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From Heresies to Holy Wars: Toward a Theory of Religious Conflict

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Heresy never prospers. Why? I daresay
If heresy prosper, none dare call it heresy.
--Jeffrey Burton Russell (1987:276)

From heresies to holy wars, our planet is
riddled with religious conflict or conflict that is
framed as religious, and yet we do not have a good
type to explain it. On a planet armed to the teeth,
conflict is something we had better learn to under-
stand. This is my attempt to get started with that
task.

All good theory is constructed through a dia-
lectic between theoretical frameworks and previ-
ously-concocted theories, on the one hand, and empiri-
cal research on the other. I would like to offer some
theoretical insights based in large part upon my own
research, especially on the Catholic modernist crisis
(see Kurtz 1986; cf. Kurtz 1979, 1988), research on
religion, violence, and nonviolence in India, and a
decade of studying religious movements, both vio-

cent and nonviolent. The following pages include
observations about (1) the general nature of conflict,
(2) the special character of religious conflict, (3) the
dialectics between internal and external religious
conflicts, and, finally, (4) the dialectics between
conflicts that are explicitly religious, and those that
are not. I will draw extensively on Georg Simmel's
(1971) essay on conflict.

1 CONFLICT AS SOCIATION

The place to begin is with Simmel's observation
that conflict is an intense form of interaction that of-
ten brings people together, even when the valence of
the relationship is negative. Since there is substan-
tial ambivalence in any relationship, its valence may
even swing back and forth between negative and
positive poles, often in a situation that Merton and
Barber (19) identify as sociological ambivalence.

Conflict is not a polar opposite of cooperation,
but lies at the end of a continuum opposite from not
knowing or total indifference (Simmel 1971; see
Levine1971). Our most vicious conflicts are often
with those with whom we are close, especially our
families. As Georg Simmel (1971) observes, conflict
is a form of sociation; the social order is fashioned
out of attractive and repulsive forces:

Society, ... in order to attain a determinate
shape, needs some quantitative ratio of har-
mony and disharmony, of association and
competition, of favorable and unfavorable
tendencies. But these discords are by no
means mere sociological liabilities or nega-
tive instances (ibid.:72).

Religious conflict as a content

Simmel suggests that we distinguish between the
forms and contents of social life, and that sociologi-
cal analysis is the study of social forms (just as ge-
ometry is the study of geometric forms). Once we
know the characteristics of a form, we can know
something about its particular manifestations, with
particular contents. (Just as we know characteristics
of a circle when we see it, whether it is a face, a
clock, or a planet.)

Religion, for Simmel, is usually a content of a
form, rather than a form itself, although contents and
forms are dialectically related and contents can
sometimes become forms. I think that it is important
to distinguish between religious conflict as a sub-
form of conflict, on the one hand, and religion as a
content, or carrier, of other types of conflict, on the
other.

Religion is often the content of a conflict, though
not its basis. The conflict may be political, econom-
ic, class, familial, or even psychological, but reli-
gious issues become the content around which the
conflict evolves. When fighting breaks out between
Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, or
Hindus and Muslims in India, the conflict is as much
economic as religious, even when it is framed by the
media, politicians, or participants as a religious con-

When people interact, they need something to
talk about, and often the content is not as important
as the talk itself. Sports, gossip, fashion, weather,
Religious Conflict as a Subform

Religious conflicts are intense interactions in which the parties have a dispute that they believe centers on matters of ultimate concern to such an extent that the outcome of the interaction itself is of ultimate concern.

Sometimes conflicts are truly religious, even if they contain other elements as well. Religious controversy shares many characteristics with conflict in general, but has its own uniquenesses. First, because it deals with "unrestricted values" (Cavanagh) or "ultimate concerns" (Tillich), it is charged with great passion and meaning, and takes place on an abstract level. Second, religious conflicts are carriers and concealers of other forms of conflict.

Because of its significance, individuals and collectivities invest a great deal of themselves and their energies in a religious conflict. Ironically, however, what is highly personal is clothed in cosmic rhetoric: "It is not for my interests that I take this stand, but for God's sake!" In the real world, of course, conflicts are probably always a mixture of types. The medieval Crusades to wrest the Holy Land from "Infidels" was most certainly motivated by religious concerns, but so much status was associated with participation in them, and so much wealth gained by some Crusaders, that one becomes suspicious about the degree to which it was a religious conflict per se. It probably was primarily religious for some participants, and not for others.

In the final analysis, discerning the form of a conflict is a tricky business, and its indicators are murky indeed. We know better than to take respondents' statements of purpose at face value, but are left without any fully reliable sources and must get multiple stories, observe the situation as best we can within our own prejudices, correct our data statistically when possible, and then surround our conclusions with caveats. Although it is essential to attempt to ascertain whether a conflict is religious in form or not, in most empirical cases, it is probably a matter of degree, rather than being clearly religious or not.

Sacred conflicts are likely to be extremely passionate, and are ironically those most likely to be carried out for profane purposes. It is not just the most holy causes that provoke religious conflict: the intensity of reaction provoked by a truly dastardly deed, means that the act requires an exceptional account. Evil deeds therefore require sacred legitimation if the perpetrator is to avoid punishment.

