Role of religion in conflicts (cont.)
Role of religion in violent conflicts

- The recruitment video of ISIS
  - A boring video!
    - There may be a reason for that.
  - Way of speech
    - Repetitiveness, use of religious terminology, "liturgical" elements
  - Sociality
    - "Band of Brothers"
  - Promises
    - Honor, meaning and purpose, belonging, sacrifice
The three levels of religious language

- **1\textsuperscript{st} level**
  - Language in religious use: cult, rites, prayer, meditation etc.

- **2\textsuperscript{nd} level**
  - Language of religious authority and teaching: formulations of doctrine and creeds, moral teaching, spiritual guidance

- **3\textsuperscript{rd} level**
  - Use of philosophical (and other) methods to (critically) analyze the meaning and use of religious language of 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} levels.
Creating the religious universe

- The recruiters only utilize the levels 1 and 2 of religious language.
- Everything is seen through religion.
  - Faith gives the proper interpretation of the current situation.
  - Joining the movement is the answer to all problems.
- Religion cannot be separated from other aspects of life.
  - Living the life of faith is life in its fullest sense.
Are there religious actions?

- How does religion show itself?
- Are there
  - specific religious actions?
  - actions that have religious meaning?
  - actions that only make sense from a religious viewpoint?
- Modes, motivations and means of action
  - With whom, for whom, how and for what purposes
Strategies for encounter

- Inclusivism (focus on similarities)
  - Roman Catholic Christianity
- Exclusivism (focus on differences)
  - Ethnic based religions, minority groups in a majority setting
- Pluralism (focus on diversity and sharing)
  - Main line religious communities
- Parallelism (separate and common spheres of life)
  - Leaders of world religions movement, ecumenism
Sources of internal conflicts

• Change of living conditions calls forth a need to reinterpret doctrine and change ways of life.
  
• Different options:
  
  1. New understanding of the phenomenon on the basis of
     – Facts based on different types of research
     – Core concepts of religious tradition, e.g., love and justice
  2. Revitalizing forgotten or hidden parts of the tradition
  3. Traditionalism
  4. Sticking to the “fundamentals” of faith
Internal pluralism

- Why is pluralism (often) a problem for a religious tradition?
  - Threat to unity
  - Sign of impurity
  - Sign of conflict
  - Sign of yielding to something alien to faith
- Pluralism could also be seen as resource for renewal and adaptation
  - Challenge: reconciling the ideal with the real
The specific nature of religion

- Religion is connected to other spheres of life in many ways.
- There are still features in religion that cannot be reduced to anything else.
- Religion is not good or bad, it may be both:
  - Strange and uncontrollable harmony of contrasts.
- Religion is connected to the sacred as the ultimate (nature of) reality, the source of all being.
- The numinous quality ultimate things:
  - *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Rudolf Otto)
Religious thinking and action

• Because of the specific nature of religion, thinking and acting for religious reasons and from religious motivation is …
  • not just a question concerning the army uniform, the head wear, or the types of cartridges…
• Religious reasons are often/usually/always connected with other kinds of reasons.
• Religion gives meaning and significance to other fields of life.
• The distinction we – them gains specific significance within a religious framework.
Religious thinking and action: meaning and significance

- Religious reasons and motivation give (deeper) meaning and significance to one’s actions and life in general.
  - “Bigger picture”: eternity,
  - Wider scope: divine perspective
  - More encompassing significance: sanctity, final purpose
  - More noble motives: fulfilling the will of God
  - Graver consequences: violating the divine order/ultimate goal, eternal destiny
Religion opens a wider and a more profound view to reality, agency and setting of goals.

- Not just for the visible world
- Not just out of my own strength and ability
- Not just for the sake of myself and for my loved ones

Religious motivation is a powerful instrument of change.

- Hope, energy, significance, love, sacrifice
Religious motivation: for good or bad?

