

Serving God and neighbor

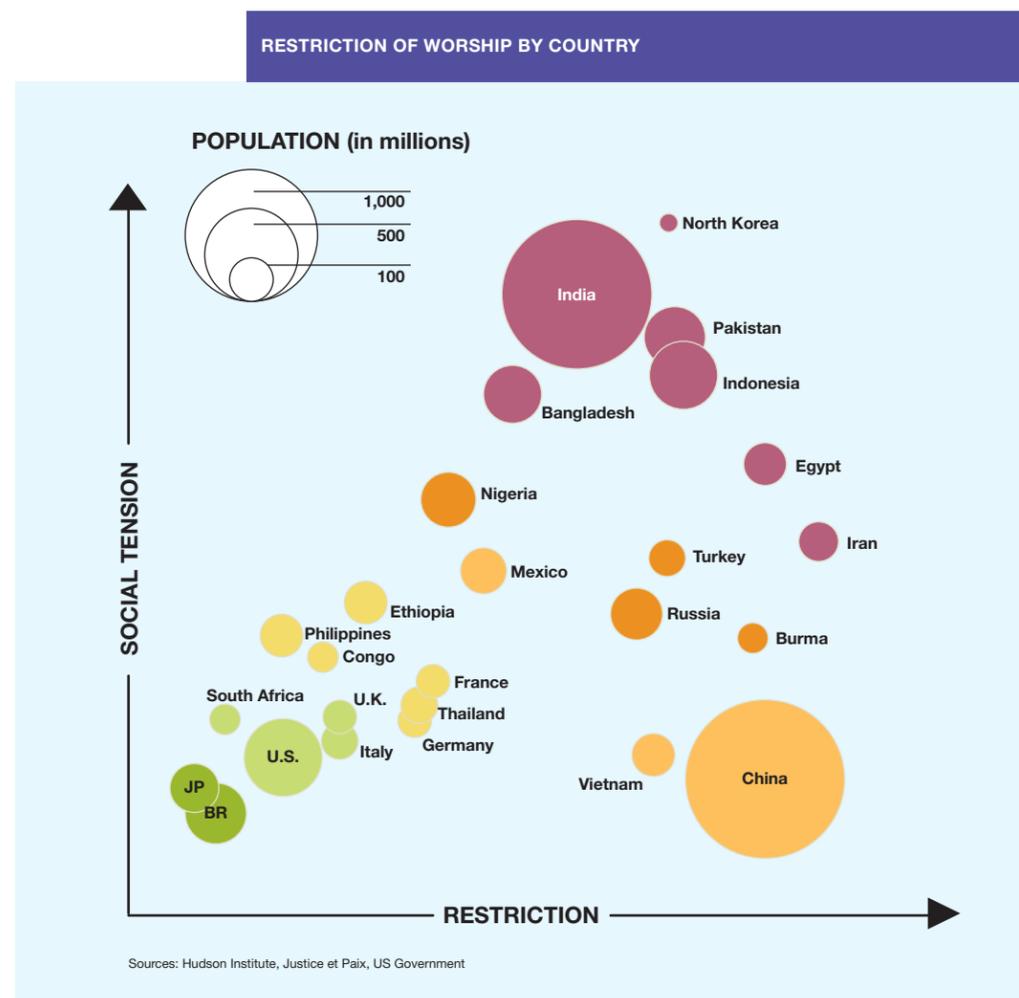
BY RICHARD GRECO

The modern world marked a passage in which faith, once imposed by whoever held power, became a private affair. Religion as instrument of public policy became a secular sin. Now, with religion in international affairs resurgent, a host of altruistic opportunities – *in servitio Dei et proximi* – accompany the obvious hazards of sectarian conflict.

A funny thing happened on the way to modernity – the West forgot about God. Maybe this is the very definition of modernity – a bold break from thousands of years of human experience, *liberating* humankind from God or religious faith. Darwin's materialism had no room for God; He was no longer necessary to explain man's creation or his evolution. Marx's communism defined religion as the opiate of the masses and as something to be risen against and eliminated. John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism maintained that organized religion was actually an obstacle to man's pursuit of happiness; moral code may have been born from God, but man's belief in God was no longer necessary to maintain that moral code. Most famously, Nietzsche asserted, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed Him." Beginning in the mid-1800s these and other influential thinkers, as well as their disciples, brought the Western world closer to the secularism we know today, where man is reduced to materialism, and God – if He is even still contemplated – is conveniently isolated in man's privacy. To speak of God and religion in public is impolite, if not offensive, and to consider religion an instrument of public policy or international relations is a secular sin.