The intensity of religious conflict is related to the fact that the parties to the dispute view themselves as "representatives of supraindividual claims, of fighting not for themselves but only for a cause," which can give the conflict a radicalism and mercilessness which find their analogy in the general behavior of certain very selfless and very idealistically inclined persons. Because they have no consideration for themselves, they have none for others either; they are convinced that they are entitled to make an-

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2 For several years I taught a course on "The Social Construction of Evil" and found in the case studies that students did as term papers for the course that acts of evil were consistently presented by the actors as necessary for some grand, ethical cause.

3 Has anyone ever said they are waging an unholy war?" my colleague Joe Feagin asked me when I told him about this paper.
ybody a victim of the idea for which they sacrifice themselves. (Simmel 1971:87)

Extremes of thought and behavior are usually defined as inappropriate for selfish causes, but not for religious purposes. Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign slogan expressed the principle well: "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."

Ironically, the most intense extremism may be reserved for conflict with those whose values and beliefs are not really so different from one's own. That is why Simmel (1971:89) observes that ancient Jewish law permitted bigamy but prohibited simultaneous marriage with two sisters. The principle here, he notes, is "that antagonism on the basis of a common kinship tie is stronger than among strangers" (ibid.:90).

The most intense form of religious conflict may be that between heretics and religious authorities, i.e., intra-denominational conflict. Such controversy combines the intensity of religious conflict with that of a sort of kinship. As Simmel (ibid.: 90) suggests, the strongest examples of hatred are church relations. Because of dogmatic fixation, the minutest divergence here at once comes to have logical irreconcilability -- if there is deviation at all, it is conceptually irrelevant whether it be large or small.

New congregations, and even denominations, are started because of seemingly-insignificant differences over doctrine, especially in Western religions, or in those religions founded by an individual: Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Islam (Russell 1987:271-272). One might even speak of an "etiological conflict," that is, the battle which precipitated the formation of a new religious institution. The style of that conflict may set the tone for future conflicts in the institution. The "Baptists," for example, derive their name from the conflict symbol over which their etiological conflict was fought.

The Life Cycle of a Conflict as Form

As James Coleman (1957) observes, conflicts have their own dynamic. Conflict as a form seems to take on its own life, which follows a standard formu-

la. A conflict may begin, or appear to begin, with a relatively small incident or disagreement. As the conflict escalates, however, positions in the battle take on significance for the identity of the participants, and the initial source of conflict is sometimes transformed, its expressions taking on cosmic proportions. A conflict may begin as a mundane dispute and evolve into a religious one as the rhetoric and stakes escalate.

The nature of the conflict becomes increasingly abstract, and the adversaries are defined more and more as nefarious and unprincipled. Positions are polarized, and many parties who were not initially involved are forced to take sides. Many elements of a position may be arbitrarily united, but seem inextricable to those caught up in the controversy. The conflict seems to escape from the control of the adversaries, so that any demobilization is extraordinarily difficult. Even if the original source of disagreement is resolved, face-saving measures must be incorporated in the settlement, so that it appears a just solution, even if the losing party is expelled from the religious community.

George Tyrrell, a Catholic modernist excommunicated by the pope in 1907, quickly determined that the pope had no authority to expel him, or rather that it did not matter. In fact, Tyrrell decided that he, rather than the pope, was the guardian of the true orthodoxy. Moreover, he noted that Jesus himself, and the Apostles "were excommunicated for refusing to be silent," and that Saint Augustine noted that "no man (not even ... Saint Ignatius) has ever served the Church largely without incurring the displeasure and censure of the officials" (Petre 1912, II:248; cf. Kurtz 1986:151).

Simmel (1971) suggests that life flows on like a river, ever changing, yet ever remaining the same. Humans create structures to channel that flow, and the structures crystallize and momentarily contain the water, but as soon as an edifice is erected, life evades it, flowing under, over, or around it, and eventually forcing the construction of new structures.

This process is, in turn, nested in a larger ongoing process of charisma and routinization identified by Weber (1968; cf. Shils 1972). A charismatic figure appears (emerges out of a particular historical context), challenges the prevailing rigidity of a particular tradition, breaks down barriers, attracts fol-
lowsers, and either participates in or lays the groundwork for a routinization of his or her charisma, followed by a calcification and subsequent wave of charismatic authority. Religious movements cannot survive unless their charismatic authority is routinized; but, neither can they survive if the dynamism of the movement is suffocated by institutional rigidity and elitist power monopolies.

The subject of a conflict usually shifts over time as well -- it may start with an idea or procedure, but will shift to issues of authority and structure, as those in power mobilize institutional resources to suppress the dissidence. Catholic theologians usually et in trouble not for what they say about the scriptures, Jesus or Mary, as what they say about the Vatican and the pope.

Conflict thus unfolds like good narrative (and vice versa), although in real life the development is never linear, and one can seldom predict the timing of the escalation, the denouement, or the resolution; there may be flashbacks and flash-forwards which confound the conflictors and observers alike. Nonetheless, certain patterns can be predicted.

