After September 11th: Religion, Diversity, and Social Cohesion under Globalisation

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The paper introduces the conceptual framework that gave rise to this collection of essays in one volume. It briefly describes the event which brought scholars together to discuss issues of religion and diversity twelve months after the events of September 11th 2001. The authors argue for three organising themes for thinking through these issues, put briefly: the changing nature of religious identity, growing religious diasporas and multi-faith societies, and the emergent notion of global risk as a mechanism of nation-state and multilateral relations with religious formations. The article is critical of the notion of social capital as it is commonly used, arguing that this concept subsumes religious, spiritual and community life under a category that is insidiously instrumental.

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This collection of papers grew out of a three day colloquium on Religion and Globalization hosted by the RMIT Globalism Institute in Melbourne in September 2002, commemorating the first anniversary of the September 11th events in the United States. The colloquium was a collaboration between RMIT and UCLA in association with the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). About forty scholars, researchers and religious leaders came together to reflect on the aftermath of "9/11" or "S11", as it has come to be known (displacing the other lesser-known and very different September 11's of Chile and Melbourne) and on the deeper theoretical and practical issues that pertain to the interface between faith communities, cultures and societies in a globalizing world. If it was not already glaringly apparent, S11 has brought religion back to the centre stage of social and political commentary and concern, and is likely to remain one of the key concerns of social theorists and observers over the next decade.

The events of September 11 and their aftermath of cynical warfare and misplaced reprisals have brought into sharp focus the intensification of connections between religion and key aspects of globalization. These include the formation of cultural, linguistic and religious diasporas, transnational faith communities, the tension between heterogeneity and homogenization, the consequences of the

politics of identity and of grievance, the reinvigoration and invention of different types of fundamentalisms and religious revivalisms that cut across assumptions that modernisation leads to secularisation, the emergence and growth of newer global religious movements, the unmooring of identities, the ambivalence of 'home', the changing role and repositioning of the nation state with the rise of global cities and the apparently endless growth in urban-rural division. Religion is at the core, or close to the core, of most of these issues.

Nothing illustrates these ambivalences quite so succinctly as the pronouncements directly surrounding the destruction of the World Trade Centre and the resulting deaths. The spontaneous creation of shrines and memorials on the fence surrounding the site and other parts of New York City were not unlike the wayside shrines and memorials created at the sites of car fatalities. These memorials sometimes adopt a religious character or religious symbolism, but are joined by national flags, photos, love-letters and other memorabilia in the service of an often secular or pan-faith testament to the bonds of affection, family love and the routines of daily life which have been so violently broken. These memorials, even the most secular, sacralise the memory of the fallen. Cusack and Digance (in this volume) provide a fascinating account of various secular and religious responses to the September 11 events. They point to the complexities and variety of spiritual responses to the notion of national trauma. In the context of the World Trade Centre memorialising there was another illustrative ambivalence: we were frequently reminded by media reports and official pronouncements that a large number of the people killed in the World Trade Centre were both elite multinational workers and low-wage casual and illegal immigrant workers from many countries. At times the events of that day were represented as a tragic, shared loss for the global community, but more commonly the events have been remembered and sacralised as a specifically national 'American' tragedy, as part of a campaign for the very 'American' responses and reprisals that we have seen in the past two years.

The immediate task of the colloquium was to map the key issues at this point in the interface between religion and globalization. Some of the fundamental questions that emerged were: how do religious organizations and traditions engage with the political dimensions of social life in a globalizing world while attempting to remain loyal to their religious and spiritual traditions? What was the role of faith communities in the so-called Dialogue among Civilizations, being debated in the UN in November 2001 and can religions help provide the hoped-for, but perhaps illusory 'peace dividend' promised by the boosters of globalization? There was much talk at the colloquium of the fashionable concept of 'social capital' as some of the papers in this collection attest, talk that raises as many questions for studies of religion as it appears to answer: might it not also be possible that the mode of thought that abstracts the social as a support to processes of accumulation and exploitation might be offensive to the masses of the world's populations and their various religions for whom the social is a sacred manifestation of forces beyond accumulation of surplus value? What becomes of 'social capital' if the social is a 'divine' end in itself? While certain kinds of religious identity seem to

be at the core of much contemporary violence and destruction, perhaps there remains in these tarnished traditions, the core of something that might offer a way out of the even greater destruction we are bringing on each other through these global processes of hyper-accumulation and exploitation.