- The core or religions is a promise:
  - Better life
  - Better morality
  - More significant agency
- Crucial question: for whom is the promise given?
  - How is the “We” of religion defined?
- What happens to the outsiders and the dissidents?
- What is the nature of the good of religion and the human good?
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxcxVCvH-IU
Crucial distinctions

- Relationship between mundane life and the “otherworldly”
  - Continuity – discontinuity
- Relationship between “Us” and “Them”
  - The deviant we: heretics, sinners, apostates
  - The truly other: possible converts, outsiders, the cursed ones, enemies of faith?
- Role of the chosen/saved/believers:
  - Divine instrument: crusade, retribution
  - Coworker for a higher cause: mission, calling, sacrifice
- The real enemy
  - Infidels, secularization, heretics, the devil
  - One’s own imperfection, sinfulness, fallibility
Religion and violence

- Religion as such does not provoke or lead to violence.
- The inclination to use violence depends on the interpretation concerning
  - We-Them division,
  - Relationship between the mundane and the sacred, this world and eternity
  - Understanding of religious calling
  - Nature of religious motivation
  - Interpretation of the cause of evil
Are some religions more violent than others?

- All religions can be (and have been) used as a cause and motivation for violence.
- The mainline tradition of all religions stresses
  - the duty not to kill or to harm
  - the call to compassion, benevolence and mercy.
Differences between religions

- “Activist” traditions
  - Stress the religious obligation to change the world
  - Are effective in building and renewing societies
- “Passive” traditions
  - Stress meditation and inwardness as ways to the divine.
  - The “activist traditions” are more effective in building and renewing societies.
  - The “activist traditions” are more liable to using violence.
(Why) is religious pluralism a problem?

- Religious pluralism is often connected with
  - Disunity
  - Secularization
  - Loosening of morality
  - Loss of doctrinal purity
What’s so tempting in religious extremism?

- How do mechanisms of social persuasion enhance religious extremism?
- Why is religious extremism “the answer”?
  - Material needs
  - Social needs
  - Emotional need
  - Meaning of life
  - Morality
  - Way of life
What can we do if...

- The fanatic can be totally unyielding. 
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ht5QDLw11U

- The force of arguments fail:
  - Cost-effect analysis doesn’t apply.
  - Moral arguments don’t count.
  - Concerns concerning the future don’t matter.
  - Epistemological consistency doesn’t signify.
The closed world of a religious extremist

- The force of arguments fail:
  - Cost-effect analysis doesn’t apply.
  - Reasonableness is not a virtue.
  - Moral arguments don’t count.
  - Concerns concerning the future don’t matter.
  - Epistemological consistency doesn’t signify.
Arguing with religious extremists – difficulties to overcome

- We are the chosen and elect.
- Having to suffer for one’s conviction is a sign of belonging to the elected.
- We have special and secret knowledge and see reality in the right light.
- We are one and our group is unanimous.
- Dissidence is a sign of the work of the devil.
- Criticism is not a resource but a vehement attack motivated by jealousy and envy.
- Intolerance towards outsiders is not only legitimate but a duty.
The way to extremism

• There is no single way to extremism.
  • No clear extremist profile
• A different approach:
  • If extremism is the answer, what is the question?
• Extremism (typically?) satisfies needs that arise in changing living conditions (both individual and collective).
  • Sense of insecurity and meaninglessness
  • Threats to individual and group identity
  • Loneliness and purposelessness
The promise of extremism

• Extremism defines distinctive lines between us and them.
  • Strong sense of belonging to an in-group
  • Safety and security
  • Meaning and purpose
• Authoritarian views and structure give security.
  • Everything is clear.
  • No energy lost in agonizing deliberation.
• The road to extremism is (often) paved with mechanisms of social persuasion.
Why we comply

• Mechanisms of social persuasion
  1. prevent people from noticing the nature of their actions and commitments
  2. (may) contribute to a process that leads to actions their agents cannot (actually) approve.
• The force of the mechanisms lies in their corresponding with basic (psychological and social) needs and patterns of thought.
• Knowing how the mechanisms work helps to inhibit their effect.
1. Reciprocity

1. Children are socialized to act according to the principle of reciprocity
   • Receiving a gift establishes a duty to reciprocate it. (logic of the gift).

2. Acting against the logic of the gift is a source of disapproval and guilt.

3. The chain of favors and favors in return
   • binds people to continual relationships
   • creates a sense of future duties.
Manipulative use of reciprocity

The principle of reciprocity can be used manipulatively by

1. offering (surprise) “gifts” or (unexpected) “services” in a manner that the receiver is compelled to accept what is being given.

