermas was sixteen years old in 1945.

Influenced by the national crisis and shame of Naziism, and the fact that intellectuals such as Heidegger failed to comprehend its malevolence, Habermas came to focus on the concept of a public sphere where the logic of reason can unfold in a transparent communicative process. Thus, his primary focus has been on the establishment of the moral foundations for the democratic public sphere. Like Weber, he sees the rise of participatory democracy in Europe as a unique social development. Unlike Weber, Habermas’ research project, at least early on, did not reveal any regret over a loss of religion’s force. Rather he affirmed a social evolutionary shift from archaic, primitive, and traditional societies to modern society, a process mediated by the development of the human capacity for self-reflection, that is, the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking and one’s own beliefs. The process of rational self-reflection leads the subject to come to an understanding of one’s worldview as historically situated in some lebenswelt; thus, no longer a comprehensive worldview, but one particular worldview among many; a worldview, and not the worldview.
Habermas, in a passage indicative of his secularist views, has said, “the aura of rapture and terror that emanates from the sacred, the spellbinding power of the holy, is sublimated into the binding/bonding force of criticizable validity claims.” Discourse ethics, and what Habermas has called the “ideal speech situation,” replaces the authority of the sacred. That is, legitimacy is linked to a consensus formed by communicative action under conditions of equality of participation, reciprocity and the absence of coercive forces of money and power. However, ordinary life seldom unfolds so neatly. In real-life contexts sacred worldviews re-emerge. And Habermas has taken note. The cry for justice, for example, is often voiced in religious language long before secularists take notice, or take action. As Stanley Fish has stated, “In the face of these injustices, a reason ‘decoupled from worldviews’ does not, Habermas laments, have ‘sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven.”

Habermas’ more recent work has been enlivened by increasing interaction with believers, and his own writings reveal a growing awareness of the ongoing significance of religion, albeit largely a functional significance. That is, he affirms the fact of religion’s ongoing vitality as it functions in the lives of individuals who live and act in the socio-political world, while he remains agnostic about the various truth claims espoused by religion. Functionalism, in the analysis of religion’s role in society, does not question the claims made by religion. While functionalist theory, from the believer’s perspective, is disrespectful or agnostic about religious claims, it represents a step forward from the denial of religion or the presumption that religion is a regressive, false or menacing force in society. Consider this quote from Habermas:

Even today, religious traditions perform the function of articulating an awareness of what is lacking or absent. They keep alive a sensitivity to failure and suffering. They rescue from oblivion the dimensions of our
social and personal relations in which advances in cultural and social ratio-

alization have caused utter devastation. Who is to say that they do not
contain encoded semantic potentialities that could provide inspiration if
only their message were translated into rational discourse and their profane
truth contents were set free.”12

Increasingly Habermas has challenged secular and post-metaphysical
thinkers to be aware of their own historical limitations and the fallible nature
of their efforts to build the good society, enjoining them to re-think their
attitude toward religion: “The insight that vibrant world religions may be
bearers of ‘truth contents,’ in the sense of suppressed or untapped moral
intuitions, is by no means a given for the secular portion of the population.
A genealogical awareness of the religious origins of the morality of equal
respect for everybody is helpful in this context. The occidental develop-
ment has been shaped by the fact that philosophy continuously appropriates
semantic contents from the Judeo-Christian tradition; and it is an open
question whether this centuries-long learning process can be continued or
even remains unfinished.”13

His shift in thinking has important implications for our consideration of
the relationship between religion and peace. On the one hand, it represents
a respectful shift toward a greater appreciation for religion. On the other
hand, his shift also falls short of what believers and other faith-friendly
thinkers would prefer. This falling short lies in the traditional difference
between religion’s function, referring to the psychological or social effects
of belief, and religion’s meaning, that is, its ability to truthfully illuminate
the nature of reality. Habermas has come to appreciate the ongoing func-
tion of religion for billions of human beings in the modern world, even
though he cannot entirely affirm the truths which religious believers claim.

Nevertheless, for peace advocates this is a step in the right direction.
After all, religion has clearly not gone away, whether one likes it or not. It
is a force that must be reckoned with. Moreover, religion has dual capacities
that are essential to peace. The first is its conservative or communitarian
capacity to generate and sustain traditional moral virtues and values and
undergird social stability and bonds of trust and solidarity, such as family and
community. The second is its more prophetic, emancipatory capacity that
has given rise to levels of commitment and sacrifice that have contributed
to moral awakenings and social transformation.
I believe Habermas has an appreciation for both these capacities within religion.