The Ritualization of Conflict

Conflict processes are not created ex nihilo each time they appear, but are ritualized and have identifiable patterns. Rituals are regularly repeated and carefully prescribed behaviors which symbolize a value or a belief (Kurtz 1988; Benford and Kurtz 1988). They have four major characteristics: they (1) provide solutions to problems; (2) are based in experience; (3) identify evil and mark boundaries; and (4) reify social structures.

Rituals solve problems in the sense that they represent a repertoire of thought, words, and actions which have been socially constructed and are available for use, especially in times of crisis.Funeral rituals, for example, provide mourners with much-needed scripts and allow them to attend to the details of the ritual, rather than dwelling on the unanswerable questions about the inexplicability of the death and the dilemmas that are presented by the deceased's departure.

Conflict rituals serve an important function in a community or society, especially since they provide a medium for expressing discontent and provoking change. Particular cultures or institutions have a repertoire of conflict subforms which have a history and have proven useful in the past to authoritative figures. They are based in collective experience and are adapted by dissidents and reformers, or by ecclesiastical authorities, for new purposes. Both elites and malcontents know what to do in certain circumstances, because ritual solutions have already been provided for them.

For centuries, when "dangerous teachings" were published, ecclesiastical authorities placed them on the Index of Forbidden Books. That gave the elites something concrete that they could do to counter the threat such teachings provided. Rituals appear verifiable, because there are stories in the collective memory of their prior efficacy. They sometimes backfire, however, and counter-rituals emerge. During the religious ferment of 19th-century Europe, so many were dissatisfied with the status quo, that condemnation of a book resulted in dramatically-increased sales. At one point, the Archbishop of Vienna became so frustrated that he put the Index of Forbidden Books on the Index of Forbidden Books. This dynamic is frequently visible today: note, for example, the rush to buy Salmon Rushdie's book, The Satanic Verses, after it was condemned by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

When possible, elites codify their ritual responses to religious conflicts in the law, as was frequently the case among early American colonists, many of whom were ironically fleeing from religious intolerance of Europe. A 1712 law in Massachusetts forbid the public criticism of the clergy, with violators subject to a 20-pound fine or the pillory (Myers 1943:55).

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it was "well known that witches could not recite the Lord's Prayer. Consequently, there was a ritual in the Massachusetts courts that alleged witches be required to recite the prayer (see Erikson 1966). To no one's surprise, those who were convicted were unable to recite the prayer without error.

Rituals thus allow individuals to proceed according to established procedures in a conflict with a mixture of rational and nonrational elements. Contradictory aspects are woven together in the same narrative. Both sides of the conflict may play
by the same rules and adhere to the same sacred values. In early American culture, for example, the Garden of Eden imagery became an important conflict symbol (see Kurtz 1979). Different parties, with varying prescriptions for all that ailed American society, picked up on different segments of the story: the Party of Hope (e.g., Whitman and Emerson) focused on America as Eden in the sense of new, pure, and a chance for people to start over. Others focused on "the Fall," and the subsequent need for strict institutional control of deviance in the New World (e.g., the Calvinists and political conservatives). Similarly, the Eden imagery is often used as a "status legend" by males to justify their domination of females (It was Eve according to the story, who was first responsible for the eating of the forbidden fruit; Kurtz 1979:461-462). Thus, there were "elective affinities" (Wahlwerwandschaften), as Weber calls them, between the interests of particular status groups and a cultural form which could be used by them to legitimize their status and position in a conflict.

Conflict rituals serve to identify the evil responsible for the problem which people are facing, and to mark out social boundaries which exclude the evil individuals and denounce them. This "social construction of evil" and ritual denunciation of enemies gives people a sense of control over the conflict and the circumstances which created it. They are empowered to act.

If a ritual does not appear to solve the problem for which it is designed, the failure is generally attributed to performance flaws, rather than to the ineffectiveness of the ritual itself. Because rituals are embedded in a belief system and do not exist in isolation, to reject them often implies a renunciation of other beliefs to which the rituals are inextricably linked. Besides, it is always easy to identify, retrospectively, flaws in the performance, and times when the ritual did work.

Ironically, it is thus when a ritual is not working that the ritual experts are most needed. The authority of those experts is thus reinforced, because they are believed to be capable of solving the performance problems and restoring the efficacy of the ritual. Similarly, the institutions in which the rituals are sustained are also reified and their authority reinforced as a consequence of that activity.

The Holy Office of the Inquisition, having saved the faith from a group of heretics, is bolstered in its power and reputation. The clergy who shepherds people through a personal crisis, such as the death of a family member, has a renewed authority over them.

As the charisma-routinization cycles are played out in a community, the residues of past conflicts help to set the stage for subsequent ones, but they are never fully the same. Heresy is often the mother of orthodoxy, so that just when a conflict appears resolved in a religious community, the ideas(s) that were thought laid to rest are resurrected on the banner of another faction within the community. Note, for example, the dialectical discussions of the early church councils, in which various ideas about the humanity and divinity of Jesus were denounced and then resurrected by an emergent group.

Particular parties to a controversy (there are often more than two, but conflicts are frequently defined as bipolar) attach themselves to a specific idea (or set of ideas) which seems to have an affinity with that party's interests. That is, these ideas and interests appear to have what Weber calls "elective affinities" with one another.