Variants of the social capital argument, according to Scanlon (2000, 57) take it as an article of faith that "the renaissance of community (is linked) to the proliferation of new technologies, particularly telecommunications and information technologies. Community is claimed to offer the 'optimal', even natural setting for economic, political and social organization in a pluralistic, globalized information society. ...they claim that community can be rethought in the form of the networks of information and economic exchange that underlie late capitalism." In this context public discussion about the revolution in information technologies have moved from a consideration of information technology (IT) focussed on the technologies themselves, to ICT emphasising their communications aspect, to IST emphasising the social. The IST research emphasis, especially in Europe, is being linked to the notion of society and its interface with virtual realities and the impact on social relationships such as cyber-dating, cyber-stalking and cyber-sex. Local lives as embodied persons have been conjoined with virtual worlds as virtual beings with instant global contact for more and more people educated under regimes of modernity. In such a world with new technologies and new understandings, the place of religion has become a reanimated problematic. This dynamic includes all the inclusiveness and sense of belonging that comes with identifying with a global religious diaspora, and at the same time the dark underbelly that fosters new fundamentalisms. Is it coincidental that one of the heartlands for support for India's Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has come from the highly educated and wealthy Hindu diaspora located in California's Silicon Valley? The online chauvinist assertions of Hindu nationalists offer little comfort to enthusiasts for online community as a building block of social capital.

The disconnection of identity from situated community has liberated a new international diaspora of fundamentalisms from the lived consequences of their ideological attachments. Much as the London-based hyper-profiteers of high imperialism were insulated from the consequences of their fundamentalist attachments to accumulation of wealth (while ignoring its distribution), so too, cyber-nationalists and other fundamentalists have been able to support violent communalist causes insulated from their consequences. The Hindutva phantasm of an India without Muslims, or Jamat Islamia's greater-Indonesia without non-believers is really only possible from a disembodied space outside a lived collectivity. As Ashis Nandy (2003) has pointed out, contrary to official state ideologies of multiculturalism (and church ecumenism), the secret to communal harmony may well lie in retaining the right to dislike the other communities of religion, caste and nation with whom one shares a social space, but to simultaneously find life without them inconceivable.

In many parts of the world religion has become more public as it engages with the new technologies of proselytism and missionisation, except perhaps in the

Western developed countries where, with clericalism in its death throes, it decays behind closed doors. In the main religion in the media-focussed first world has been privatised and relativised, conspicuous for its emergence on occasions of particular national tragedies such as the death of an English princess, the launching of an (all too frequent) war with divine blessings being sought for the troops of a supposedly secular state, and of course the September 11 events. Religion still retains its potency as a political force, as seen in the rise of the BJP in India, in the emergence of charismatic and evangelical movements in European-heritage countries, Islam and Judaism being used as bludgeons in the politics of the middle east, and the rise of the Falun Gong in contemporary China just to name a few examples.

Just as religion has retained its potency in the social sphere, so it has also retained its capacity to be manipulated. Religion has been a factor in almost all local conflicts in Africa as well as being a positive factor in reconciliation in Sierra Leone in 1999 and 2000; religion-based identity was a factor in the various stages of the recent Balkans saga, and religion remains an underlying factor in the major state-sponsored conflict hotspots such as Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Chechnya and Iraq. Perhaps most disturbingly, religious fundamentalism may be driving the political core of the most dangerously armed state that the world has ever known, with massive stockpiles of chemical, nuclear and biological weapons and a proven history of using them: the United States. As both Tariq Ali (2003) and Talal Asad (2003) remind us, the Bush administration is funded, staffed and held captive by a constituency that believes the Iraq war is a step closer to the divine plan of Armageddon, by anti-Semites who have made a strategic alliance with Israeli fundamentalists in their continued assault on Palestinian aspirations, and who have reanimated discredited notions of manifest destiny.

The colloquium was asked to consider three organising themes affecting the notion and practices of religion in the context of globalisation. These three themes were roughly characterised as the following: religion and the global politics of identity; global ethnic and religious diaspora and the formation of multi-faith societies; and the emergent notion of global risk as a mechanism of nation-state and multilateral relations with religious formations.

1. Religion and the Global Politics of Identity

Partly as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, highlighted by the events of S11 and its aftermath, there has been a reconfiguration of the politics of identity, the politics of memory, and the politics of retribution. At the last Assembly of the World Conference of Religion and Peace[1], held in Amman in November 1999, its Secretary-General, Dr. William Vendley (1999: 1) stated the new post Cold War context:

> The end of the ideologically based proxy wars in the East-West competition of the Cold War has given way to the rapid proliferation of smaller scale, more localised armed conflicts. Increasingly people have

sought security through identification with a group closer to their own experience and over which they have some control. Most violent conflicts today occur between identity groups within national boundaries, making them inter-group in character and internal or intra-national in scope. Group identity may be based on some mix of ethnicity, clan, race or geographical affiliation, but it also typically involves religious factors. Recent examples complement more ancient ones in illustrating that religion, insofar as it is related to how a people or culture define themselves, can be manipulated to become a factor in this type of conflict.

