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INTRODUCTION: RELIGION, IR AND METHODOLOGY

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The religious dimensions of international relations are elusive. To make these dimensions *researchable* has been, and still remains, a challenge. This fourth, and last volume in the series on *Religion and International Relations* focuses on the various research strategies that scholars use to explore religion and international relations. We have shown in earlier volumes of this series that religion is, indeed, an important factor that cannot be neglected when it comes to describing, explaining, and understanding the main aspects of the field of IR, namely international relations (Vol. I), peace (Vol. II), and war (Vol. III). The scholarly interest religion, for long a neglected field of inquiry in IR, has now greatly increased and we are witnessing more research focusing on religious dimensions.

A first basic question is whether religion can be made researchable and if so how. We have chosen to incorporate a debate from political science, which we deem applicable to international relations. **Joshua Mitchell** suggests that the mainstream theoretical factors that are utilized in order to describe and explain religious dimensions in political science – preference, values, identities, and choice – are inadequate. These terms, Mitchell shows, were developed at particular historical junctures, often as a critique of religious ideas, and represent rather modern ideas (whereas religious experiences and traditions are ancient). The religious experience at its essence cannot be correctly comprehended through these narrow terms according to a religious persons' self-understanding. In fact, making rational and well-grounded choices is not the basis for the religious experience. Contact with the sacred challenges subjective agency. According to the perspective of the believer, it is not the individual that chooses God, but rather God who chooses and fundamentally transforms the individual.

This position is questioned in a response to Mitchell by **Clyde Wilcox, Kenneth D. Wald and Ted G. Jelen**. First, although the religious experience that Mitchell describes is not necessarily invalid, the authors find it to be a rather narrow description of all possible ways in which religious actors perceive the religious dimensions of their everyday lives. Many people around the world live out the religious dimensions in ways that can actually be explained by preference, values, identities, and choice. Second, they question the individualized conceptualization of religion. When it comes to political processes, it is not primarily the individual's religious experience that is the main interest, rather, it is the way in which these experiences translate into politically relevant decisions. These are group-processes among political elites or in wider societal circles.

In order to understand those group-processes it may be useful to utilize the conceptual approach proposed by **Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger**. They lay out a useful conceptual framework for understanding the role of religion in international relations (and in particular in conflicts), focusing on the strategic choices that elites make when they appeal to religious sentiments, identities, and traditions. Their categorization of three basic and different ways of understanding religion is very useful in this regard. The primordialists, instrumentalists, and constructivists, have very different takes on how religion should be approached in the study of international relations. For instance, a primordialist approach assumes that religious identities are given, ancient, and unchangeable, whereas an instrumentalist

perspective starts with the opposite assumption: elites utilize religion strategically to further their own ends.

A second debate in this subfield concerns the problem of defining religion. **Elizabeth Shakman Hurd** challenges the field of international relations in her analysis of the idea of secularism. Identifying something (or someone) as ‘religious’ is a politicized decision, she argues, which can silence certain political voices and forces. Secularism therefore can be a harbinger of hegemonic agendas, utilizing religious labels in order to produce and reproduce structures of domination and power. There are, according to Shakman Hurd, two main forms of secularism in international relations, both worthy of criticism. The first is the idea that religion needs to be privatized and performed in the individual sphere, rather than in public. Proponents of this idea usually assume that religion is a cover for some other material interests for class, state, or rational actors. Religion is also often seen as an irrational force, and often also dismissed as something that is becoming irrelevant in international relations. A second form of secularism identifies and acknowledges a role for religion in international relations, albeit a very particular role. Secularism, in this perspective, is an important idea steaming from deep cultural roots within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Shakman Hurd’s criticism ties in with **Robert M. Bosco**, who also engages the question whether defining something as religion is, in fact, a decision with political ramifications. By examining the politics of defining religion, Bosco supports the idea that religion is in no way a neutral category in international politics. Identifying the connections between knowledge and power, his analysis shows how the study of religion and international relations runs the risk of reproducing a set of Orientalist ways of thinking.

