

Not in God's Name

Confronting Religious Violence

Jonathan Sacks



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PART ONE

Bad Faith

1

Altruistic Evil

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.

Blaise Pascal

When religion turns men into murderers, God weeps.

So the book of Genesis tells us. Having made human beings in his image, God sees the first man and woman disobey the first command, and the first human child commit the first murder. Within a short space of time ‘the world was filled with violence’. God ‘saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth’. We then read one of the most searing sentences in religious literature. ‘God regretted that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain’ (Gen. 6:6).

Too often in the history of religion, people have killed in the name of the God of life, waged war in the name of the God of peace, hated in the name of the God of love and practised cruelty in the name of the God of compassion. When this happens, God speaks, sometimes in a still, small voice almost inaudible beneath the clamour of those claiming to speak on his behalf. What he says at such times is: *Not in My Name*.

Religion in the form of polytheism entered the world as the vindication of power. Not only was there no separation of church and state; religion was the transcendental justification of the state. Why was there hierarchy on earth? Because there was hierarchy in heaven. Just as the sun ruled the sky, so the pharaoh, king or emperor ruled the land. When some oppressed others, the few ruled the many, and whole populations were

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turned into slaves, this was – so it was said – to defend the sacred order written into the fabric of reality itself. Without it, there would be chaos. Polytheism was the cosmological vindication of the hierarchical society. Its monumental buildings, the ziggurats of Babylon and pyramids of Egypt, broad at the base, narrow at the top, were hierarchy's visible symbols. Religion was the robe of sanctity worn to mask the naked pursuit of power.

It was against this background that Abrahamic monotheism emerged as a sustained protest. Not all at once but ultimately it made extraordinary claims. It said that every human being, regardless of colour, culture, class or creed, was in the image and likeness of God. The supreme Power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless. A society is judged by the way it treats its weakest and most vulnerable members. Life is sacred. Murder is both a crime and a sin. Between people there should be a covenantal bond of righteousness and justice, mercy and compassion, forgiveness and love. Though in its early books the Hebrew Bible commanded war, within centuries its prophets, Isaiah and Micah, became the first voices to speak of peace as an ideal. A day would come, they said, when the peoples of the earth would turn their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruning hooks, and wage war no more. According to the Hebrew Bible, Abrahamic monotheism entered the world as a rejection of imperialism and the use of force to make some men masters and others slaves.

Abraham himself, the man revered by 2.4 billion Christians, 1.6 billion Muslims and 13 million Jews, ruled no empire, commanded no army, conquered no territory, performed no miracles and delivered no prophecies. Though he lived differently from his neighbours, he fought for them and prayed for them in some of the most audacious language ever uttered by a human to God – ‘Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?’ (Gen. 18:25) He sought to be true to his faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith.

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That idea, ignored for many of the intervening centuries, remains the simplest definition of the Abrahamic faith. It is not our task to conquer or convert the world or enforce uniformity of belief. It is our task to be a blessing to the world. The use of religion for political ends is not righteousness but idolatry. It was Machiavelli, not Moses or Mohammed, who said it is better to be feared than to be loved: the creed of the terrorist and the suicide bomber. It was Nietzsche, the man who first wrote the words ‘God is dead’, whose ethic was the will to power.

To invoke God to justify violence against the innocent is not an act of sanctity but of sacrilege. It is a kind of blasphemy. It is to take God’s name in vain.

*

Since the attack on New York’s Twin Towers and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, religiously motivated violence has not diminished. After wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, interventions in Libya and Syria, regime changes in many Middle Eastern countries and the rise of ISIS (commonly known as Islamic State), after more than a decade in which to think the problem through, the West has grown weaker while radical political Islam has grown stronger.

Al-Qaeda and the Islamist ideology from which it derived have generated dozens, perhaps hundreds, of associated or imitative groups throughout the world and neither they nor their acts of terror show any signs of diminution. In November 2014, for example, there were 664 jihadist attacks in 14 countries, killing a total of 5,042 people. A December 2014 report by the BBC World Service and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King’s College London concluded that Islamist extremism is ‘stronger than ever’ despite al-Qaeda’s declining role.¹

We have grown used to seeing sights on television and the

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social media that we thought had been consigned to the Middle Ages. Hostages beheaded. Soldiers hacked to death with axes. A Jordanian pilot burned alive. Innocent populations butchered. Schoolchildren murdered in cold blood. Young girls sexually assaulted and sold as slaves. Ten-year-olds turned into suicide bombers. A February 2015 report by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child spoke of mass executions of boys by ISIS, and of children being beheaded or buried alive.² Churches, synagogues and mosques have been destroyed, holy sites desecrated, people at prayer assassinated, and Christians abducted and crucified. Ancient communities have been driven from their homes.