Since 1989, there have been approximately 110 armed conflicts, eight between States while the rest are intra-State in nature. Part of this scenario is the emergence of non-State actors such as local and international warlords, ethnically or religiously motivated terrorist groups and money oriented criminal groups involved in the illegal drug or diamond trade and laundering money through safe havens.

Those religious movements which are commonly described as fundamentalist are generally anti-modern in outlook while being distinctly modern in formation, method and orientation. Peter Van der Veer (1994) has described this as "religious nationalism", however there seems to be something more than this at stake when many of these movements display a distinctly transnational or even anti-national dimension. Their claims to be maintaining, or more often claiming to re-enact the more pure traditions of the past in a corrupted present, while conducting a thoroughly modern jihad/crusade/holy war (take your pick). In this common faith narrative, believers in the current epoch have become corrupted, weak and in need of salvation in the form of a resurgence of the word, the book or the way, with an emphasis on the unflinching singularity of that way to the exclusion of all others. Reflecting modernity, this religious modality shows a distinct intolerance for ambiguity, plurality or femininity, prioritising action over reflection, and recasting the role of believers as hard-core action men in the service of an aggressively masculine divine. In this collection Vinay Lal describes this phenomenon and its complexity among the Hindu diaspora of the United States. Lal makes the point that this extremely successful and newly assertive 'Non-Resident Indian' population of high-tech professionals and business people suffers an anxiety of influence that wishes to see India, and by extension Hinduism, assert itself as an aggressive, military world force.

This is public religion in competition with (and reflection of) Hollywood, new media, the everyday allure of commodities and the way of life commodification brings with it to all dimensions of the social, including religion. In the fundamentalist rejection of the West, commodity fetishism, and the supposed moral decay of late modernity, religion is recast as a distinctly modern mirror of these phenomena, and in the mediatised world, as increasingly postmodern phenomena: Dalai Lama merchandise, Pope-mobiles and telecasts, Osama t-shirts, websites and computer games. Van der Veer's more recent work (2001) shows that notions like secularism and religious fundamentalism which are assumed to be opposites are in fact intimately intertwined. Thus it should be no

surprise when we find that the key cadre of fundamentalist movements are very often highly educated in the technical sciences with very intimate and extended contact with the west.

At a different end of the scale, Adam Possamai (this collection) describes the ways in which the technologies of globalisation give rise to new forms of religion, that even play at the edges of what religiosity is conventionally thought to be. Where does the growing religious affiliation from the most recent Australian census, 'Jedi', fit in notions of serious ecumenism? Is the Jedi faith an instance of postmodern irony mocking the notion of religious identity, or an emerging spiritual path derived from a series of Hollywood films? It would not be the first time film has given rise to a deity, the cult of the Hindu Goddess 'Santoshi Ma' was spawned from a successful Bollywood film by the same name in the 1970's. The work of Possamai on New Age movements, reflected further in Bouma's close look at the Australian census materials, raises more questions about the status of religious identity. It appears that in conditions of advanced modernity, religion has to some extent become unmoored from community, making shifts across religious identities or affiliations more common and easier. Is this the emergence of a more cosmopolitan, less partisan approach to spiritual life, less attached to the hierarchies and institutions of established religion, or is it simply a reflection of the pick and choose identities of contemporary consumer-oriented societies such as Australia? One of the refreshing characteristics of this freedom or fluidity of identity is a turn to an emphasis on the experience of spiritual life, a concern with practice and encounter, over doctrine, obedience and belonging.