Indian nationalists in the late 19th century, for example, were attracted to the teachings of Ramakrishna (1836-1886), who claimed that the Hindu Vedanta was a superior worldview that included the best of all faiths. Such a perspective provided a useful, but not highly confrontational, approach to conflicts between indigenous Hindus and invading Christian and Muslim forces, a sort of accommodation without surrender, at least on a psychological level. A similar adaptation was made by African slaves brought to the United States. Forced to convert to Christianity, many used Christian symbols as a way of subverting the violence of their situation, a sort of "status sabotage" that undermined the stratification system imposed upon them.

The valence of elective affinities is not always positive, nor are they always unidimensional. Religion, like politics, often makes for strange bedfellows, and yet there is often a hidden logic to the relationship, even if it is an antagonistic one. Just as some groups or principles appear to be ideal allies,
others make ideal enemies. The Catholic modernists, for example (see Kurtz 1986:179) "served as the negative model for the church's stance toward the modern world. Modernist ideas and intellectual formulations were defined as heretical, but their very existence provided the focus for a revitalization movement, motivated members of the church to rally to the faith's defense on the Vatican's terms, and set in motion an institutional reaction analogous to the flow of adrenaline in an endangered animal."

The Presentation of Self in Conflict

Conflicts are not orchestrated by "institutions" or broad social forces, of course, but by individuals, who often get caught up in a conflict and find it an important event in their lives. Because large conflicts consume so much of a person's energy, their very identity may become invested in its outcome: if "their side" wins, they win personally and vice versa.

Although conflicts are largely about power, they are also about such personal matters as attention. Charles Derber (1976) has argued that many social processes that appear to be a pursuit of wealth are actually a "pursuit of attention." People seem to need attention, and things like wealth and power may simply be means to that end.

Any given religious conflict has a variety of standard roles involved in it, such as dissidents and authorities, victims and perpetrators, prophets and priests. Individuals generally are assigned a role in the conflict (although perhaps with some choice in the matter), and find that much of the script is already written for them, due to the ritualization of conflict.

Different roles have varying perspectives, of course, on the conflict: the prophet specializes in provoking conflict, and the priest in demobilizing it (see Weber 1968). Dissidents must challenge the authority of elites and established structures, whereas the authorities are charged with defending the status quo. These different attitudes toward conflict are related to their respective responsibilities in religious institutions.

There may be an affinity between personalities and various conflict roles, so that some prophets have difficulty adjusting to the priestly role if their movement wins and they try to routinize their charisma. Skills of opposition are different from those required to be in charge (the dilemma of every revolution). Sometimes prophets are jailed, assassinated, or executed prior to the victory, and the mantle passes on to a new style of leader. Those in priestly roles are occasionally frustrated prophets who begin to make prophetic pronouncements from the pulpit. If the congregation is not ready to move with their new prophet, then he or she may be forced to move on to another more receptive flock.

Roles are not played in isolation, however, but in interaction with others: adversaries and allies, performance teams, and audiences. The competence of actors in their presentation of these conflict roles, and their respective resources, may have more influence on the outcome of the conflict than "objective" merits of the issues at stake.

The Double-Edged "Sword" of Conflict

Conflict, including religious conflict, can be either constructive or destructive. The most significant developments in the history of religions are embedded in conflict. Most (if not all) religious movements are born in a crucible of conflict, either among the mortals or the gods, or even between the gods and the mortals.

From the inner conflict of the creative spirit of a Michaelangelo or a Van Gogh, to the external conflicts between Moses and the Pharaoh or the Buddha and his protective father, it is conflict that gives rise to new religious insights.

The most significant religious movements often synthesize two opposing forces or tendencies. The Puritans, according to Weber (1958), combined two types of rationality ordinarily in tension: practical, economic, goal-oriented rationality (instrumental rationality), on the one hand, and value rationality, on the other. The result, Weber argues, is the set of cultural conditions which facilitate the rise of capitalism.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi took a religious orientation which generally cultivated a detachment that might make one apolitical, and turned it into a powerful tool for practical politics. The
Hindu concept of *ahimsa*, nonviolence or non-harmfulness, requires a detachment from consequences of action, is combined by Gandhi with a notion of *karma*, which is attentive to the cause and effect inherent in all action. A radical activism is made possible by that synthesis of usually-opposed tendencies, because the activist could pragmatically assess the consequences of his or her actions, but not make that a criterion for doing something (especially in the sense of avoiding action that would have negative personal consequences). Particular actions could be taken because they are morally right (see Kniss 1988). Consequently, wave after wave of nonviolent protesters walked fearlessly up to the police, who beat wave after wave of them, in the satyagraha movements organized by Gandhi; they had the courage to act on the basis of their moral convictions regardless of the consequences.

Conflict is not always pleasantly creative, however; it also destroys. Thousands of precious, irreplaceable cultural artifacts have been smashed as a result of religious fervor. Innumerable lives and careers have been lost, cultures destroyed, and cities sacked in the name of various gods and sacred causes. Even when religious conflicts result in positive developments, they are often achieved at a great price to many individuals or groups, and often have long-lasting effects.