Christians are being systematically persecuted in many parts of the world. Throughout the Middle East they are facing threat, imprisonment and death. In Afghanistan Christianity has almost been extinguished. In 2010 the last remaining church was burned to the ground. People converting to Christianity face the death sentence. In Syria, an estimated 450,000 Christians have fled. Members of other religions, among them Mandeans, Yazidis, Baha'i and people from Muslim minority faiths, have also suffered persecution and death.

In Egypt, 5 million Copts live in fear. In 2013, in the largest single attack on Christians since the fourteenth century, more than fifty churches were bombed or burned in an attack that has been called Egypt's Kristallnacht.³ Young Coptic girls are abducted, converted to Islam against their will and forcibly married to Muslim men. If they attempt to return to their Christian faith, they face imprisonment and death.⁴

In 2001 there were 1.5 million Christians in Iraq: today barely 400,000. In 2014 ISIS began a programme of beheading and butchering Christians, announcing that anyone refusing to convert to Islam will be 'killed, crucified or have their hands and feet cut off'. Christians have been expelled from Iraq's second city, Mosul, where they had been a presence for

more than sixteen centuries.

In Sudan, an estimated 1.5 million Christians have been killed by the Arab Muslim militia Janjaweed since 1984. In Pakistan, they live in a state of fear. In November 2010, a Christian woman from Punjab Province, Asia Noreen Bibi, was sentenced to death by hanging for violating Pakistan's blasphemy law. The accusation arose from an incident in which she had drunk water together with Muslim farm workers. They had protested that as a Christian she was unfit to touch the drinking bowl. An argument ensued. The workers accused her of blasphemy. As I write, she is still being held in solitary confinement pending an appeal for her life.

A century ago Christians made up 20 per cent of the population of the Middle East. Today the figure is 4 per cent. What is happening is the religious equivalent of ethnic cleansing. It is one of the crimes against humanity of our time.

Muslims too face persecution in Myanmar, South Thailand, Sri Lanka, China and Uzbekistan. Eight thousand were murdered in the massacre at Srebrenica in 1995, and many others raped, tortured or deported. In Cambodia in the 1970s as many as half a million were killed by the Khmer Rouge, and 132 mosques were destroyed. In Hebron in 1994 a religious Jew, Baruch Goldstein, an American-born physician, opened fire on Muslim Palestinians at prayer in Abraham's Tomb, killing 29 and injuring a further 125. On 2 July 2014 a seventeen-year-old Palestinian, Mohamed Abu Khdeir, was kidnapped and gruesomely murdered in a revenge attack after the killing of three Israeli teenagers. On 10 February 2015, three Muslims were killed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, allegedly by a militant atheist.

Muslims form the majority of victims of Islamist violence. A report from the University of Maryland's Global Terror Database estimated that between 2004 and 2013, about half of terrorist attacks and 60 per cent of fatalities occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, all of which have a mostly

Muslim population.⁵ One of the most tragic incidents occurred in Peshawar, Pakistan, where on 15 December 2014 Taliban gunmen stormed a military-run school and massacred 141 people, 132 of them children. Many Muslims feel deeply threatened by what they see as Western hostility, whether in the form of civilian casualties of the war in Iraq, drone strikes in Pakistan, or Israeli retaliation for Hamas rocket attacks, or as generalised antagonism in countries where they are a minority.

Meanwhile antisemitism has returned to the world in full force within living memory of the Holocaust. In Stockholm, on 27 January 2000, the fifty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, leaders of every nation in Europe committed themselves to a continuing programme of anti-racist and Holocaust education. Since then antisemitism has risen in every European country. Jews are leaving France, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Belgium and Hungary in fear. A survey by the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights, published in November 2013, showed that a third of Europe's Jews were contemplating leaving.

In Copenhagen on 14 February 2015, a Jewish security volunteer was killed outside a synagogue. In Paris on 9 January 2015, four Jews were shot in a kosher supermarket. In May 2014, three people were killed by a gunman in the Jewish Museum in Brussels. In Toulouse in 2012, a Jewish teacher and three schoolchildren were murdered. In these last three cases the killers were all French-born Muslims. In the summer of 2014, a synagogue near the Bastille in central Paris was surrounded by a large and angry mob chanting 'Death to the Jews'.

That the cry of 'Jews to the gas' should be heard again on the streets of Germany, and that several European countries should now be considered by Jews as unsafe places in which to live, is extraordinary, given decades of anti-racist legislation, interfaith dialogue and Holocaust education. Jews fear that

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‘Never again’ may become ‘Ever again’.