2. Global Ethnic and Religious Diaspora and the Formation of Multi-Faith Societies

Central to globalization has been the creation of multilayered movements of people such as the movements of global professionals working for international organizations, national governments, global social movements and transnational corporations. Universities are moving their students world-wide as part of the internationalization of their curricula, there are international contract workers and seafarers; older tourists and their backpacker children, conference attendees and religious pilgrims to places such as Mecca and Rome paying homage at their sacred sites. As economic expectations have risen, there are the permanent migrants together with border-hoppers, and as inter-ethnic conflicts rise, growing numbers of asylum claimants and refugees, victims of ethnic cleansing and growing numbers of people looking for the better future they see possible each night in the dreams projected on their television screens. There are growing numbers of environmental refugees with more to come as sea levels rise, small island nations are inundated and weather patterns change. Also to be noted is the rise of international marriages, a very accurate barometer of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations. Love takes little notice of border sentry-posts, and the old Chinese saying that "a chicken does not marry a duck" is increasingly irrelevant - yet religious and ethnic community leaders have varied enormously in their reaction to such inter-faith and intercultural

marriages from outright condemnation and ostracization to quiet antipathy to genuine ambivalence or to perhaps a resigned and even warm acceptance of the inevitable.

This reconfiguration of national and religious profiles implies that religious pluralism cannot be wished away nor can the intermingling of cultures and religions be synthesized into a syncretist amalgam in some form of global culture and global religion. As Scott Philipps (this volume) points out, living in a multifaith society entails certain responsibilities and commitments at the local level if communication between communities is to have any depth to it. Also as a consequence of mass migration, diasporas, to a greater or lesser extent, create a transnational ethnic economy and a transnational public sphere which influences the nuances of their local debates, overtly or covertly in discourse or perhaps little known to their host countries. The information revolution means they can more easily be networked across time and space; if these diasporas provide cities with multicultural colour and cuisine, they also can provide cover for religious encapsulation and, for international criminal syndicates and terrorist organisations and their operative cells.

3.   Global Risk, Global Governance: Religion and the State

After September 11th, never again can we look at skyscrapers in the same way. These steel and concrete cathedrals are now symbols of the risk and unpredictability of the future. For more than a decade, theorists like Ulrich Beck (1992) have been writing about the 'world risk society', about the risk of a backlash against the West; they have spoken about the link between risk, responsibility and trust, and of "organized irresponsibility" and the 'limited controllability' of the dangers the world faces, the dangers from the disorganized capitalist market, of the polluted environment, of fanatical terrorist groups, and of the destruction of traditions of wisdom and scholarship. Mervyn Bendle (in this volume) points to the war being waged on the non-fundamentalist traditions of Islam, Sufism in particular, whose scholarly and mystical orientations are seen as anathema by those asserting a very narrow doctrinal view of Islam.

The management of some very narrowly understood risks have become a major concern for governments post-S11. The massive boosts to airport and infrastructure security, the widespread and highly controversial use of 'ethnic profiling', the formation of a United States mega- 'Department of Homeland Security', are all (perhaps belated and contradictory) attempts to manage perceived risks to security. The irony is of course, these 'get tough' measures create the climate of fear and compliance that mobilises populations into a more sedimented oppositional framework: people inevitably become the terrorist/criminal/fanatic the state identifies them as under conditions of extreme repression. While massive military mobilisations and human rights abuses are carried out or tolerated in the name of this "war against terror", what appears to be the reassertion of a distinctly American form of global expansion creates endless new forms of resistance and resentment. While the United Nations and many others call for a more considered,

peaceful and long-term approach to questions of national and global security linked to global justice, the United States and its most unflinching allies create the conditions for further violence.

Focus has now shifted to the notion of social capital, which has been described as the silent partner in global change, the resource for global and local action and a potential source of major social improvements. As John Montgomery (2001: 1) has commented, social capital "is not displayed in almanacs, stock market reports or tourist advertisements; its presence has to be discovered through intuition or diligent rationalism. Yet it is ubiquitous; it is so often invoked to enhance desired behaviour in the present or to bring about purposeful change for the future". It is supposed to be reflected in the stability and solidity of institutions; it highlights trust and its maximization in public life; it underpins and influences the flows of communicating and associating between individuals and collective entities like religious communities and ethnic groups and between nations; it gives nations "competitive advantages" in the international economic race or in responding to international crises and national disasters; it can help to achieve social justice by improving distributive justice; it can foster and facilitate grassroots change and initiatives. Yet despite these remarkable claims, social capital is used as a new bludgeon against the third world and communities that foster religious extremism. No longer is western exploitation, the maldistribution of resources or the years of super-power proxy wars to blame for global poverty, extremism and instability, rather it is the lack of 'social capital' in those societies that is the problem... 'if only they could be more like us' goes the new catch-cry. This sounds remarkably similar to an earlier phase of imperialism where the natives were constantly castigated for their lack, their 'not-yet' status in modernity and democracy, necessitating rule from the stable, modern metropolitan centres of empire.