II. CONFLICT SYMBOLS

When a particular sacred issue or item becomes a matter of conflict, it may become what I would call a "conflict symbol," that is, a "cultural object" (Griswold 1987) that serves as a carrier of dispute. Almost anything can become a conflict symbol if it becomes a focus of disputation: a material object (a flag, a cross), a territory (the Holy Land, the Mother Land), an idea (infant baptism, scriptural inerrancy), or an event (the assassination of Archbishop Romero). It seems to me that identifying this symbol in a conflict is crucial to understanding a dispute, because it gives clues as to who is on which side of the conflict and how the controversy is perceived by the conflicting parties.

Conflict symbols serve as loyalty litmus tests: how one feels and talks about the symbol becomes a badge of membership in a particular party to the struggle. It is elevated to a special status and thus confers status on those who so define it. Those who hold the "wrong" position on the topic, or who refuse to speak about it with the proper rhetorical formulas, are outside of the circle: if one does not believe in the Virgin Birth or biblical inerrancy, in some traditions, one is simply not saved. Memphis pastor and former Southern Baptist Convention president Adrian Rogers declares that "The Bible is either absolute or it's obsolete. There can be no in-between" (Barnhart 1986:2).

Conflict symbols are condensation symbols, in the sense used by Edelman (1985); they contain (in condensed form) the meanings surrounding a religious conflict, from the politics to the history of the controversy. For all those privy to the codes, the "buzz words" and rhetorical strategies used by conflicting parties provide encoded information which immediately identifies people in terms of loyalty and disloyalty, cognitive frame, and whether or not one is an ally. "Are you washed in the blood of the lamb," one person asks another, in order to determine membership. Rhetorical orthodoxies are established by both sides of a conflict and often the side share their meaning (although they value them differently).

Thus, the symbols and their formulation or expression, become sacred to the respective parties of a conflict. Because both sides know the codes, there is often deliberate profanation of the conflict symbols, and epithets are hurled which degrade the opponents. Terms of respect become terms of derision -- e.g., "secular humanists" -- and vice versa; flags are burned, and crucifixes are smashed to the floor. Roving bands of Jacobin youth entered Catholic schools while they were in session after the French Revolution, grabbing crucifixes from the wall and throwing them to the floor, much to the dismay of the school children who witnessed the desecration (Dansette 1961). It was precisely because the revolutionaries knew that the symbols were so sacred that they attacked them.

Just as the opponent's symbols become objects of derision, one's own become objects of veneration, and a carrier of status. Stances about particu-
lar conflict symbols are formulated and adhered to so that social and ideological boundaries are inter-related; an ensemble of ideas and interests fit together (Weber's notion of "elective affinities"). Thus, it became virtually impossible, in 19th century France, to be Catholic, pro-republican, and scientific; if one were scientific, one had also to be anticlerical and democratic.

Cultural symbols also convey "cultural capital" (Bourdieu; Lamont). They become reified and are valued as having great worth, despite some "objective" valuation. A conflict symbol is defined as having a quantum of cultural capital, and those who own it and defend it find their own status enhanced, especially if they defend it at the cost of personal sacrifice. Profane objects may become sacralized and then again trivialized as everyone jumps on the sacred bandwagon. The cross, for example, was a gruesome symbol of execution appropriated by early Christians as a highly sacred symbol. For Emperor Constantine, it became a means of calling upon the Christian God to help him win battles, and in the 20th century, it is a ubiquitous cultural object which so many have sought to possess that it has lost its original meaning.

Relics of the saints at the Cave Monastery in Kiev may have become more valuable because of decades of suppression of their veneration. When half of the monastery was recently returned to the church by the Soviet government, the holy water that had once flowed from the site began to flow again.

Similarly, Christian conceptions of the "rapture," originally developed as an other-worldly compensation for the sufferings of the martyrs, becomes something to which the most ordinary "disciple" can aspire. In the original version, those who would be saved ("raptured") by Jesus at the end of the world were the saints who had been beheaded; I know of no religious sect today that requires such a stringent criterion for membership in the elect.

III. AFFINITIES AND DIVISIONS

The fault lines along which religious conflict moves are social boundaries. Religious conflicts are social processes that play a crucial role in creating and maintaining boundaries, both ideological and social. Religious orthodoxy is constructed out of conflict with heresies, as well as through positive affirmations, so that people mark out what they think on the basis of what they do not think. Likewise, religious communities are constructed through conflict with those outside of the community, because it is both attraction and repulsion that gives shape to social life (Simmel 1971).

Certain religious ideas are defined as having an affinity with the interests of a particular community, as opposed to other ideas and other groups of people. These configurations probably emerge, for the most part, as heresies internal to a parent community, and finally break off through a schism, forming a new community.

The world's great religions clearly demonstrate that process: Christianity emerges as a Jewish sect, becomes increasingly in conflict with Jewish authorities, and finally splits off to become a distinct community with its own doctrine, despite obvious continuities which are often overlooked or denied, especially by church leaders in order to strengthen their position by playing up the differences between the two traditions. Similarly, Indian Hinduism gives rise to Buddhism, which gradually takes on its own identity as it becomes shaped by other cultural influences (especially Confucianism and Taoism) in China and Japan.