It is not only members of the Abrahamic monotheisms who are under threat. So too are Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and Bahais. In Northern Iraq, the ancient sect of the Yazidis only narrowly escaped genocide at the hands of ISIS. As well as being victims, several of the non-Abrahamic faiths, especially nationalist Buddhists and Hindus, have been among the perpetrators. Religious freedom, a right enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is under threat today in more than a quarter of the world’s nations. A report entitled *Religious Freedom in the World*,⁶ covering the years 2012–14, notes that there has been a marked deterioration in 55 of the world’s 196 countries, due either to authoritarian regimes or to Islamist groups. These are deeply troubled times.

*

Hannah Arendt, writing about the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, famously used the phrase ‘the banality of evil’, suggesting, rightly or wrongly, that many of those who implemented the Final Solution, the planned extermination of Europe’s Jews, were faceless bureaucrats implementing government orders, more out of obedience than hate. There is nothing banal about the evil currently consuming large parts of the world.

Many of the perpetrators, including suicide bombers and jihadists, come from European homes, have had a university education, and until their radicalisation were regarded by friends and neighbours as friendly, likeable people. Unlike the Nazis, who took fastidious care to hide their crimes from the world, today’s terrorists take equal care to advertise them to the world using professionally produced videos and the latest social media technology. Their lack of conscience in committing what leading Islamic jurists and theologians have deemed

forbidden, sinful and contrary to the Qur'an is breathtaking. In Gwoza, Nigeria, one of the survivors of a massacre by the Islamist group Boko Haram described to a reporter how the radicals calmly killed their fellow Muslims one by one. 'They told us they were doing God's work even though all the men they shot in front of me were Muslims. They seemed happy.'⁷

We need a term to describe this deadly phenomenon that can turn ordinary non-psychopathic people into cold-blooded murderers of schoolchildren, aid workers, journalists and people at prayer. It is, to give it a name, *altruistic evil*: evil committed in a sacred cause, in the name of high ideals.

By this I do not mean the kind of behaviour that people argue over: abortion, for instance, or assisted suicide. Nor do I mean issues like the highly complex question of civilian casualties in asymmetric warfare. I mean evil of the kind that we all recognise as such. Killing the weak, the innocent, the very young and old is evil. Indiscriminate murder by terrorist attack or suicide bombing is evil. Murdering people because of their religion or race or nationality is evil. It was for this reason that, during the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War, the concept of a crime against humanity was born, to give global force to the principle that there are some acts so heinous that they cannot be defended on the grounds that 'I was only obeying orders'. There are acts so alien to our concept of humanity that they cannot be justified on the grounds that they were the means to a great, noble or holy end.

There is nothing specifically religious about altruistic evil. Some of the great instances in modern history – Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Mao Zedong's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia – were avowedly secular. Their mass murders were undertaken to avenge past wrongs, correct perceived injustice, restore honour to the nation, or institute a social order that would bring equality and freedom to the world. Only in fiction are the great evils committed by caricatures of malevolence: Darth Vader, Lord Voldemort, Sauron or the Joker. In real history

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the great evils are committed by people seeking to restore a romanticised golden age, willing to sacrifice their lives and the lives of others in what they regard as a great and even holy cause. In some cases they see themselves as ‘doing God’s work’. They ‘seem happy’.

That is how dreams of utopia turn into nightmares of hell.

*

Much has been said and written in recent years about the connection between religion and violence. Three answers have emerged. The first: Religion *is* the major source of violence. Therefore if we seek a more peaceful world we should abolish religion. The second: Religion is not a source of violence. People are made violent, as Hobbes said, by fear, glory and the ‘perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceaseth only in death’.⁸ Religion has nothing to do with it. It may be used by manipulative leaders to motivate people to wage wars precisely because it inspires people to heroic acts of self-sacrifice, but religion itself teaches us to love and forgive, not to hate and fight. The third answer is: Their religion, yes; our religion, no. We are for peace. They are for war.

None of these is true. As for the first, Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod surveyed 1,800 conflicts in the *Encyclopedia of Wars* and found that less than 10 per cent involved religion at all.⁹ A ‘God and War’ survey commissioned by the BBC found that religion played some part in 40 per cent of conflicts but usually a minor one.¹⁰

The second answer is misguided. When terrorist or military groups invoke holy war, define their battle as a struggle against Satan, condemn unbelievers to death and commit murder while declaring ‘God is great’, to deny that they are acting on religious motives is absurd. Religions seek peace, but on their own terms. This is not a recipe for peace but for war.