In stark contrast to Shakman Hurd and Bosco, **Ivan Strenski** dismisses the brouhaha over defining religion by “detractors” of the term, a debate that he considers to be unnecessary and, indeed, condescending. He finds the concept to be uncomplicated: In their daily use, non-scholars encounter no difficulty understanding or using the word. It requires no greater expertise than grappling with every-day concepts like politics, art, or culture. Efforts to purge “religion” from our vocabulary, he argues, are irrelevant and futile.

John Carlson offers a compromise solution that rejects both relativist and nihilist approaches, on the one hand, and reductivist approaches, on the other hand. Carlson surveys the concept's origins and competing definitions, then moves to examine pragmatic challenges in defining the term, such as which belief systems should be included under this umbrella term. He warns about the dangers of essentializing religion, particularly efforts to portray it as inherently violent or peaceful, but is also aware of the limited effectiveness of efforts to deconstruct religion. Finally, he problematizes the concept of violence to a similar degree, wary of over-associating its practice with the modern state.

A separate, and no less influential debate in the study of religion and conflict, has been spurred by the notion of a “clash of civilizations”. In Volume I of this series we described the basic tenets of Samuel Huntington’s proposition: the idea that civilizations represent the main building-blocks of international relations, and that wars and conflicts could best be understood from the civilizational perspective. This hypothesis has stimulated a large body of empirical research, some of which we have included on this volume. In order to try to test the main implications of the Huntington’s theory, scholars have developed different methodological approaches

and designs, generating different empirical findings with divergent results. Overall, this empirical research shows little support for the “clash of civilizations” thesis.

Yet, there are many different nuances in the empirical studies of civilizational effects on war and peace. **Giacomo Chiozza** focuses on the propensity for interstate conflict and shows that interactions between states from different civilizations pose no higher risk for conflicts than interactions between states of the same civilization. In fact, inter-civilizational dyads (pairs of states) are generally less conflict prone. The study examines the direct effects of civilizational belonging, but also includes the indirect effects through some of the key variables for conflict onset identified in previous research.

The empirical picture is somewhat different if centered on intra-state conflicts. **Philip G Roeder** contributes to the “clash of civilizations” debate with an empirical focus on domestic, rather than international, conflicts. He shows that inter-civilizational relations are actually more likely to be associated with escalation of conflicts. Thus, disputes between governments and ethnic groups from different civilizations are more likely to result in conflicts of higher intensity. Thus, the study lends support to Huntington’s claim. Yet, Roeder suggests that it is not primarily civilizational differences per se, but rather major cultural divisions, that explains the intensity of conflicts.

Bruce M. Russett, John R. Oneal, and Michaelene Cox examine incidents of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). They find, contrary to Huntington, that inter-civilization MIDs are not becoming more common and that civilizational differences between states do not explain the prevalence of these MIDS. They propose that mainstream realist and liberal variables can explain these findings. **Andrej Tuscisny** analyses both conflicts between and within states and finds that civilizational differences seem to have a range of different effects over time, though these effects are marginal.

To sum up, the empirical research on “clash of civilization” has focused on two main predictions following from the thesis. First, that civilizational difference are more conflict prone, and second, that there will be an increase in civilizational conflicts after the end of the Cold War. As Huntington made clear in his rebuttal of the study by Russett et al, his theory should be seen as a prediction of what would unfold after the end of the Cold War, when the East-West ideological struggle faded away. The study by Russett, Oneal and Cox covers only conflicts up to 1992. Chiozza studies the post-Cold War period (up to 1997), although it should be recognized that this temporal domain is rather limited (eight years). Roeder also examines the post-Cold War era (up to 1999).

Explaining wars by examining religious demography has its critics. The article by **James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin** is one of the most influential in the study on the onset of civil war and can be seen as a methodological benchmark for statistically-based analyses of armed conflicts. Although the focus is not on religion per se, the study does take religious variables into account when explaining why some countries experience civil wars but others do not. In particular, the authors show that more religiously diverse countries have actually not been more at risk of outbreak of civil wars. Thus religious or ethnic heterogeneity cannot account for the outbreak of large-scale intrastate conflicts, according to their analysis.