In Henry Kissinger's *Diplomacy*, one of the most important textbooks for students of international relations, the term religion is not even included in the subject index. After an introductory chapter entitled "From Universality to Equilibrium" wherein Kissinger brilliantly describes the convulsive passage of one world view (religious, where relations among nations on Earth should mirror Heaven) to another world view (secular, where international relations were about del-

Pope Benedict XVI after his weekly audience in Saint Peter's Square in Vatican City on November 16, 2011.



search showed that between 1980 and 1999 only 6 of 1,600 articles published in four major international relations journals included religion as a significant element. Nowhere is this relegation of God more pronounced than in the 2002-2005 debate over the European Constitution, where the proposed draft left out (read rejected) God or reference to Europe's millennial Christian heritage.

Of course, an honest analysis of modern international relations must include religion if not specific reference to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The Christian faith, for example, has been a key element in the world outlook of many influential Western leaders, particularly American. Woodrow Wilson, the father of the League of Nations (the predecessor of the United Nations) and Ronald Reagan who helped America defeat godless communism, were deeply Christian men who believed, like many of America's founding fathers and many in America today, that America was blessed by God and had a divine purpose to serve as a beacon for all peace-loving and liberty-loving people. Indeed,

icate balances of power). Kissinger seldom revisits religion as a force of international relations. One can argue that religion in international relations in the West actually began to disappear in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia, which generated the concept of the modern sovereign state, the principle of non-intervention, and the notion that religion ought to be separate from the secular sphere of international relations. Westphalia rejected international relations based on how things should be in favor of a realistic analysis of how things really are – the birth of realpolitik.

The absence of religion from modern Western thought, particularly in the sphere of relations among nations, was made painfully clear by the attacks of September 11, 2001, which were motivated by many reasons including, ostensibly, religious faith. Following the attacks, a study called "The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations" was published in the journal *World Politics*. The author's re-

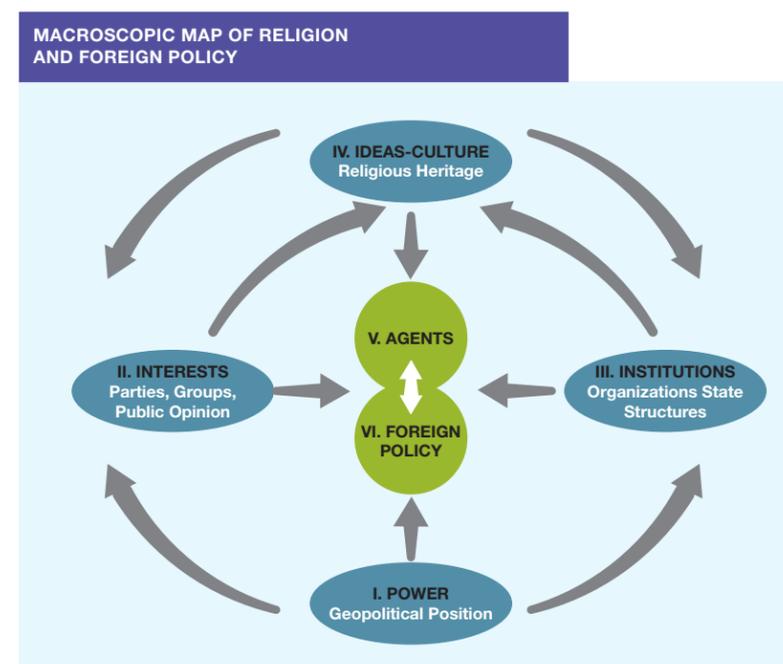
the whole construct of the rights of man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness come from religious, if not Christian, frameworks. One may argue that the proximate cause of communism's collapse was the weight of its own economic inefficiency and political despotism; but one may also argue that through Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II the power of Christianity's worldview defeated communism through its strong tenets that no man or government could ever take away the rights that God had given. And even though the origins of the modern state of Israel are secular and cultural, the country has evolved since its founding into a thriving, powerful, and religiously Jewish nation.

