

Genocidal Religion

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ABSTRACT

There is no more egregious hateful behavior than that of genocide. There is no more uncomfortable thought than that of religion as a *participating factor* in the perpetration of genocide, though religious studies scholars come late to any discussion of genocide. This paper, an initial foray into a much longer and more in-depth book-length project, and whose author is desirous of collegial feedback (sjacobs@bama.ua.edu), is a *preliminary* conversation addressing four *precipitating factors*: (1) tribalism, (2) religious exclusivism, (3) privileged access to the divine, and (4) a particularistic and parochial reading of sacred texts. It will also attempt, by way of conclusion, to offer possible practical and realistic suggestions to reverse this nexus between genocide and religion.

It is my strong contention that religion in both its institutional forms and its intellectual formulations has played a truly significant if underexplored role in *all* genocides, past and present, but, it is to be hoped, *not* in the future. That is to say, that there are aspects of religions and religious communities as they have evolved and developed that have lent themselves, sadly and tragically, to the work of genocide. Examples: Can we truly speak about the Holocaust/Shoah without examining 2,000 years of religious-theological antisemitism beneath the umbrella of both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity? Can we truly speak about the Armenian Genocide without examining the Muslim identity of the perpetrators and the Christian identity of the victims? Can we truly speak about the Rwandan Genocide without examining the role of the Roman Catholic Church and a group known as the “Belgian White Fathers” and the so-called “Hamitic Theory or Hypothesis,” in which, referencing Ham, the son of Noah in the Hebrew Bible, this 19th century pseudo-theory argued that the “Hamitic race” was superior to other so-called “Negroid populations” in sub-Saharan Africa, ultimately resulting in distinctions being made among Hutu and Tutsi and Twa that would lay the foundation for the later genocide? Or the *fact* that *some* Roman Catholic priests and nuns and Seventh-Day Adventist pastors were found guilty of being *genocidaires* by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)? Additional examples could be supplied. Thus, the question that haunts is a relatively simple yet equally horrifying one, something about which we would rather not think, talk, and/or

research, but one that *must* be asked nonetheless: *Is there something inherent in the construction of both a religion and the community of its adherents—especially but not exclusively the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—that lends itself all too easily to genocide?* And, if so, what is it, and, equally as important, are there things that can be done, steps that can be taken, to break and ultimately destroy the genocidal cycle of violence? (A somewhat different perspective from that of the author is that of Günther Schlee in his 2010 book *How Enemies Are Made: Towards a Theory of Ethnic and Religious Conflict*. Schlee develops a decision-making and competition theory—resource rivalry—under which different types of group identities are preferred. He does not, however, address the question of *inherency* in the development of religions and religious communities.)

Before proceeding further, I begin, for purposes of this initial exploration into the darkest side of collective human behavior, with two definitions that grew out of an advanced seminar I teach at The University of Alabama entitled “Religion and Genocide.” The first is that of religion and the second that of genocide.

The operating definition of RELIGION is “a system of communal beliefs and practices encouraging moral/ethical and ritual/ceremonial behaviors for the betterment of both the individual and the community, and addressing questions of profound meaning and possibly including those of deity or deities.”

The operating definition of GENOCIDE is “a systematic physical and/or cultural destruction of a victim group or groups, in war or peace, defined as such by a perpetrator group or groups and sanctioned by the state.”

Unpacking each of these definitions, I note the following: The “best-kept secret” in the academic study of religion is, quite simply, that there is no one universally accepted definition of religion in the Academy—and even more so in the larger society! (I am here reminded of the pointed cliché: “One person’s religion is another person’s cult—and the reverse!”) Hence the following points are relevant to this paper:

#1: Religion, no matter its specific manifestation, is a *system*, that is, an organized progression of thoughts and behaviors that continues to “make sense” on intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual levels to its adherents, no matter how much or how little it is understood by outsiders.