The third is a classic instance of in-group bias. Almost

invariably people regard their group as superior to others. Henry Tajfel, one of the pioneers of social identity theory, showed how deeply this runs in even the most trivial of groupings. In one experiment he divided people into groups on the basis of the mere toss of a coin, yet they still rated the members of their own group as more likeable than the others, despite the fact that they had never met one another before and knew that they had been selected on a purely random basis. Groups, like individuals, have a need for self-esteem and they will interpret facts to confirm their sense of superiority.¹¹ Judaism, Christianity and Islam define themselves as religions of peace yet they have all given rise to violence at some points in their history.

My concern in this book is less the general connection between religion and violence than the specific challenge of politicised religious extremism in the twenty-first century. The re-emergence of religion as a global force caught the West unprotected and unprepared because it was in the grip of a narrative that told a quite different story.

It is said that 1989, the year of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, marked the final act of an extended drama in which first religion, then political ideology, died after a prolonged period in intensive care. The age of the true believer, religious or secular, was over. In its place had come the market economy and the liberal democratic state, in which the individual and his or her right to live as they chose took priority over all creeds and codes. The hymn of the new dispensation was John Lennon's 'Imagine', with its vision of a post-ideological, post-religious world with 'Nothing to kill or die for.'

It was the last chapter of a story that began in the seventeenth century, the last great age of wars of religion. The West had undergone a process of secularisation that had taken four centuries.

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First, in the seventeenth century, came the secularisation of *knowledge* in the form of science and philosophy. Then in the eighteenth century came the secularisation of *power* by way of the American and French Revolutions and the separation – radical in France, less doctrinaire in the United States – of church and state. In the nineteenth century came the secularisation of *culture* as art galleries and museums were seen as alternatives to churches as places in which to encounter the sublime. Finally in the 1960s came the secularisation of *morality*, by the adoption of a principle first propounded by John Stuart Mill a century earlier – namely that the only ground on which anyone, including the state, is justified in intervening in behaviour done in private is the prevention of harm to others. This was the beginning of the end of traditional codes of ethics, to be replaced by the unfettered sanctity of the individual, autonomy, rights and choice.

By the late twentieth century most secularists had come to the conclusion that religion, if not refuted, had at least been rendered redundant. We no longer need the Bible to explain the universe. Instead we have science. We do not need sacred ritual to control human destiny. In its place we have technology. When we are ill, we do not need prayer. We have doctors, medicine and surgery. If we are depressed there is an alternative to religious consolation: antidepressant drugs. When we feel overwhelmed by guilt, we can choose psychotherapy in place of the confessional. For seekers of transcendence there are rock concerts and sports matches. As for human mortality, the best thing to do, as the advice columns tell us, is not to think about it too often. People may be uncertain about the existence of God, but are reasonably sure that if we don't bother him, he won't bother us.

What the secularists forgot is that *Homo sapiens* is the meaning-seeking animal. If there is one thing the great institutions of the modern world do not do, it is to provide meaning.

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Science tells us how but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot guide us as to how to use that power. The market gives us choices but leaves us uninstructed as to how to make those choices. The liberal democratic state gives us freedom to live as we choose but on principle refuses to guide us as to how to choose.

Science, technology, the free market and the liberal democratic state have enabled us to reach unprecedented achievements in knowledge, freedom, life expectancy and affluence. They are among the greatest achievements of human civilisation and are to be defended and cherished. But they do not and cannot answer the three questions every reflective individual will ask at some time in his or her life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live? These are questions to which the answer is prescriptive not descriptive, substantive not procedural. The result is that the twenty-first century has left us with a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning.

Religion has returned because it is hard to live without meaning. That is why no society has survived for long without either a religion or a substitute for religion. The twentieth century showed, brutally and definitively, that the great modern substitutes for religion – the nation, the race and the political ideology – are no less likely to offer human sacrifices to their surrogate deities.

The religion that has returned is not the gentle, quietist, eirenic and ecumenical form that, in the West, we had increasingly come to expect. Instead it is religion at its most adversarial and aggressive, prepared to do battle with the enemies of the Lord, bring the apocalypse, end the reign of decadence and win the final victory for God, truth and submission to the divine will.

Not all anti-modern religion is violent. To the contrary, highly religious Jews (*Haredim*) are usually quietist, as are Christian groups like the Mennonites and the Amish, and Muslim groups like the Sufis. What they seek is simply the

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opportunity to live apart from the world, construct communities in the light of their values, and come close to God in mind and soul. In their different ways they are testaments to grace.