HABERMAS: FROM THE LINGUISTIFICATION OF THE SACRED TO THE POST-SECULAR PUBLIC SPHERE

Habermas, now 82, remains very active and prolific. The corpus of Habermas’ own writings is enormous, and the secondary literature makes up a massive bibliography. Having lived through the aftermath of Naziism, Habermas was existentially familiar with the dangers of anti-Enlightenment and tradition-driven ideologies and oppressive political systems that gave no allowance for dissent. In 1953, Habermas challenged Heidegger and the German intellectual establishment for failing to stand up against Naziism.

Habermas’ dissertation at the University of Bonn, in 1954, was on the thought of Schelling, and his habilitation was published in 1962, entitled Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. In this work Habermas reveals “his interest in a communicative ideal that later would provide the core normative standard for his moral-political theory: the idea of inclusive critical discussion, free of social and economic pressures, in which interlocutors treat each other as equals in cooperative attempt to reach an understanding on matters of common concern.”

In some ways we can say that the prevailing theme of Habermas’ work is the effort to establish the normative foundations for a rational public sphere, characterized by “communicative action” that seeks consensus, free from the dominating effects of money and power. The “ideal speech situation” allows for inclusion, non-coercion and equality of participation.

In this respect, we can see Habermas as one who upholds the ideal of universalism which affirms universally applicable moral standards and procedures that provide the conditions that help assure legitimate outcomes. In this regard, Habermas stands within the Kantian tradition of German philosophy, though he has made a linguistic turn away from consciousness...
philosophy, i.e., transcendental or universal norms are rooted in the moral presuppositions of speech itself. As a social theorist, Habermas continues Max Weber’s analysis of the emergence of western rationality as the central characteristic of modernity, underlying the rise of science, democratic institutions, secularization and the Enlightenment.

Habermas’ most systematic work is *The Theory of Communicative Action (TCA)*, published in Germany in 1981. Communicative action, unlike strategic action, seeks understanding; its *telos* is to achieve agreement based on normatively regulated communication, rather than by manipulation or domination.

Habermas also differentiates between “system” and “lifeworld.” The former has to do with the operation of markets, bureaucratic administration and political power. The latter refers to our life within interactive communities, such as family, neighborhood, religious and ethnic community, or the public political sphere. The lifeworld is a public sphere, and, in order to protect it as a realm of communicative action, effort must be made to prevent the “colonization of the lifeworld” by instruments of money and power. The “lifeworld” should be increasingly guided by communicative rationality, as manifest, for example, in the communicative practices of scientific, academic or even many civil society communities. For Habermas, rationality is manifest most fundamentally in dialogue or discourse that aims toward uncoerced consensus, a consensus that represents the unforced force of the best argument.

The rise of the public sphere, according to Habermas, emerged as the power of traditional worldviews began to diminish. As human beings developed the capacity to reflect on themselves, their beliefs, their traditions, and their worldviews, there is a natural distancing from tradition. This has been the underlying process that has yielded the modern world. As previously mentioned, Habermas spoke in *TCA* about the “linguistification of the sacred” suggesting that the authority and power of the sacred was gradually shifting from traditional religion to the realm of communicative action.

Such a perspective is generally consistent with the view that religious worldviews and traditions will gradually weaken, and greater distance will emerge between modernity and traditional ways of life. However, the conflict between tradition and modernity, the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, has not resulted in an unqualified victory for modernity, led
by its seemingly superior rationality. In some sense, the voices of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Gadamer and contemporary post-modernists and deconstructionists have not been put to rest. The hegemony of reason, and indeed its emancipatory claims, have been challenged. Habermas is very aware of this reality and recognizes the poverty of rationality when it comes to securing the foundations for moral commitment and social solidarity.

Upon receiving the Peace Prize of German Booksellers in late September 2001, Jurgen Habermas called upon secularists to awaken to the relevance and significance of religious beliefs.\(^{16}\) This marked something of a turning point for Habermas, whose philosophy, up until that time, had paid little respectful attention to religion.