#2: Religions, while initially promulgated either by individuals or small groups, ultimately and rather quickly evolve into communal multi-generational enterprises for their very survival, and may, therefore, be characterized quite easily as “historical religions” (i.e., those which have survived the lives of their founder or founders—e.g. Judaism, Christianity,

Islam) or “new religious movements” (NRMs, i.e., those whose founder or founders are still alive—e.g. The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity or “Unification Church” founded by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon).

#3: Essential to any religious community is a set of behaviors that we may characterize as moral/ethical, and that consists of a series of guidelines in three arenas: (1) how the members are to behave toward each other (almost always positive); (2) how the members are to behave toward those who are not (or not yet) members of the community (usually a mix of positive and negative behaviors); and (3) how the members are to behave toward their God or gods, and, if appropriate, toward other heavenly entities (almost always positive). (N.B.: As regards genocide specifically, the question of the “other”—that is, how one relates to the person or persons who are outsiders—remains central to their understanding of themselves. Behaviors that outsiders would regard as negative are almost never so construed by the members themselves; indeed, they are almost always viewed positively.)

#4: If Socrates (469-399 BCE) is correct in suggesting that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” then it is of the very essence of the world’s religions that they are attempts put before the human community to make meaningful sense of the human journey with all of its twists and turns, peaks and valleys, joys and sorrows. Those who commit themselves to specific religious communities, therefore, do so because their religions do truly make sense to them, that is, answer the “haunting questions” that disturb them (e.g., Is there a God or gods? What is the meaning of Life itself? What is the purpose of my own existence? What happens when we die? Is there life after death? Why is there evil? etc.) and celebrate their own lives’ journeys (birth, growth, maturation, decay, and death).

#5: With the possible exception of the religions of Buddhism, where “God-talk” is neither required nor essential, and Confucianism, which may also be viewed as a religious philosophy or way of life, the religions of the world are intimately intertwined with either a singular Deity or many deities, communications with whom are usually achieved through authoritative spokespersons understood to have a much closer relationship to the divine than the vast majority of the membership. In some communities, the divine-human connection is hereditary; in others, doors are opened through prayer, fasting, the study and mastery of sacred texts, and/or extraordinarily affirmed moral/ethical behaviors, and so on and so forth, for any members to achieve this high status of divine partnership (some are gender-specific, males or females only; others not). One primary function of this partnership, however it manifests itself, is to legitimate both the moral/ethical and ritual/ceremonial behaviors of the religious community—and, at times, the

larger society (e.g., in wartime through the use of religious chaplaincies)—as regards its internal cohesion and whatever threats it perceives and to which it responds from outsiders. (This function has particular relevance to the exploration of genocide as discussed below.)

As regards genocide, the following points are equally significant in attempting to explore the relationship between these two fully human phenomena:

#1: Genocides are *systematic behaviors*, rational and organized, the result of careful planning to achieve specific ends and that fully *make sense* to their perpetrators, though often far less so to their victims. A good example would be the Holocaust/Shoah, which fully made sense to Adolf Hitler, and evidently to both his leadership and his followership, but especially not at all to those highly socially integrated Jews, many intermarried with non-Jews, who could trace their historic residence in Germany back generations. (Tragically, the more successfully they were integrated into German and other societies, the more difficulties such Jews experienced in trying to cope with and survive the experience of the *konzentrationslagers*, the concentration camps; the *arbeitslagers*, the work camps; and the *vernichtungslagers*, the extermination camps. See, e.g., Cohen, 1953, and Des Pres, 1980).

#2: Genocide is not only the physical destruction—murder—of all or some of the members of a victim group; it is the destruction of the cultural output of the group as well—that is, everything it has created by and through which it identifies itself to itself and by which others also identify its members. Sacred and other texts and publications (e.g., works of fiction, culturally specific newspapers, plays and paintings, sculptures, etc.), ritual and other objects, artistic endeavors, languages (e.g., in the case of the Jews, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Ladino [a lesser-known and lesser-practiced cognate of Mediterranean, rather than Germanic/Russian, Jews]), distinctive clothing (e.g. Jewish Hasidic garments and/or headcoverings), specific and sometimes easily identifiable behaviors, all constitute the culture and cultural output of *all* groups, and the very “stuff” that genocidal perpetrators desire to eliminate. A particularly tragic example is the Communist shut-down of Yiddish language publishing houses and restrictive synagogal gatherings and celebrations under Stalin.