Some ideas and interests seem to bond together, as Weber (1968) notes. The notion of a glorious afterlife serves the persecuted, just as the idea of predestination appeals to the wealthy. Although the fit is never perfect, there must be some degree of continuity between a religious worldview, on the one hand, and the lifestyle of a people, on the other (Geertz 1973). Conflicts about ideas are thus also conflicts about social boundaries. As I have suggested in The Politics of Heresies (1986 10ff.),

Ideas and interests are dialectically related: the way in which beliefs systems are formulated and articulated is largely shaped and influenced not only by their actual content but also by the interests of the groups adhering to them, particularly in times of social conflict. Particular religious beliefs,
worldviews, and political orientations are chosen both because they make sense to people intellectually and because those definitions of reality have an affinity with the interests and life-styles of those who choose them.

The Dialectics of Conflict

Conflicts are most intense when a certain critical distance is achieved. The effects of distance in a relationship are curvilinear: conflict is most significant to people when both social and ideational distances reach, but not exceed a certain level (ibid.). If conflicting parties are within the same boundaries (territorial, social, etc.), the battle means more to them than if the adversary is external.

Sometimes, of course, external enemies are drawn into one's social circle; if adversaries attack or somehow interact with one another, the conflict redraws boundaries so that both parties are in a larger social circle. Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland are simultaneously inside and outside each other's religious communities -- they are all Christians, but have drawn sharp religious boundaries that correspond with social boundaries. Nonetheless, they also share territorial boundaries and have overlapping social networks. The conflict between them intensifies their relationship, so that they become united in struggle against each other. Significant others are not simply those whom one loves, but also those whom one hates.

Adversaries in intra-denominational conflict are like Simmel's stranger: near and remote at the same time. This combination of opposed tendencies means that ambivalence is structured into intra-religious conflicts. One can therefore expect oscillations in behavior, with adversaries now loving, now hating one another and now hating one another.

The Protestant-Catholic relationship is an instructive one, paralleled by other divisions that are internal in one sense, but external in another, such as Sunni and Shiite Muslims (note the Iran-Iraq war between predominantly Shia Iranians and largely Sunni Iraqis). Such relationships are often particularly intense because, like the heretic and Simmel's "stranger," they are near and remote at the same time (see Simmel 1971; Kurtz 1986).

Protestant anti-Catholicism has been a predominate feature of cultural life in England and the United States. Rumors about "popish plots" have circulated in those countries for centuries. The great fire in London in 1666, for example, was believed started by a "papist." Robert Hubert (who was French as well as Catholic!) was hanged for setting the fire, which burned 13,000 houses and caused massive destruction (Myers:86). Similarly, anti-Catholic slurs against John F. Kennedy were widely circulated when he was running for the U.S. presidency. Some said that if he were elected, the pope would run the United States.

Internal and External Conflicts

External and internal conflicts are intimately related to one another. A general rule of thumb in religious conflict (to paraphrase a Stephen Stills song) is "if you can't be with the one you hate, hate the one you're with!" This proposition is illustrated by the modernist crisis in Roman Catholicism (Kurtz 1986; Lyng and Kurtz 1985). Beset by anticlericalism on all sides during the nineteenth century, the Roman Church found itself in a precarious position. It position of privilege in medieval Europe was being wrested from it, and it had thrown in its lot with the losing side: the monarchy and feudal aristocracy.

As it lost its secular powers, the Vatican found itself less and less able to respond directly to external critics and turned instead against the internal dissidents over which it had more control.

Heretics are "deviant insiders," who are within the institutional control of the hierarchy and against whom measures can be taken. The heresy hunt ritual provides elites with something to do about a crisis; they cannot be accused of inaction, and the action appears effective because it has immediate, observable effects (which actions against outsiders sometimes do not have).

I would suspect that most religious conflicts within institutions are precipitated by either (1) external controversies between the religious community and forces outside of it, or (2) internal squabbles of a non-religious character, such as the re-
spective status of various members or groups within the community. The conflict probably cannot be understood without some appreciation of both of those aspects.

The Judeo-Christian concept of monotheism, for example, emerged at the time of the Babylonian captivity, when the ancient Hebrews were militarily defeated, thus raising questions about the relative power of their god, Yahweh, and that of the Babylonians, Marduk.

External changes precipitate internal changes, which then often feed back on the outside world as well. Widespread changes in the ancient Near East including the spread of the Roman Empire and expansion of trade throughout the region, precipitated developments that led to changes in Judaism and the emergence of Christianity, first as a Jewish sect and later as an independent religious movement. New religious movements are precipitated by conflicts within religious communities, but those conflicts are, in turn, often related to political, economic, or even ecological transformations of the environment in which they emerge.