After the fall of Communism, attention among leading international thinkers turned to Islam. In 1990 Bernard Lewis, in his "Roots of Muslim Rage," spoke of a "clash of civilizations." This theme was soon picked up by Samuel Huntington, who in 1992 predicted a

"clash of civilizations" – flashpoints in the world where different peoples of different beliefs would inevitably turn to conflict, especially where different cultures bordered Islam. Huntington was widely criticized for over-simplifying the roots of conflict and for failing to define precisely religion's role in civilization. Nevertheless, he identified an important but missing dimension in the study and practice of international relations – religion. The world needed a more holistic paradigm that moved beyond materialism and realpolitik.

In 1995 the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC sponsored a book called *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*. It was among the first attempts after the Cold War to create a new paradigm of international relations, warning that the "the most intractable sources of conflict, are those with which conventional diplomacy is least suited to deal." Again, September 11 made this clear. Now, in the post-September 11 world, religion in world affairs cannot be ignored. The Council on Foreign Relations, the Brookings Institution, and the Belfer for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University all now have programs regarding religion and world affairs. Even former Secretary of State Madeline Albright wrote a book, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*. They all describe a real "Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century." The Belfer Center published a study called *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*.

The West cannot ignore Islam as a factor in relations with predominantly Muslim countries or Hinduism in its relations with India, for example. But more to the point we cannot ignore our Judeo-Christian heritage and all that it has given to the world. The United States, her Western allies, and Israel must embrace their own religious heritage and the hope and charity that have shaped their history – indeed their very existence. As today's most influential political philosopher in Europe Jürgen Habermas has concluded, Christianity is the source of Europe's values of human rights, tolerance, and democracy. *This is powerful*. Christianity has motivated unprecedented efforts in the 20th century towards humanitarian assistance for victims of earthquakes, tsunamis, and other disasters; unprecedented liberations of people in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa; unprecedented ideological battles worldwide against oppression. We must be proud of our achievements in the world born of religious and philosophical underpinnings that are mostly for the good. By being secure in our own identity and in our own faith we in the West can engage other religious peoples and nations using more common mindsets and world outlooks. Of course matters of realpolitik will not disappear – Muslim nations hold much of the world's proven reserves of oil, for example, and there may seem to be little room for religion in discussions of oil supply and de-



mand. But if Islam, for example, holds to a tenet that state and religion are integral, and there are real social, political, and environmental problems to solve in order to avoid conflict, it is – perhaps only – through religion that we may find common ground. We cannot reject the spiritual dimension of man or think that it is irrelevant. This would be both ignorant and naïve, if not insulting to the dignity of man in general, as well as to world leaders and world actors who have deeply held religious beliefs. It would also ignore a modern-day reality that religion is resurging – perhaps we are witnessing the birth of a *religious realpolitik*.

Paradigms are fluid and are constantly evolving. Paradigms involving religion are likely to be influenced by both styles and beliefs of individual world leaders and by the work of international organizations, which are tasked more and more with executing the work of international relations, especially development and humanitarian assistance, among the most pressing matters of international affairs. Faith-based organizations have always existed, such as hospitals, schools, chivalric organizations with humanitarian missions, and others. The World Bank estimates that as much as 50% of all health and education services are provided by faith-based organizations.

Religious organizations have actually been engaged in active collaboration with the United Nations since its founding in 1945, and a Committee on Religious NGOs has been meeting regularly since 1972. A 2010 study on international religious NGOs at the UN, "Thinking about the Role of Religion in Foreign Policy: A Frame-



Buddhist nuns pray during a ceremony celebrating Buddha's birthday in Hanoi.

work for Analysis," concludes that of the approximately 3,183 NGOs holding consultative status with the UN, 320 or 10% consider themselves religious. Of these, there are 187 Christian, 52 Muslim, 22 Jewish, 14 Buddhist, and 3 Hindu NGOs. Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist NGOs are clearly underrepresented compared to the number of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in the world. More important, however, than the number of NGOs is the work they are committed to doing. An analysis of the goals of these NGOs shows that 47.3% have cultural, recreational, educational, health, social services, environment, development and infrastructure, law, defense, and political goals. Only 13.9% have religious promotion as their field of work. Herein lies the secret – NGOs can collaborate in the work of international affairs, knowing that each believe broadly that man is a creation of God and that the highest calling among men is to serve both God *and* neighbor.