#3: Central to genocidal behavior is the necessity of *defining* the victim group, that is, “Who is the enemy who is to be destroyed?” It is no accident that, once in power, the Nazis took to heart Hitler’s fantasy of the Jews as civilization’s enemies, and, two years after his assumption of power (January 30, 1933), defined Jews as “anyone with three Jewish grandparents; someone with two Jewish grandparents who belonged to the Jewish community on September 15, 1935, or joined thereafter; was married to a

Jew or Jewess on September 15, 1935, or married one thereafter; was the offspring of a marriage or extramarital liaison with a Jew on or after September 15, 1935,” and further translated those words in the November 15, 1935 “Laws for the Protection of German Blood and Honor” into even harsher realities.

#4: Finally, genocide is a *state-sanctioned* exercise. That is to say, in order to achieve the desired ends, it goes through a *process* of conversation by all those responsible for such decision-making and decision-implementing before it can be carried out. Such conversations usually occur in secrecy at the highest levels behind closed doors, and, only later, when prosecution for genocidal crimes becomes the order of the day, are the documentary records revealed. An excellent example of this would be the so-called “Memorandum of the Ten Commandments of the Committee of Union and Progress,” outlining the strategy for the implementation of the Armenian Genocide (www.armenian-genocide.org, n.d.). (It is somewhat tragically ironic, however, that the infamous Wannsee Protokoll of January 1942, which put ink to paper with the stated agenda of realizing the annihilation/extermination of Europe’s Jews, *followed* genocidal practices that were already in effect; thousands of Jews had already been murdered by the time of the meeting and the recording of its conversations.)

Having now set the appropriate frames of reference for my argument—that of religion and genocide and their interrelationship within the context of such horrific behaviors—I come to the heart of this paper: the four *precipitating factors* evident in *all* genocides, both historical and contemporary. Although I am not in any way positing the idea or conclusion that religion is either a necessary *or* a sufficient condition for the perpetration of genocide, I do very much want to suggest that it is one very powerful and potent factor upon which the *genocidaires* are able to draw to accomplish their ends.

The first precipitating religious factor very much in evidence in all genocides I have taken to calling *tribalism*, a term that also resonates in the fields of anthropology, social psychology, and sociology. *All* groups, no matter their identity—be they political, social, economic, ethnic, national, *or* religious—functionally speaking, act as if the world itself were a binary place—“us” *and* “them,” “us” *or* “them,” “us” *versus* “them”—in escalating perspective. And while group boundaries may often prove themselves porous and other times hardened, in the development of social groupings one factor stands out: the superiority of the so-called “in-group” as it perceives itself, coupled with the very real and evident inferiority of the so-called “out-group” as it is perceived by them. “*Our* group is better, more humane, more civilized, more moral, more learned, more devout,” what have you. “*Your* group is less devout, less moral, less civilized, less

learned,” and so forth. A good example would be the genocidal practices foisted on the Native American populations during the periods of westward expansion in this country by the white and largely Christian populations, among whom such epithets as “savages” (denoting a lack of civilizational propriety) were all too common. And certainly the Western and, again, Christian colonialist incursions onto the African continent shared such understandings of the resident populations. Turning to the European continent, in the tragic 2,000-year relationship between Jews and Christians, one cannot avoid the descriptive term *triumphalist supercessionism* regarding that peculiar religio-theological understanding that with the birth, ministry, and death of the Christ, Judaic religious development ceased, and that, prior to the Holocaust/Shoah, Jews practiced an inferior religious tradition and were themselves devoid of positive moral characteristics. Thus, British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), author of the magisterial twelve-volume *A Study of History* (1934-1961), would refer to Judaism as a “fossil religion” (Schectman, 2010); and the story, apocryphal or not, has been told of Hitler’s meeting with German Christian clergy regarding the Nazi agenda of Jewish extermination, and exclaiming, “Why do you criticize me? I am only putting into practice that which you have advocated for the last 2,000 years!” Even today, if one delves into the worst excesses of religious literatures *including sacred texts*, here focusing on the three monotheistic faiths, one reads of the “superiority” of Islam over Judaism and Christianity, and reflected, according to some readings, in the Qur’an itself; Christianity over Judaism and Islam; and Judaism over both. In the evolution and development of religious traditions and communities, *tribalistic superiority* is very much in evidence, and, in the context of genocide, can become foundational and easily drawn upon by those intending to perpetrate genocide on the out-groups, as the above examples testify. That Muslims perpetrate horrible deeds upon Christians and Jews, Christians upon Native Americans and Jews, and fundamentalist Orthodox Jews upon Muslims in Israel, is too much in evidence today and yesterday to be cavalierly dismissed.