Sometimes religious communities in hostile environments isolate themselves or change location. Dionysian worshippers in ancient Thebes temporarily escaped the king's efforts to suppress them by moving to the countryside. All went well, apparently, until the king sent a representative to investigate; then, all hell broke loose, as recorded by Euripides in The Bacchae. A similar sequence occurred in the twentieth century, when the followers of Jim Jones moved their religious community to Guyana. When a U.S. Congressional investigation of the community was mounted, the violence of the external world on the group was internalized and they committed mass suicide, as well as murdering the investigators.2

Internal conflicts often arise because of different attitudes within a religious community toward the outside changes. Some aspect of the way in which those external developments impinge on the community becomes a conflict symbol.

The classic example is the scientific revolution of the early modern period, which threatened Christianity in a fundamental way. Theories of biblical criticism and evolution were used by anticlericals to raise questions about the legitimacy of Christian doctrine and thus to erode its power in the secular sphere (especially its legitimation of the ancien regime). As Tocqueville points out, it was not so much that the priests controlled the next world, but that they had power in this one, that made the church a target of the French Revolution of 1789.

The inerrancy of the bible became the battle cry for reactionary forces who wanted to sustain the monarchy, and biblical criticism became the tool for those both inside and outside of the church who wished to foster change. Ecclesiastical authorities were rapidly losing their power in both secular and religious spheres, and denounced the existence of heretics in their midst who were espousing views on biblical criticism similar to those of the dreaded external enemies. The campaign against the heretics provided an occasion for institutional authorities to maintain boundaries and heighten their authority.

Similar developments occurred in China during the period preceding the Revolution regarding the teachings of Confucius (Chu 1989). Enlightenment intellectuals used textual criticism, pointing out various discrepancies in the writings, to attack the Confucian underpinnings of the old regime.

In the global village of the late twentieth century, there is a sense in which everyone is inside the same boundaries, although often unwillingly. An unprecedented interaction among widely-divergent religious traditions inevitably precipitates conflicts within each tradition.

**Dissident Responses to Heresy Hunts**

Although authorities may find heresy hunts an opportune mechanism for shoring up their own authority, such rituals may provoke unanticipated consequences. Labeled dissidents have a range of options, from what Hirschman (1970:30) calls "exit" (leaving the organization) to "voice" (expressing discontent). Although Hirschman argues that exit is the most likely choice in many instances, exclusivist religious institutions may make that choice very costly for believers. This is particularly significant if there is no salvation outside of the institution (as in Roman Catholicism), and one believes oneself to be damned if excommunicated.
Sometimes people can simply change religions or congregations, but there are often factors such as family history, friendship networks, prestige, or doctrinal issues, that make believers prefer to fight than switch.

Moreover, efforts by elites to denounce dissidents may provoke a movement, if there is widespread discontent, by making martyrs out of them. That is what I found in my study of Catholic modernism (Kurtz 1986:174; Lyng and Kurtz 1985); the modernist movement was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once stigmatized as heretics, the scholars who were denounced became a self-conscious insurgent movement.

Papal repression brought the modernists together and forced them to shape a movement in their own defense. The temporary success of the movement was met with increased pressures from authorities, however, so that eventually their efforts to control the movement reached an "obliterating maximum." By excommunicating movement members and reassigning dissident clergy to marginal posts, the repression began working as a negative force, depleting rather than enhancing movement resources (Lyng and Kurtz 1985; cf. Gerlach and Hine 1970:188; Wilson 1977:477).

The story did not end with the suppression of modernism in 1907, however, because most of the modernists' heresies became Catholic orthodoxy in the 1960s and 1970s. Although there is not agreement on what determines the success or failure of such movements, in part it has to do with the ability of respective sides to mobilize resources and with the extent to which there is some widespread support for change. No doubt many other factors come into play, such as the capabilities of insurgents and elites respectively, in their efforts to expand or contain change. Environmental situations may be salient as well, such as changes in birth rates precipitating religious debates on abortion.

Institutional configurations and resources are important determinants of the outcome of a conflict, but may be more complicated than they appear at first glance. Social organizations that seem quite solid and stable can change quite rapidly if the climate is ripe for transformation, as can be seen in the Roman Catholic Church during the few short years since Vatican II, or in contemporary developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Sometimes an authoritarian structure facilitates rapid change, even toward democratization, as Pope John XXIII and Mikhail Gorbachev have demonstrated.

Although a straightforward calculation of institutional resources may be a helpful tool in predicting the direction in which a conflict might flow, it may be too static. Much of the success or failure of an insurgent movement within an institution has to do with the ability of the dissidents to define the conflict symbol at stake. An old symbol may be infused with new meaning, as has happened with the rapid diffusion of liberation theology throughout the Third World. The same symbols used for centuries by colonists and their successors to suppress dissidence in many Latin American, African, and Asian countries, are now being used to agitate for social and political changes in the name of God.

This movement spread so rapidly, much to the dismay of many religious and political authorities, in part because it made so much intuitive sense to the believers, whose "eyes were opened" to the assumed "preference for the poor" contained in the teachings of Jesus. The Virgin of Guadalupe, long an opium for the poor and a source of comfort in their suffering, now becomes an inspiration for change, because the poor believe that they have a powerful ally in their fight against oppression.