Ironically, the forces of democracy, globalization, and modernization of communication technology have actually solidified religion's place in man's heart and mind. Since man is a social and political being, religion will inevitably make its way into politics and world affairs. We, in the West, cannot fear this but must embrace it. By embracing our religious heritage and understanding all that it has given to the world – both good and bad – we may begin to enlarge our paradigms and

find genuine common ground on world matters of war, peace, justice, human rights, education, humanitarian assistance, development, and many other pressing matters. We should keep in mind the words of Abraham Lincoln in his second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865, spoken to a broken Christian nation of different political factions, but equally applicable to a broken world of different religions, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

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We are family

BY PASQUALE FERRARA

Now could be the time to give a more concrete and democratic meaning to the vague and somewhat oligarchic idea of global governance.

In the words of Julia Kristeva, today mankind is capable of destroying the earth in the name of beliefs, religions or ideologies; but, at the same time humankind's "constituent religiosity" is being recognized. In their analysis of the role of religion on the international scene, experts have chosen, on the one hand, to focus on the impact of new religious radicalisms on the relations among "civilizations"; on the other hand, they have devoted their attention to the possible role that motivations based on religious beliefs can play in the process of conflict prevention and resolution. There is, however, a different reading of the new religious phenomena, based on the complex interplay of national, international and transnational effects of religious identities.

The core issue is how to "de-nationalize" religions to make their inclusive claims flourish. De-nationalize doesn't mean deculturalize. Religious identities are not a danger per se to international relations; on the contrary, religions could reinforce the idea of a global common identity, both symbolic and pluralistic.

Transnational religions could either be destabilizing or the opposite: integrative factors for world politics. Examples of the first are the violent networks that make an instrumental use of the concept of "ummah" as a closed and exclusive community. Examples of the second type are religious groups fostering a pragmatic dialogue among religious traditions with regard to peace and reconciliation on a global scale.

In many religious traditions we can find the same basic idea of "universal brother-



Children pray before getting a free meal donated by a non-governmental agency in a slum near Manila, the Philippines, on May 18, 2011.

hood" or "human family" which has been dismissed for a long time as an ethical aspiration irrelevant for the international order and uninfluential in terms of the adoption of policies that reflect asymmetries of power and interests. That position has been considered, in political and diplomatic circles as an irenic, utopian perspective, without any roots in reality, and with no practical impact.

And yet, religions could give more concrete and democratic meaning to the vague and somewhat oligarchic idea of global governance.

There are many possibilities for religions to forge pragmatic, pro-active and creative ways of combining justice, community and dialogue in international relations. Religions are a way for understanding the world and realizing the existence of a connection of the individuals to a wider context of meaning. Religions can also provide transnational legitimacy for global actions and international institutions.

More concretely, in the Mediterranean, religions can reconceptualize the political narrative of the region, too often trapped between geopolitical and deterministic visions ("Broader Middle East," "Middle East and North Africa," or "Southern Shore").

Moreover, in the Mediterranean there is a need to "compare notes" and exchange points of views on how to overcome the current crisis of democracy as a political system in which comprehensive visions of the worlds have been "sterilized" rather than considered components of a positive-sum game. The same goes for the formal and informal international institutions, whose legitimacy is sometimes challenged on the ground that they are the offspring of a "Westphalian," state-centric logic of organization rather than representative of the global civil society. Instead of considering religions as an obstacle to cooperation and understanding, Western countries should first do their homework, moving away from simplistic and reductionist visions of the religious sphere in international relations as the realm either of intolerance or naïveté. A correct and balanced assessment of the new political environment in the Mediterranean, where religions will certainly play a role in the framework of fragile transitions towards democracy, represents a crucial test.

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