Undeniably, though, the greatest threat to freedom in the postmodern world is radical, politicised religion. It is the face of altruistic evil in our time.

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It demands a response, but from whom? Intellectuals have faced extraordinarily violent reactions to their work. The controversy over *The Satanic Verses* (1989) led to the assassination of its Japanese translator, the stabbing of its Italian translator, the shooting of its Norwegian publisher and the death by fire of thirty-five guests at a reception for the book's publication in Turkey.

In Holland in 2004, Theo van Gogh, who made the film *Submission*, was murdered in broad daylight in central Amsterdam, shot several times at close range, then knifed in an attempted beheading. The 2005 Danish cartoons led to violent demonstrations across Africa, Asia and the Middle East in which at least two hundred people died.

After a 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg by Pope Benedict XVI, five churches were attacked in the West Bank and Gaza, a sixty-five-year-old Italian nun was murdered in Mogadishu and a Christian priest abducted and beheaded in Mosul. In Paris the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, the French satirical magazine, were firebombed in 2011 and attacked by terrorists in January 2015 and the editor, cartoonists and other staff killed. In a global age, speech is no longer free.

The most vociferous response has come from the 'new atheists', a group that emerged after the 9/11 attacks. Sadly they ruined their case by caricature, making the claims, palpably false, that all religion leads to violence and most violence can be traced back to religion. This is taking a pneumatic drill

to perform microsurgery. All religions have had their violent moments, as have all substitutes for religion, and they have all also achieved periods of tolerance, generosity of spirit and peace.

In general, the West has suffered from the tendency to fight the last battle, not the next. The Cold War produced, in figures like Friedrich Hayek, Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin, great defenders of freedom. Their target, though, was the totalitarian regime of Stalinist Russia. They showed, successfully, that a Marxist utopia is in principle impossible since the great ideals, such as freedom and equality, conflict so that the more you have of one, the less you have of the other.

The trouble was that they also argued that the worst thing you can have is certainty. Conviction, they said, leads to tyranny. On this they were wrong, indeed self-contradictory. Hayek was certain that freedom was preferable to slavery, Popper that open societies were better than closed ones, and Berlin that negative liberty was better than its positive counterpart. But so insistent were they that no truth is final that the effect of their work, albeit unintentionally, was to give strength to the principle of moral relativism.

Moral relativism is no defence whatsoever against those currently waging war against the West and its freedoms. If relativism is true, then nothing can be said truly or absolutely to be wrong. As a matter of subjective belief I may regard the killing of civilians, the use of children as human shields and the enslavement of young girls as bad. However, I will then have to concede that you see things differently. You believe it is a sacred imperative undertaken for the greater glory of God. Our values are different because our worldviews are, to use Isaiah Berlin's word, incommensurable. Such discourse may have made compelling sense in the serene surroundings of Oxford during the long peace that prevailed for half a century after the Second World War. But it is utterly inadequate to the challenge today.

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What then is the alternative? For this we need to travel back to the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries following the Reformation. There was war in France between Catholics and Huguenots between 1562 and 1598, followed by the devastating Thirty Years War between 1618 and 1648. There are striking parallels between then and today.

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As now, the unrest began with a revolution in information technology. The technology was printing, developed by Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century. Many inventions have changed the world, but when there is a change in the way we record and transmit information, the repercussions are more systemic, transforming institutions, cultures and even the way people think.

The new technology made it easier and cheaper to connect with ever wider populations. The result was a spread of literacy, a democratisation of access to knowledge, and a subsequent challenge to all existing hierarchies of power. Then as now, the primary expression of the change was religious – Luther’s Reformation, begun when he nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517.

Most of the basic doctrines set out by Luther in the early sixteenth century had already been formulated two centuries earlier by John Wycliffe in Oxford. The reason they did not spread then but did later was the impact of printing itself. The first book to be widely printed was the Bible. In England alone it has been estimated that more than a million Bibles and New Testaments were published between 1517 and 1640. Luther’s own declaration was transmitted by the press. Within fifteen days it had appeared throughout Germany and within three weeks printing presses in three different towns were turning out copies. By 1546, a total of 430 separate editions of his

biblical translations had appeared in print.

The result was a century of religious war, transformation of the map of Europe, the beginning of the end of the Holy Roman Empire and the birth of a new political dispensation, ushered in by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, based on sovereign nation states and the balance of power. It is this entire system that, according to Henry Kissinger's *World Order*, is currently at risk.