In 2004, Habermas engaged in dialogue with fellow German and Roman Catholic theologian, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who now serves as Pope Benedict XVI. Their dialogue considered the foundations of the good society. Habermas reflects on the “pre-political” conditions necessary for constitutional democracy and traditions of human rights. Habermas states, “We find in sacred scriptures and religious traditions intuitions about error and redemption, about the salvific exodus from a life that is experienced as empty of salvations; these have been elaborated in a subtle manner over the course of millennia and have been kept alive through a process of interpretation. This is why something can remain alive in the communal life of religious fellowships…..something that has been lost elsewhere and that cannot be restored by the professional knowledge of experts alone.”\(^{17}\)

Habermas suggests that philosophy often transforms the religious meaning of terms, and such has been the interplay of Christianity and Greek metaphysics. For example, the theological concept of “man in the image of God” has been transformed to “the identical dignity of all men that deserves unconditional respect.”\(^{18}\) These reflections lead Habermas to speak of the “post-secular society.” Habermas states, “When secularized citizens

---

“This is why something can remain alive in the communal life of religious fellowships... something that has been lost elsewhere and that cannot be restored by the professional knowledge of experts alone.”
act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth.”19

In his response to Habermas, Ratzinger states that “I am in broad agreement with Jurgen Habermas remarks about a postsecular society, about the willingness to learn from each other, and about self-limitation on both [secular reason and faith] sides.” Ratzinger adds that “Religion must continually allow itself to be purified and structured by reason.”20 In this way, religion may correct its pathologies. But similarly, there are pathologies of reason, rooted in the hubris of reason. Hence “reason, too, must be warned to keep within its proper limits, and it must learn a willingness to listen to the great religious traditions of mankind.” Otherwise, reason becomes destructive.

Ratzinger goes on to speak of the need for complementarity of faith and reason, and a “universal process of purifications” that includes the need to engage other civilizations and their great faith traditions, thereby avoiding a Eurocentric view of the dialogue between faith and reason.21 Alternatively, Habermas calls believers to develop capacities to translate their religious ideas and ideals into language that is publicly accessible to those who do not share the religious worldview from which the ideals have emerged.

Since his dialogue with Ratzinger, Habermas has continued to reflect further on the role of religion. Although he remains committed to methodological atheism qua philosopher and social scientist, even as a social scientist he appreciates both the poverty of pure rationality and the limits of a public sphere or democratic system guided by “reason alone.” In some respects one can see Habermas retrieving his Weberian roots, though of course Weber saw religion as the primary causal factor in the rise of modernity. Habermas seems to recognize that religion is here to stay and, moreover, can do things or does things that rationality alone cannot achieve.

In a more recent interview with Eduardo Mendieta, Habermas says, and I quote at some length:
In the West, Christianity not only fulfilled the cognitive initial conditions for modern structures of consciousness; it also demanded a range of motivations that were the great theme of the economic and ethical research of Max Weber. For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideal of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical re-appropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk.”

This represents a highly nuanced position that affirms religion’s ongoing role, even a central role in history, while at the same time affirming the domains of reason and science. Yet this affirmation of religion cannot lead to triumphalism, for two reasons. First of all, the significance of rationality cannot be denied or rejected by religion. Furthermore, religion, in the modern context, cannot escape the plural multiplicity of religious claims to truth and wisdom, not all of which claims are overlapping or compatible.

Hence, religion inhabits a world where the existence of both reason and other religions requires of believers humility. Habermas states, ”Thus modern faith becomes reflexive. Only thorough self-criticism can it stabilize the inclusive attitude that it assumes within a universe of discourse, delimited by secular knowledge and shared by other religions.” Moreover, Habermas continues, “This de-centered background consciousness of the relativity of one’s own standpoint certainly does not necessarily lead to the relativization of articles of faith themselves, but it is nevertheless characteristic of the modern form of religion’s faith.”

Habermas does call into question the tendency found in all religions, if not in all worldviews, toward fundamentalism. He says, “We call ‘fundamentalisms’ those religious movements which, given the cognitive limits of modern life, nevertheless persist in practicing or promoting a return to the exclusivity of premodern religious attitudes. Fundamentalism lacks the
epistemic innocence of those long-ago realms in which the world religions first flourished, and which could somehow still be experienced as limitless.” Religion today must endure the “secularization of knowledge” and the “pluralism of world pictures.”

Habermas adds, “I would not object to the claim that my conception of language and of communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding nourishes itself from the legacy of Christianity. The ‘telos of reaching understanding—the concept of discursively directed agreement which measures itself against the standard of intersubjective recognition, that is, the double negation of criticizable validity claims—may well nourish itself from the heritage of a logos understood as Christian, one that is indeed embodied (and not just with the Quakers) in the communicative practice of the religious congregation.”