Ivan Strenski (in this volume) articulates the role Christian religious ideology has played in the development of global capitalism and this particular phase of globalisation. His argument that the Catholic Church was in some ways a model for the transnational institutions of our times raises fascinating questions about the repressed theological content of notions of transnational governance. The further set of questions explored by the colloquium under this theme included: the building of global social coalitions through a global faiths agenda, the role of education in inter-faith interaction and co-operation, the movement for a global ethic or the articulation of an international covenant for religious rights and responsibilities, religion and the construct social capital in addressing poverty, inequality and human rights abuses, and the role and effects of business in community life.

In a globalised world characterised by Arjun Appadurai (1996) as being usefully conceived as an uneven geography of ideoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, ethnoscapes and technoscapes, the role of the nation state has changed because it is inescapably vulnerable to global processes. Despite Kenichi Ohmae's (1995) claim that the nation state is increasingly "a nostalgic fiction", it continues to display a remarkable tenacity. Each nation state has had to reposition itself in the fractal global neighbourhood. This raises the question of faith-state

relationships which has been expressed in the apparent dialectic of the supposed separation of religion and state on the one hand, and the close configuration between religion and government in theocratic states on the other. Neither extreme characterisation is particularly helpful, and closer examination of state-religious relations is definitely called for. As Paul James points out in this volume, American secularism has a distinctive and peculiar form when it comes to the national narrative of 'manifest destiny'. Talal Asad reminds us this peculiar secular society displays remarkably different characteristics to the secularism of Republican France, and so too from the Establishment church headed by the monarch in Great Britain. The role of states is central in defining the social and political limits in which religion can be a counter-cultural force providing a critique of dominant social forms and concerns.

Religious traditions have an inherent tendency to refer to the past for this social critique, even if they are also fundamentally oriented to a this-world or beyond-world future. In the creation of civil societies, religion cannot be left to one side. They are handcuffed (much like the nation-state) to an imagined, if not imaginary, past that is often based on poor history. There are extremes in each religious tradition that can become locked into their enclosed world-view. Boys, Lee and Bass (1995: 256) argue for a pluralistic religious orientation that reflects the liberal values to which they aspire:

> What our world needs is men and women whose religious commitments are both clear and ambiguous, rooted and adaptive, particular and pluralistic, yet this would not be sufficient: in addition, we must probe our traditions so that we can identify and eradicate the pathologies that have contributed to inquisitions, holy wars, obscurantisms and exclusivisms...religiously committed men and women (who) come to the public forum with powerful and necessary tools for the transformation of the world. They bring the sacred into the public realm.

Ireland and Baker (in this volume) consider the role of new religious movements as a social force. Their detailed analysis of a number of new religious movements shows that fear of these movements as a disruptive or potentially violent social force is largely unfounded. Hughes (this volume) comes to a similar conclusion from his Australian survey work, that religious identity is not necessarily divisive or undermining of trust in contemporary Australia. Global faith communities would seem to have to confront one fundamental and three other challenges. The fundamental one is the attitude to religious pluralism, a religious pluralism that ensures peaceful co-existence and avoids any evangelical and forced conversion but allowing fluidity, conversion and reciprocity. Ninian Smart (1996) has developed the twin notions of "soft non-relativism" and "infederated complementarity" to inform a religious pluralist view based on the three propositions (a) no world-view or revelation is susceptible of proof, so certitude is not possible (b) not all world-views teach compatible theses so there exists a rivalry even if there is considerable overlap - given the uncertainty, the only possible stance is soft non-relativism and (c) a multicultural stance implies a positive stance towards the different religions and world-views which complement

each other and have something to teach each other whilst they co-exist in a world-wide federation. What are the implications of this changing, diverse, disjunctional, multi-faith landscape for the relationship between the state and religion?

Vendley (1999) reports that in Amman late in 1999, for the first time, 23 religious leaders from Bosnia-Herzogovina were brought together as a group. At the end of the colloquium, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzogovina, the Orthodox Metropolitan and the Catholic Cardinal each reported the only antidote to the hatred that had spread in the south-east of Europe was to be found in the cornerstones of spirituality: the practice of love for other living beings and respect for peace. The Mufti spoke of the 'many problems in front of us' and the difficulty of 'learning how to communicate with each other'. He commented, 'human blood has no nationality, no religion, no culture'. It can only be hoped that these themes to be found in most substantive religious traditions can prevail in times when absolutist creeds of destruction and domination of difference are resurgent in religious life, and in the all-consuming, commodifying, modernising powers which they reflect.

Endnotes

[1]. This organisation is the world's largest coalition of religious leaders working for peace and religious and social harmony.

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