What printing was to the Reformation, the Internet is to radical political Islam, turning it into a global force capable of inciting terror and winning recruits throughout the world. The extremists have understood that in many ways religion was made for the twenty-first century. It is a more global force than nation states. Religious radicals use the new electronic media with greater sophistication than their secular counterparts. And they have developed organisational structures to fit our time.

Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom argued in *The Starfish and the Spider* that leaderless organisations will dominate the future. The starfish and the spider have similar shapes but different internal structures. A decapitated spider dies, but a starfish can regenerate itself from a single amputated leg. That is what has happened to the many successor movements of al-Qaeda.

So it is worth returning to the seventeenth century to see what ended the wars of religion then, giving birth to the modern world and transforming the West into the vanguard of civilisation, overtaking China on the one hand and the Ottoman Empire on the other.

Weapons win wars, but it takes ideas to win the peace. In the case of the seventeenth century the transformative ideas emerged from a series of outstanding thinkers, among them John Milton, Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza and John Locke. Their key principles were the social contract, the limits of state power, the doctrine of toleration, liberty of conscience

and the concept of human rights.

Not all of these thinkers were religious. Hobbes and Spinoza were both considered atheists in their time. Milton was one of the great religious poets and Locke was a Socinian Christian. Nonetheless, all four drew their political ideas primarily from the Hebrew Bible. One of their most important principles, found also in the Qur'an (*Al-Baqara* 256), is that there should be no compulsion in religion.

Those principles remain valid today, but there is one major difference between now and then. In the seventeenth century, the primary movement was against the religious power of the Catholic Church in favour of the secularisation of the various societal domains. Today the revolution, at least in the Middle East, is against secularism of two different kinds. The first is the secular nationalism of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak in Egypt, Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, regimes widely seen to be corrupt and oppressive. The second is the secular culture of the West, judged by those for whom tradition resonates to be decadent, materialist and soul-destroying. To put it simply: *The seventeenth century was the dawn of an age of secularisation. The twenty-first century will be the start of an age of desecularisation.*

The twenty-first century will be more religious than the twentieth for several reasons. One, as we have seen above, is that in many ways religion is better adapted to a world of global instantaneous communication than are nation states and existing political institutions.

Second, as we will see in the next chapter, is the failure of Western societies after the Second World War to address the most fundamental of human needs: the search for identity. The world's great faiths provide identity. They offer meaning, direction, a code of conduct and a set of rules for the moral and spiritual life in ways that the free-market, liberal democratic West does not.

The Abrahamic monotheisms in particular offer ordinary

individuals – and we are, most of us, ordinary individuals – a sense of pride and consequence. A creed that tells us that we are no more than selfish genes, with nothing in principle to separate us from the animals, in a society whose strongest motivators are money and success, in a universe that came into existence for no reason whatsoever and for no reason will one day cease to be, will never speak as strongly to the human spirit as one that tells us we are in the image and likeness of God in a universe he created in love.

The third reason has to do with demography. Not a single member state of Europe has a replacement-level birth rate (2.1 children per female). Having dropped at one point to 1.47, the European average is now 1.6 (the increase largely being due to immigrant populations), but this means that the native populations of Europe are all in long, slow decline. The gap will be filled by immigration and the high birth rates of ethnic minority populations.

Worldwide, the most religious groups have the highest birth rates. Over the next half-century, as Eric Kaufmann has documented in *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?*, there will be a massive transformation in the religious make-up of much of the world, with Europe leading the way. With the sole exception of the United States, the West is failing to heed the Darwinian imperative of passing on its genes to the next generation.

All of this means that we can no longer defer the task that was essentially avoided in the seventeenth century. What then stopped Catholics and Protestants from murdering one another was *to deprive religion of power*. The theology that led to conflict in the first place was, by and large, left untouched. It lay dormant like frozen DNA. For four centuries people have known that religious doctrines might be harmful in many ways, but since power had been taken out of religious hands, there was little damage they could do.

That is no longer the case. In a world of declining

superpowers, sclerotic international institutions, a swathe of failed or failing states and a Hobbesian chaos of civil and tribal wars, religious extremists are seizing power. This means that we have little choice but to re-examine the theology that leads to violent conflict in the first place. *If we do not do the theological work, we will face a continuation of the terror that has marked our century thus far, for it has no other natural end.*

It cannot be ended by military means alone. Moisés Naím, in his seminal work *The End of Power*, makes this absolutely clear. Wars, he says, are becoming increasingly asymmetric, large armies against smaller, non-traditional ones. They are also being *increasingly won by the militarily weaker side*. A Harvard study has shown that in asymmetric conflicts between 1800 and 1849, the weaker side in terms of soldiers and arms achieved its aim in 12 per cent of cases. In the wars between 1950 and 1998, the weaker side won in 55 per cent of cases. Hence Naím's conclusion that 'when nation-states go to war these days, big military power delivers less than it once did'.¹²

The work to be done now is theological. The point was made in an historic speech at Al-Azhar University at the beginning of 2015 by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Calling for a 'religious revolution', he said, 'The Islamic world is being torn, it is being destroyed, it is being lost. And it is being lost by our own hands.'