The problem of the system is that the instrumental rationality that guides it cannot also generate moral vision, commitment and solidarity. These arise from the lifeworld, or from traditions, and primarily from religion.

The problem of the system is that the instrumental rationality that guides it cannot also generate moral vision, commitment and solidarity. These arise from the lifeworld, or from traditions, and primarily from religion. The secularist’s anticipation that religion’s capacity to generate moral commitment would mature and be translated into post-religious forms has not been fulfilled. Likewise the view that secularization was both inevitable and universal has failed to play itself out.

At the same time, religions face their own dilemma. On the one hand, religion is confronted with the impact of reflexivity that arises from the fact of pluralism, even the so-called incommensurability of various “language games” of particular religious subcultures. That is, each community comes
to recognize that it is one community, worldview and lifeworld among many others, each of which may have both similar and competing claims concerning matters of truth and goodness. On the other hand, the religions seek to find ways to relate to one another by appeal to shared universal principles. From where do these universal principles arise if not from within their own traditions; alternatively, if their tradition has little or nothing to say about engaging in dialogue with others, then that leaves little room for dialogue as a common search for truth and goodness.

TRADITIONS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

We have seen that Habermas seeks to prevent the weakening of communicative spheres of life, the public sphere, that results from the overwhelming expansion of the systemic forces of money and power. In addition, he seeks to uphold a universalist moral ideal, arguing that there are, in fact, universal moral principles that every moral agent presupposes and implicitly affirms each time they engage in speech acts aimed at making validity claims about matters of truth or rightness or authenticity, etc. That is, we each presuppose that the process of reaching an understanding should ideally be guided by reason rather than force, inclusive participation rather than exclusion, and openness to the force of the better argument rather than an unwillingness to consider other perspectives.

It is not merely the unchecked power of the “system” that threatens communicative action; it is also threatened by the historicists who reject universalism and proclaim the radical alterity and incommensurable plurality of the various forms of life that make up our world. Habermas seeks to stand against the tide or relativism that rejects the existence of foundations for moral universalism.

This is why, for Habermas, there is need to uphold the universality of discourse ethics, which provides the standards that underlie rational communication among communicators who represent diverse, plural traditions. If he can secure the normative rules and procedures for rational communication that yields legitimate outcomes, then this can contribute
to peace and the establishment of a cosmopolitan order. Nicholas Adams has said, in *Habermas and Theology*, “He rightly claims that the plurality of worldviews does not simply produce a lovely rainbow of differences but throws up profound challenges to how argumentation in the public sphere is to proceed. He also wishes to point his readers in the direction of an approach that might coordinate different traditions in the public sphere in a way that fosters non-violent argumentation and what he calls ‘symmetrical relations’ between participants in dialogue.” Adams states that Habermas is “insistent on the priority of peace.”

As he seeks to steer a course between Kant’s universalist ethics and Hegel’s understanding that the moral life, *sittlichkeit*, is always embedded in historical contexts, he faces challenges. The logic of Kant leads to a public sphere that is populated by transcendental subjects who stand outside of history’s messy particularities. The logic of Hegel leads to acceptance that knowing subjects are never outside of history; we are each embedded in universal history, and a *zeitgeist* from which there is no escape. This dilemma is also seen in Habermas’ view of religion. While he approves of modernity’s shift away from religious worldviews, he nevertheless cannot find any substitute for religion’s capacity to inspire hope and redemptive activism. Philosophy falls short of religion’s capacity in this regard. Where philosophy, and the realm of *logos* fall short, religion, and the realm of *mythos*, has the capacity “to supply its members with substantive ethical commitments which can then be coordinated via discourse ethics.”

Despite tipping his hat to religion, Habermas’ views are off-putting to any serious believer. For, concerning matters of God and salvation, he remains agnostic at best. Yet, given his theological limitations, he does provide a rational basis for dialogue, and argumentation, among traditions, and in this respect he does not abandon the public sphere to a “Babel” of competing evangelical orations, kind of like a “Hyde Park Corner” wherein each tradition has its chance to proclaim and share its narrative.
Of course, we also know that there exists within most religious traditions a call to hospitality and openness and care for the stranger and the other, including the non-believer. That is, there are resources for a call to dialogue within various scriptures. Habermas, however, doesn’t have a starting point in scripture. Thus, his message may be most relevant to those who are disinterested, negligent, or prejudicial in their attitudes toward people of faith.