Religious freedom is one of the main areas of empirical research on religion and international relations. **Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke** pioneered the research in this area by creating cross-country data on three important dimensions of religion. Their international religion index covers a wide range of countries and territories and

provides opportunities for systematic comparisons. The first of the three dimensions, government regulation, cover policies and official rights that seek to regulate the religious sphere. A second measurement captures actively government support for religious actors and institutions. The third measurement complements the two first. Whereas government regulation and favoritism focus on how the government relates to the religious sphere, the third measurements focuses on social regulation. It captures social restraints and various forms of cultural practice in relation to religious groups. These measurements can be related, indeed they often are, but are nevertheless three distinct phenomena within the broader religious landscape. A growing body of work is now utilizing and developing these measurements. For example, scholars are examining how government regulation of religion influences the development of societies, as well as what accounts for the rather dramatic variations in government regulation and favoritism in countries around the globe.

We have included two interesting examples of historical and case analysis in this volume. They utilizes intensive research approaches (rather than extensive approaches) to come to grips with the question of how religion influence international relations. First, **Michael C. Horowitz** tackles the issue of whether it is religious considerations themselves, or rather material interests dressed up in religious clothes, that are the driving force behind conflicts fought in the name of religion. His study examines the behavioral patterns of religiously motivated military campaigns in order to ascertain whether religious arguments influence wartime behavior. Because of the introduction of nonmaterial motivations for fighting, religiously defined conflicts can go on for longer than other types of conflicts. Examining the longevity of the Crusades, Horowitz shows that purely material factors are insufficient in accounting for their persistence. His analysis is a valuable example of the methodological fruitfulness of closely studying behavioral patterns as a way of drawing inferences about the effects of religious dimensions of international relations, and of demonstrating the importance of religion in international relations.

Second, **Shane Barter and Ian Zatzkin-Osburn** present a novel way of measuring whether a conflict should be seen as 'religious' in general, and as a 'Holy War' in particular. Examining the violent conflicts in Southern Thailand and the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines, they suggest a culturally anchored approach that builds on the social practice. By exploring a set of social indicators in the form of burial practices, public discourses, as well as local recruitment patterns, they develop measurements of high validity that capture whether local communities perceive particular armed conflicts in religious terms.

The study by **Robert Pape** is an important contribution to our understanding of suicide terrorism, a mode of activity which has not been utilized exclusively by religious groups, but which several religious groups also uses. Its framework is applicable to the field of religion and IR. Methodologically, the study represents a good – and influential – example of comparative approaches in order to clarify the connections between religion and the behaviors of certain non-state actors in the international system. Its emphasis on strategic logic has also been having an important impact on our understanding of how religious actors should be analyzed.

The quantitatively oriented analysis on religion has tended to focus on religion as a problem, emphasizing religious wars and how certain religious factors contribute to violence. In volume III of this project ("Religion and Peace"), we identified a set of important scholarly work that focused instead on the more positive and constructive role of religion. Methodologically, the paper by **Matthias Basedau and Alexander de Juan** (as well as other publications flowing from the same project) contributes to

the study of peace and conflict by offering an empirically more nuanced set of measurements on religion, taking both positive and negative roles into account. Because the research project is on-going, the findings of this particular paper are not as important as the indicators utilized. First of all, the study provides a comprehensive measurement of several religious demography variables: religious polarity, religious fractionalization, and major change in religious demographics. It also explores the role of overlaps between religious identities and other identities. Lastly, it provides measurements of the use of religious rhetoric, both for escalatory purposes (legitimization of violence) and de-escalatory purposes (calls for peace). These measurements push the empirical research frontier on religion and international relations (particularly peace and conflict) forward.

As is evident in this forth volume, the study of religion and IR is marked by methodological pluralism. Scholars utilize a wide range of approaches, ranging from critical theory (**Bosco, Shakman Hurd**) to conceptual work and theory-building (**Hasenclever and Rittberger, Carlson**) to empirical work utilizing both intensive case-studies (**Horowitz, Barter and Ian Zatzkin-Osburn**), comparative analysis (**Pape**) or extensive statistical analysis of larger datasets (**Grim & Finke, Russett, Oneal and Cox, Chiozza, Roeder, Tuscisny**). There are certain epistemological or methodological differences and tensions between these approaches but, given the complexity of the religious dimensions of IR, these alternative approaches also serve to complement one another.