What is surprising about religious conflict is not that elites have more resources and therefore more ability to influence events, but that powerless people can often have such a dramatic impact on an institution by redefining and manipulating conflict symbols. This may be what Marx meant when he said that theory can become a material force when it meets the needs of the masses (Marx 1972).

IV. CULTURAL STYLES OF CONFLICT

Religious conflict appears be a universal phenomenon. And yet, it is somewhere and sometimes more prevalent and pronounced. No society or epoch has a corner on religious conflict. Different cultural traditions and religious institutions
have different styles of religious (and other) conflict. Both the form and the content of those conflicts leave long-lasting residues in the culture and structure of societies. Sigmund Freud's concept of "prefiguring" is helpful here: he suggests that the way in which one relates to authority figures is prefigured by one's childhood relationships with one's parents. Similarly, a society's cultural forms are prefigured by those of its cultural ancestors, and institutional forms are prefigured by the styles of its founders and subsequent generations of elites.

Of particular interest are the differences in religious toleration in Eastern and Western religious traditions, although it is difficult to make broad generalizations, since history is replete with exceptions, and there is always a gap between doctrine and practice. There are many examples of religious conflicts in the East, despite doctrinal toleration in most Eastern religions.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the commandment "Thou shalt have no other gods" originally denoted boundaries that were simultaneously ideological-religious and social. When Christianity began to diverge from Judaism, a differentiation between those boundaries occurred: everyone, regardless of social origin, was welcomed to join the community, provided that they denounced their gods and accepted only the Christian god. The criteria for exclusion shifted from social to ideological boundaries. That is why for many Christians, what you think (or say you believe) is more important than what you do, whereas the reverse is generally more true in Judaism. This practice provided Roman authorities with a rationale for vociferous persecution of the troublesome new religious sect, and later led the Christians to persecute others after they took over the Roman Empire (or, rather, the Empire coopted them).

This sort of exclusivist intolerance, which is applied both internally and externally, stands in sharp contrast to the normal attitude toward differing belief systems in the Hindu-Buddhist tradi-

tions, and is an important factor to examine in any attempt to understand religious conflict.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, there is a strong preference for stability and toleration over conflict and doctrinal correctness. If one wishes to be a Christian, from a Hindu point of view, that is not a problem: one may, for example, simply see Jesus as another incarnation of Krishna. Hindu teachings provide an elaborate religious rationale for one's social position -- if one suffers in this life and has a lowly station, it is punishment for misdeeds in a previous lifetime. One need merely find one's dharma (duty) and fulfill it to the best of one's ability and look forward to a future reward. Social mobility is never achieved within a lifetime, but is reserved for the transmigrating souls. The message is clear: do not precipitate conflict now, or you may be punished in the future.

Early Pali texts report that the Buddha told his followers,

"Monks, if others speak against me, or against the Dhamma [the Teachings] or the Sangha [the Order], you should not on that account either have a grudge against them or suffer heart-burning or feel ill-will. If you, on that account could be angry and hurt, that would become a danger to your own selves. If when others speak ill of me, or of the Dhamma or the Sangha, you feel angry at that, and displeased, would you then be able to judge how far that speech is good or bad?"

"That would not be so, Lord."

"But when others speak ill of me, or of the Dhamma or of the Sangha, you should rebut their statement by saying: 'For this or that reason this is not the fact, that is not so, such a thing does not exist among us, is not in us.'" (in Gard 1962:16)

The Buddha goes on to explain that his followers should also not "be filled with pleasure and gladness, or be lifted up in mind" if others should speak in praise of their religion.

A similar sentiment is found in an Edict carved on rock [No. XII] by the third century B.C.E. Buddhist emperor Asoka of India, the emperor declared:

One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but

In the final analysis, the study of religious conflict requires a comparative historical method, but also a variety of other methods, including ethnography, textual analysis, and much more. It is a difficult, but fruitful exploration, and anyone who refuses to recognizes its importance should be expelled from the sociological community!

one should honour others' religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking 'I will glorify my own religion.' But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely. So concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others. (in Gard 1962:18-19)

One should not be taken in by religious rhetoric, however, which often masks the true religious reality. The emphasis on toleration and conflict avoidance in Hinduism may well be an effort to compensate for strong tendencies toward conflict in a socioeconomic situation ripe for it, because of cleavages along religious lines in economic and political confrontations.

Western religions seem to encourage conflict, especially because of their exclusivism. It is important, therefore, to explore broad cultural styles, as well as the styles of particular institutions. Sect-like institutions are more exclusivistic and narrow than church-like institutions, which are more broad, heterogeneous, and tolerant (Troeltsch).

The conflictual nature of Western religions is both their blessing and their curse. It is the dynamic drive that precipitates social change and bloodshed. From Martin Luther to Martin Luther King, Jr., from the medieval crusades to campus crusades, the Christian orientation to conversion motivates people to engage in conflict time and again.

It is no accident that the "original sin," the "fall" posited in the Judeo-Christian tradition, comes from eating the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which stands at the center of the garden. This ideational conflict between good and evil is quickly translated into social conflict East of Eden. The first bloodshed in human history, according to the tradition, is a battle over who was pleasing to God. The irony is that the one who pleased God gets killed, and the rest of us may be descended from the murderer.

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