All human communities benefit from rules of communication and argumentation for the peaceful, and reasonable settlement of disagreements. In this respect, Habermas’ effort to establish the ground rules for the public sphere is very important for peace.

Critics of Habermas point to the Hegelian critique of Kant, stating that even principles of criticism emerge from particular, historical forms of life; moreover, that human subjects are shaped less by abstract philosophical ideas than by historical narratives. As Nocholas Adams points out, many who challenge Habermas’ ideas often cite the distinction between narrative and argumentation, or between world-disclosing ways to wisdom that may come through literature or sacred texts and logical, rational approaches to problem-solving. For the former, we move toward truth and consensus by the power of the more compelling narrative. For the latter, we move toward truth and consensus through structured communicative action.

Habermas makes a distinction between a “normatively ascribed” agreement that is based on acceptance of a shared tradition and “communicatively achieved” consensus which may be obtained between persons of different traditions. The challenge is to find a way to accommodate both perspectives. Are they antithetical or complementary? What do faith and reason, Jerusalem and Athens, Caesar and the Pope, the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas terrena*, have to do with one another? Do they complement one another? Is there some way the domain of Cain and that of Abel can find a way to work together. Is this not the essence of peacebuilding?

**COMMUNICATION ETHICS, RELIGION AND THE UNITED NATIONS**

If we consider a document such as the charter of the United Nations, which speaks in secular language, we can recognize that this secular, political language is indebted to concepts formerly embedded in religious worldviews.
Throughout its history, the UN has had only nation-states as its members. Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, may be affiliated with the United Nations either through the Department of Public Information or the Economic and Social Council, but they are not members. There are several thousand NGOs affiliated with the United Nations. Many of these are faith-based organizations. Traditionally the place of religion and religious voices has not been centrally positioned within the UN system.

However, in the year 2000, things began to change. Just prior to the convening of the UN’s Millennium General Assembly, which attracted the largest number of heads of state and government ever assembled and which produced the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, two important events took place. One was the convening of a congress of spiritual leaders in New York, known as the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders; this conference addressed such topics as peace, poverty and sustainable development. A second, and more sustained program, was convened also in August under the sponsorship of the Universal Peace Federation [at that time known as the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace], founded by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, who delivered an address at the United Nations, calling for the establishment of an interreligious council within the United Nations system. Moon argued that with the creation of such a council, making the United Nations a kind of bicameral house, the UN “will be able to make great advances in ushering in a world of peace. The wisdom and vision of the great religious leaders will substantially supplement the political insight, experience and skill of the world’s political leaders.”

Since the Millenium General Assembly, significant advances have been made in terms of the United Nations signaling a more accommodating position vis a vis religion. In 2004, a resolution, sponsored by the Philippines, was passed by the General Assembly (59/23), calling for the “Promotion of Interreligious Dialogue.” In 2006 a Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace was called for, aiming at partnership among the member states, the UN bodies, and NGOs. In 2007, General Assembly Resolution 61/221 called for the establishment of a Focal Unit in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In December 2009, the General Assembly adopted a resolution 64/81 calling for the Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue. In 2010, H.M. King Abdullah II
of Jordan introduced a proposal calling for a week dedicated to interfaith harmony. On this foundation, in October of 2010, a resolution of the General Assembly was passed calling for a “World Interfaith Harmony Week” to be celebrated each year during the first week of February. Throughout this same ten-year period, both the former Secretary General, Kofi Annan, and the current Secretary, General Ban Ki Moon, have frequently included in their speeches references to the significance of interfaith dialogue for efforts to secure a lasting peace. The Office of the President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly, H.E. Nasir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, is preparing a special session in the General Assembly, scheduled for February 7, 2012, in honor of the “World Interfaith Harmony Week.”

These developments are concurrent with the growth of a post-secular consciousness that, while it may not itself be a religious awakening, is nonetheless an awareness that religion should no longer be excluded or marginalized, or viewed as uniquely disqualified to participate openly in the public sphere. Even if religion’s weaknesses and historical sins are acknowledged, this in no way should disqualify religion from being fully welcomed in the company of equally, and sometimes more seriously flawed, diplomats, political leaders, governments, NGOs, and private sector representatives.