The challenge is not only to Islam, but to Judaism and Christianity also. In November 1995 a young Jewish student, Yigal Amir, assassinated Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, whom he saw as endangering the future of the State by the peace process in which he was engaged. Like Barukh Goldstein, who killed twenty-nine Muslims at prayer, Amir was university trained, religious, and acting on religious principle. Goldstein, as far as we can surmise, believed he was fulfilling the command to 'wipe out the memory' of Amalek, the biblical symbol of evil (Deut. 25:19). Amir regarded

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Rabin as a *rodef*, that is, a threat to the welfare of others, or a *moser*, a traitor to his people. I believe with perfect faith that Judaism is a religion of peace. But not everyone interprets a religion the same way. None of the great religions can say, in unflinching self-knowledge, 'Our hands never shed innocent blood.'

As Jews, Christians and Muslims, we have to be prepared to ask the most uncomfortable questions. Does the God of Abraham want his disciples to kill for his sake? Does he demand human sacrifice? Does he rejoice in holy war? Does he want us to hate our enemies and terrorise unbelievers? Have we read our sacred texts correctly? What is God saying to us, here, now? We are not prophets but we are their heirs and we are not bereft of guidance on these fateful issues.

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Why has this happened now? Because the world is changing faster than at any time in history, and since change disorients, it leads to a sense of loss and fear that can turn rapidly into hate. Our world is awash with hate. The Internet, alongside its many blessings, can make it contagious. You can spread hate globally through social media. You can have worldwide impact through YouTube videos of burnings and beheadings.

The multiplication of channels of communication means that we no longer rely for news on established newspapers and television channels. Broadcasting is being replaced by narrowcasting. The difference is that broadcasting speaks to a mixed public, exposing them to a range of views. Narrowcasting speaks to a targeted public and exposes them only to facts and opinions that support their prejudices. It fragments a public into a set of sects of the like-minded.

The Internet also globalises hate. Events that would in the past have had purely local impact now send shockwaves around the world. A provocation somewhere can create anger

everywhere. Never has paranoia been easier to create and communicate. It is easy to portray an unintentional slight as a deliberate insult if you are communicating with people thousands of miles away who have no means of checking the facts.

Nor has it ever been easier to demonise whole populations so effectively. Jihadists and suicide bombers are recruited by non-stop streams of images of the humiliation of Muslims at the hands of others who then become the Greater or Lesser Satan and can be murdered without qualms since you see them as persecutors of your people. Even at an everyday level, the Internet has a *disinhibition effect*: you can be ruder to someone electronically than you would be in a face-to-face encounter, since the exchange has been depersonalised. Read any Comments section on the Web, and you will see what this means: the replacement of reason by anger, and argument by vilification. Civility is dying, and when it dies, civilisation itself is in danger.

In the West we tend to have a vague sense of what is happening without always understanding why. That is because, since the eighteenth century, the West, through market economics and liberal democracy, has produced an historically unusual way of thinking and a distinctive personality type: the *rational actor* who makes decisions on the basis of individual choice and calculation of consequences. For the rational actor there is no problem that cannot be solved, no conflict that cannot be resolved. All we need to do is sit down, brainstorm, work out alternative scenarios and opt for the outcome that is maximal for all concerned.

What rules in this universe is *interests*. Sometimes they are individual, at others collective, but interests are what are at stake. What is missing is *identity*. Identity is always a group phenomenon. It comes laden with history, memory, a sense of the past and its injustices, and a set of moral sensibilities that are inseparable from identity: loyalty, respect and reverence, the three virtues undermined by market economics, liberal

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democratic politics and the culture of individualism. As one who values market economics and liberal democratic politics, I fear that the West does not fully understand the power of the forces that oppose it. Passions are at play that run deeper and stronger than any calculation of interests. Reason alone will not win this particular battle. Nor will invocations of words like 'freedom' and 'democracy'. To some they sound like compelling ideals, but to others they are the problem against which they are fighting, not the solution they embrace.