2. expecting counter gifts and services that exceed the value of the original gift or service,

3. expressing first an unreasonable demand and reacting to opposition with a second, much more moderate petition. The recipient is cheated to accept the second request for the sake of avoiding the unreasonable demand

4. using gifts and services for creating an illusion of a continuous relationship that (seems to) constitute(s) the requirement to reciprocate endlessly.
2. Consistency

1. There is a strong human need to be consistent in one’s thoughts and actions.

2. Consistency is a (often) sign of trustworthiness and firmness. Such characteristics are an asset in positive social relationships.

3. Consistency helps to make decisions: following one’s principles saves time.

4. Consistency is connected with right-mindedness and honorability.
Consistency and commitment

1. It’s easy to make people commit themselves to something of little importance. Consistency requires that we stick to our commitments even if they change over time. (using a bait)

2. An active, publicly made and voluntary act of commitment that is made after achieving something important is the most effective means to tie people to organizations and activities and increases the need to act consistently.
Manipulative use of consistency

1. First, create
   - principles that guide and obligate to certain types of action and
   - conditions that make the commitment to follow these principles seem both necessary and essential

2. Then,
   - those who have committed themselves to the group/ideology/organization
   - will start to make up and express justificatory grounds why they must stick to the principles and cannot act otherwise.
3. Conformity

1. Acting as a member of a group and conformity with other members of the group increase the possibility to be accepted by the group.

2. There is a strong human tendency to modify one’s actions and thoughts (even perceptions) to conform with actions and thoughts of the majority even when it would be rational to act and think differently.

3. The tendency to conform with others speeds up decisions: you don’t have to consider everything, just follow those who know better.
   - The majority must know best (so many people cannot be wrong).
Manipulative use of conformity

1. Opinion of the majority is used as a justification for something being necessary. *(Never a valid argument!)*

2. The opinion of a group is presented as something that is based on careful reasoning.
   - If you don’t agree, there must be something wrong with you.

3. The most efficient way to use the majority knows best argument is to claim that the group consists of a chosen elite.
   - If you want to be part of the elite, it’s necessary to comply to their thoughts and actions.
4. Need of being liked by others

1. There is a strong human need to be liked by those whom we like, admire and/or feel fond of.
2. It’s a common human tendency to try to please those whom we like and admire.
   • We are prone to fulfill their requests.
3. We tend to like those whose features and characteristics are (somehow) favorable for us.
Manipulative use of the need to be liked

1. Praising and complimenting the object.
   - “They told me I am intelligent. By the way, I bought this.”
   - Reciprocity comes to your help here.
2. Influencing is easier if the speaker/leader is pleasant, polite, intelligent and (seems to have been) successful.
3. Claiming that the speaker and the listeners share many praiseworthy features.
   - We want to think that we are good and we like people who are similar to us.
4. Claiming that this is something familiar.
5. Combining our ideology/cause with important and/or pleasant things.
5. Authority

1. Complying to authorities is part of the important socialization process in childhood.

2. There is a strong human tendency to obey authority figures.

3. Obeying authority figures is (often) rational.
   - People often have an authority position for a good reason (knowledge, experience, resources etc.).

Dangers:
- We may wish to follow authority figures because we are too lazy to think and want to avoid responsibility.
- We wish to please the powerful.
- We don’t make the necessary distinctions between different (types of) authority figures.
Manipulative use of authority

- Manipulators may make use of
  - Symbols of authority, such as uniforms, clothing, badges, titles and the like
  - Authority position, e.g., buildings, rooms, furniture, paraphernalia, etc.
  - Showing exaggerated respect towards the authority figure
6. Scarcity

1. We tend to give more value to things that are difficult to obtain, that are scarce or that require extra effort to get than to things that are available to everyone and that are easy to get.

2. There is a link between value and effort.

3. One values things that one attains only after an effort.

4. New things seem to us more tempting than those we are familiar with (despite the effort needed).

5. The value of something is even bigger if you have to compete with others to get it.
Manipulative use of scarcity

1. Creating an impression that it is difficult to obtain something (special issue, limited edition, exclusively for our golden club members, only for the brave and fearless, etc.)

2. Creating an impression that delaying your decision will lead to final loss:
   - Act now, otherwise it’s gone forever
   - Others will take advantage of the offer in your stead, they get, you don’t.
Sources

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