I believe Habermas’ insights are quite relevant to the United Nations, and to religion, in three very important respects. First of all, his analysis of the public sphere and the effort to build a cosmopolitan order, as the fulfillment of the “Enlightenment project,” building on the normative ideal of the communication community seeking consensus in the public sphere, guided by the “unforced force of the better argument,” provides a strong theoretical foundation for the United Nations, and indeed the reform of the United Nations, widely recognized as appropriate and necessary at this stage. In this respect, the UN is a communication community, seeking to fulfill the telos of speech, namely, a consensus based on reason, and free from the...
non-discursive forces of money and power. As Habermas has stated, “I have been concerned with the postnational constellation and the future of the Kantian project of establishing a cosmopolitan order.” He says further, “The Kantian project only found its way onto the political agenda with the League of Nations, in other words after more than two centuries; and the idea of a cosmopolitan order only acquired an institutional embodiment with the foundation of the United Nations.”

Yet, it is widely recognized that the United Nations faces enormous challenges, many of which are beyond the scope of the traditional nation-state or the traditional operating principle of the United Nations: national sovereignty. Habermas points out that “The nation-states have long since become entangled in the interdependencies of a complex world society. The latter’s sub-systems effortlessly permeate national borders—with accelerated information and communication flows, worldwide movements of capital, networks of trade and production, technology transfers, mass tourism, labor migration, scientific communication, etc.” Moreover, “This global society is also integrated through the same media of power, money, and consensus as the nation-states.”

Transnational networks continue to develop, enhanced by digital technologies. Habermas notes that these “networked flows of information” have a wide impact. He says, for example, “Beyond the nation-state, vertical power-based dependencies are receding behind horizontal interactions and functional interconnections.” These views are consistent with the analysis of the “High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change,” commissioned during the tenure of Kofi Annan, and which produced the report, A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility.

Habermas suggests that there is a growing cosmopolitan order, and a rising sense of transnational citizenship, a reality that is implied in the concept of human rights, and implied in the limits that such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights places on national sovereignty. He sees this growing “public sphere” in a variety of manifestations: “Decisions taken at the supranational level concerning war and peace and justice and injustice do indeed attract the attention and critical responses of a global public—just think of the interventions in Vietnam, Kosovo, and Iraq, and the cases of Pinochet, Milosevic, and Saddam. The dispersed society of world citizens becomes mobilized on an ad hoc basis through
spontaneous responses to events and decisions of such import. Shared moral indignation extends across the gulfs separating different cultures, forms of life, and religions as a response to egregious human rights violations and manifest acts of aggression. Such shared reactions, including those spawned by sympathy for the victims of humanitarian and natural disasters, gradually produce traces of cosmopolitan solidarity.  

Habermas’ theory of the public sphere and the rise of a global society and global solidarity provide important analytical tools that may serve to guide the United Nations toward reforms relevant to the global changes that have taken place since 1945.

The second way in which Habermas provides valuable insights relevant to the reform of the United Nations is in the area of religion. In the foregoing discussion, we have seen Habermas articulate the need for a revision of secularism’s unenlightened dismissal of religion. The Enlightenment project that, at least to some extent, found its ideals embodied in the United Nations, is in need of correction. Religion cannot be ignored, and neither can it be viewed as irrelevant, nor as merely a nuisance or menace. On the contrary, on a functional level, religion is profoundly important for most of the world’s people. It is virtually impossible to imagine global citizenship without recognizing that the vast majority of such citizens are believers who do not view their beliefs as quaint curiosities.

Additionally, while affirming the functionality of religion, Habermas also concedes the meaningfulness of religion, admitting that its world-disclosing narratives, guiding principles and truth claims cannot be summarily dismissed, for they have, historically, served as the basis for many, if not most of the ideals that inspire humanity to its highest and most noble achievements. This is not to ignore the many pathological, immature, and distorted expressions of religion.

Based on Habermas’ analysis, however, we can to see the legitimacy of the claim that religion should have a place at the table in a reformed United Nations system.

Finally, the ideal of the communication community also serves as a very important regulative ideal for interfaith dialogue, offering a normative framework for believers of various religions to improve their intersubjective relations, both internally among fellow-believers, as well as with believers of other traditions. The secularization of most modern societies, coupled
with the empirical, social reality of pluralism, has had a marginalizing impact on traditional worldviews. Traditional worldviews and religions have been called to a form of self-reflection that results in situating themselves historically and comparatively within the broader scheme of things. This outcome is very difficult to avoid. Habermas states, “Every religion is originally a ‘worldview’ or ‘comprehensive doctrine’ in the sense that it claims authority to structure a form of life in its entirety. A religion must relinquish this claim within a secularized society marked by a pluralism of worldviews.”