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To put the argument of this book as simply as I can: there is a connection between religion and violence, but it is oblique, not direct. Why this is so is set out in chapter 2. There is, though, a different and deeper connection between Abrahamic monotheism and the three religions to which it gave rise: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Tracing this back to its roots is the task of chapters 3 to 5. In them I examine the social and psychological processes that lead to altruistic evil, of which violence in the name of God is a key example. There is, in these chapters, an emphasis on antisemitism, not because it is the most important instance of religiously motivated hate, but because it is the one in which we can see these processes at work most clearly. Christian and Muslim victims of violence vastly outnumber Jews, whether in the age of the Crusades or today. It is, though, by putting antisemitism under the microscope that we can trace the sequence by which fear becomes hate and then murderous violence, defeating rationality and becoming both destructive and self-destructive.

The relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam has been historically a poisoned one, and I seek to understand why. In these chapters I explore three phenomena: mindset, myth and sibling rivalry. First, there is a specific mindset that

makes altruistic evil possible: dualism. This is incompatible with monotheism, but it has nonetheless from time to time found a home there. Second, there are myths that feed this mindset, and they are surprisingly durable and adaptable, moving from one religion to another and even to secular cultures. Third, there is the unique relationship between the three Abrahamic faiths that has set them in tension with one another.

Each initially assumed the others would disappear. Their members would either convert or acknowledge the primacy of the new faith. Christians expected that Jews would become Christian because the founder of their faith was a Jew. Muslims expected that Jews and Christians would become Muslims because their faith incorporated Abraham, Moses, Jesus and elements of their teachings. But they did not disappear. Some converted, but most did not. Jews remained Jews. Christians remained Christians. The result is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are each challenged, even threatened, by the existence of the others. For much of the time this hardly matters. Jews, Christians and Muslims have lived peaceably together for most of their history. But at times of intense turbulence and stress it matters very much indeed.

There is, as I show in chapter 5, a way of thinking that we can trace back to a set of narratives in the book of Genesis, shared at least loosely by all three faiths. Here is where the problem was born. To ignore these narratives is impossible. But to reinterpret them is very possible indeed. We can go further: *the very texts that lie at the root of the problem, if properly interpreted, can provide a solution.* This, though, will require a radical re-reading of those texts, through an act of deep listening to the pristine voice of monotheism itself.

Part II is that re-reading. I argue that these narratives are more profound than they have been taken to be, and that much religiously motivated violence throughout the centuries has been the result of a failure to understand these texts in

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their full depth and challenging complexity. Part III then looks at the other key challenges to Abrahamic monotheism in the global age. What will it take for the children of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims – to live together in peace, and what is at stake if we fail?

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What made this book possible is knowledge of the transformation that has taken place when Jews, Christians and Muslims face one another in their full humanity.

In the case of Judaism and Christianity it took the Holocaust for this to happen. The result has been dramatic. Today, after an estrangement that lasted almost two millennia, Jews and Christians meet much more often as friends – even (in the word selected by recent popes) ‘brothers’ – than as enemies.

Likewise with Islam. As I was writing this book an event happened that moved me greatly. On Friday 9 January 2015, an Islamist terrorist entered a kosher supermarket in Paris and killed four Jews buying food for the Sabbath. A Muslim employee, Lassana Bathily, saw what was happening and, out of sight of the gunmen, hid twenty Jewish customers in a cold storage room, saving their lives. Commended for his courage, he replied, ‘We are all brothers. It’s not a question of Jews, Christians or Muslims. We were all in the same boat, we had to help each other to get out of the crisis.’

Like Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani-Muslim girl who fought for women’s rights against the Taliban, surviving an attempted assassination and becoming in 2014 the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Prize, Lassana is one of the heroes of our time. What they and millions like them represent is the ability to let faith strengthen, not damage, our shared humanity. It sounds simple, but history tells us that it is not. Religious people in the grip of strong emotions – fear, pain, anxiety, confusion, a sense of loss and humiliation – often dehumanise their opponents with

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devastating results. Faith is God's call to see his trace in the face of the Other. But that needs a theology of the Other, which is what I offer in this book.

There is nothing accidental about the spread of radical politicised religion in our time. It came about because of a series of decisions a half-century ago that led to the creation of an entire educational network of schools and seminaries dedicated to the proposition that loving God means hating the enemies of God. The end result has been a flood of chaos, violence and destruction that is drowning the innocent and guilty alike. We now have, with equal seriousness, to educate for peace, forgiveness and love. Until our global institutions take a stand against the teaching and preaching of hate, all their efforts of diplomacy and military intervention will fail. Ultimately the responsibility is ours. Tomorrow's world is born in what we teach our children today. That is what this book is about.

It begins with the simplest of questions: What makes people violent in the first place?