This assertion is of course problematic for believers, both those who deny the historicity and fallibility of their tradition, call them fundamentalists, and those who accept historical situatedness and fallibilism, call them liberals. There are, however, ways to engage in self-reflection and self-criticism while maintaining a faithful commitment to the truth one has come to know. In a certain sense, any deeply-held truth may be questioned, challenged and even may be proven to be flawed. Believers should always remain open in this sense. In fact, although doctrinal absolutism may be the norm for religion, there are theological perspectives which acknowledge a gap between human knowledge of truth and the reality of God and the ways of God. Most notably the field of hermeneutics has taught us that there are no uninterpreted texts. That is, texts are always interpreted by particular historical human beings. We cannot escape our particularity.

Habermas speaks of a “dialectical understanding of cultural secularization,” stating that the “modernization of public consciousness….affects and changes religious and secular mentalities alike by forcing the tradition of the Enlightenment, as well as religious doctrines, to reflect on their respective limits, then the international tensions between major cultures and world religions also appear in a different light.” For example, the liberal state protects religious freedom in accordance with secular law and human rights, and religions respect the state for providing such a realm...
of freedom; religions also tolerate, and in some cases respect or appreciate the other religious worldviews. This does not require that one embrace a relativistic view of truth or belief.

In a post-secular world, religion is increasingly less marginalized or excluded from the public sphere. Exclusion would be a denial of the historical and cultural roots of most societies, nation states and civilizations; exclusion would also represent a failure to acknowledge the religious roots of even secularized concepts and norms. This has implications for politics and international relations, and transnational relations, including the United Nations, as has been said. The steady rise of interfaith dialogue and intrafaith dialogue over the past 120 years, dating back to the 1893 Parliament of the World’s Religions convened at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, is itself a developmental step in the history of religion that was not anticipated by secularization theorists. Interfaith dialogue is a particular public sphere that works to improve the intersubjectivity of believers across various traditions. In many ways, the interfaith “movement” is a forerunner of the broader interfaith public sphere that is the very character of most of our communities; we live not only in a multi-ethnic, multi-religions world, but also in multi-faith neighborhoods, cities and nations.

Religion is here to stay for it is an expression of our need to understand our ultimate origins, our human condition and our ultimate destiny. Neither science, nor secular society has been able to supplant either the function of religion or the meaning it provides.

Notes


4. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 43.
7. Ibid. p. 88.
8. Ibid., 198.
17. Ibid. p. 43.
18. Ibid. p. 45.
19. Ibid. p. 15.
20. Ibid., p. 77.
21. Ibid., p. 79.
23. Ibid., p. 150.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 160.

28. Ibid., p. 236.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 239.


32. Ibid. p. 22.


34. Ibid., p. 333.

35. Ibid., p. 347.


37. Ibid., p. 344.

38. Ibid., p. 307.

39. Ibid.
SUBMISSIONS AND ORDERS

COMMENTARY, ARTICLES, MISCELLANY, BOOK REVIEWS

1. Footnotes: end of MS, as Notes. Double-spaced. Number serially: 1, 2, 3...
2. Avoid abbreviations.
3. Be consistent in ALL respects.
4. Polish entire MS very carefully.
5. Double-space everything. E-mail submissions preferred.
6. Abstract for article: about 100 words. Third person.
7. Vita for article: about 100 words. Stress training, positions, publications. Third person.
8. Keep a copy of every manuscript you submit.

Send Articles, Commentary, and Book Reviews via:

- Email (preferred): submissions@ijwp.org
- By post to: *International Journal on World Peace*
  1925 Oakcrest Avenue, Suite 7
  St. Paul, MN 55113-2619 USA

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

Individuals, $25.00 per year; institutions, $35.00 per year. For international surface mail add $20.00. Back Issues may be ordered for $8.00 each, plus shipping.

Send to: *International Journal on World Peace*
Subcription Department
1925 Oakcrest Avenue, Suite 7
St. Paul, MN 55113-2619 USA

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

If you move, send a postcard with your complete old and new addresses to the Subscription Department. This will prevent any delays in receiving the journal.