A cautionary note: It is far too easy, however, to reject such persons committing such genocidal and other violent behaviors as “non-religious” or not truly religious and violating the sacred norms of their own communities. Thus, the Muslims who destroyed the Twin Towers on 9/11 were not really “good” Muslims, the Christians who savaged Native Americans in the United States and Jews in Germany were not really “good” Christians, and the Jews who have destroyed the olive trees of Arab Muslims or harassed and worse those under Israeli military occupation or nearby settlement outposts are not really “good” Jews. This is simply not accurate. Such Muslims, Christians, and Jews share a superiority-inferiority reading

of their own religious traditions, communities, theologies, and sacred texts, all of which serve to legitimate their deeds, and translate their understandings into the kinds of behaviors the majority of humanity seemingly abhor, but which may very well be derived from *accurately* reading their traditions, however much we choose to reject them. This leads us to the second precipitating factor:

Taken to conclusion, hardening the boundaries of religious communities leads to a notion of religious *exclusivism*, a notion in which *all* religious communities have engaged, and which then becomes a tool upon which political, military and religious *genocidaires* can draw as they further divide their societies and plot the extermination/annihilation of those who fall outside the universe of moral obligation—what Holocaust/Shoah scholar Richard L. Rubenstein has labeled “surplus populations.” Only Muslims are worthy of Allah’s embrace; Jewish men, women and children are not, at least according to the governing documents of both Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Only Christians—and not all Christians!—merit the potential of salvation and access to God’s heavenly realm; Muslim men, women, and children, and Jewish men, women, and children do not, at least according to rather literalist readings and understandings of certain passages of the New Testament and later commentaries. Only Jews are the true recipients of God’s love; “gentiles,” however defined, are not, and therefore are worthy of destruction, at least according to the Israeli Orthodox Rabbi Yitzhak Shapira, author of *Torat Ha-Melech (The King’s Torah*, 2010) for example. This brings us to the third precipitating factor.

Religious traditions whose members see themselves as directly connected to their God or gods equally understand themselves as having *privileged access* to the divine, often to the point of exclusivity. That is to say, they see their particularistic ways of connection as superior to those of people who are not members of their communities. *Their* prayers, *their* rituals, *their* sacred texts, *their* moral-ethical behaviors are the sanctified superior ways in which to affirm their relationship to God or gods, and while others outside their communities may also have opportunities to engage the divine, theirs is a poorer or lesser second. Allah speaks directly and more powerfully to Muslims than to others. “No one goes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), according to the New Testament and Christianity. Judaic formulaic prayers reference the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” with whom Judaism and Jews share a special and unique relationship. Thus, religions and religious communities simply do not exist in positive relationship to others who do not share their orientations, values, perspectives and the like *as equals*, and, in so doing, open themselves up to that superiority-inferiority continuum upon which *genocidaires* are able to draw because their own populations have already been so conditioned by words

emanating from the pulpits and texts already so sanctified. The Qur'an is a superior text that connects the Muslim to Allah, and, the Hebrew Bible of the Jews and Christians as we now have it, according to some, is *not* the original text, but a disguised and edited version with an agenda of Jewish (and Christian) superiority over Islam and Muslims. The Hebrew Bible of the Jews transparently affirms the truth of the Christ, and only Jewish obduracy presents the Jews from seeing and acknowledging him, and, thus, the Christian reading of those texts is the "correct"—and only—one. The Torah of the Jews, according to some, is the *only* text that presents the "God of Israel" as He truly is; all other texts and understandings are decidedly inferior and, therefore, incorrect. This brings us to the fourth and final precipitating factor:

All religious traditions have sacred texts by which they connect themselves to their God or gods, connect themselves to each other, disconnect themselves from others, and provide the foundational bases both for their ritual-ceremonial behaviors and their moral-ethical behaviors. Historically and to a far lesser degree contemporarily, all were originally oral texts offered through shamans, priests, and/or other sacred individuals and so regarded by their communities as being in closer communication and relationship with their deities. Over time, and often due to the exigencies of history, oral texts and traditions were written down, and thus developed a fixity that required certain authoritative spokespersons to explicate correct understandings, even going so far as to exclusivize those who could correctly read, understand, and interpret these texts for their own communities, which remains true today. By extension and implication, however, these same communities developed a wariness of outsiders, especially when it came to their texts. Non-Muslims, non-Christians, non-Jews, and so forth could not approach authoritative understandings, and, therefore, could not raise questions that critically challenged the texts themselves and thereby lessened the authority of their spokespersons. Ironically, as the world evolved more and more to a higher literacy standard, some religious communities equally dismissed those within their own communities who challenged such authoritative readings. Here, one cannot help but think of biblical scholars who were put to death for their different readings and/or translations, or, if not executed, shunned by their communities that have a long religious history of rejecting such alternatives. One thinks of British scholar William Tyndale (1494-1536), whose translation of the Christian Bible directly from the Hebrew and Greek led to charges of heresy, threatened the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and led to his being burned at the stake. Or of French priest Father Richard Simon (1638-1712), author of *A Critical History of the Old Testament* (1682), who died somewhat ignominiously in 1712. Or Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), who

experienced a somewhat similar fate in the Jewish community in Germany for translating the Hebrew Bible into German. Thus, privileging their own sacred texts and the readings that those in power had of them *and no other readings* also signaled the exclusive nature of their relationship with their God or gods and further provided a way not only for the *genocidaires* to bring them willingly into the realm of the perpetrators, but, in such cases, to also become complicit players in the work of genocide and provide a false patina of legitimation and authority for the grisly and murderous work at hand.

Thus, these four precipitating factors—(1) tribalism, (2) religious exclusivism, (3) privileged access to the divine, and (4) a particularistic and parochial reading of sacred texts—*by their very nature* contain within themselves seeds of genocidal potentiality all too easily and readily adaptable to the work of genocide by those who would trade upon them and use them for the extermination and annihilation of others. Among the world's religious communities today, even with our increasing knowledge of both the genocides of the past and the genocides of the present, there is seemingly little recognition of the role these factors have played in genocides, even as they are all with us today. Thus we now turn to an even more pragmatic concern: What, if anything, can be done to reverse, lessen, or even disentangle the impact of these factors to somehow remove religion from the genocides of the future?

One can teach only those who come to learn, and one can preach only to those who truly come to listen. Because these four precipitating factors address the community of religions, it is to religious communities that we must turn if we are to involve them not only in their recognition, acknowledgement, and affirmation of past complicities and, worse, in the perpetration of genocide, but in their future alleviations as well. Religious persons and communities, like other persons and communities, are either parts of the problem of genocides or parts of the solutions.

In examining several texts addressing the problem of genocide prevention (Evans, 2008; Hamburg, 2008; Heidenrich, 2001; Hirsch, 2002; Waxman, 2009), only *one*, Heidenrich's (2001) *How to Prevent Genocide*, contained a discussion of "The Faith Behind Genocide" (pp. 21-48). *None* of the authors were scholars of religious studies trained in that discipline: Gareth Evans was an Australian politician from the Labor Party, president and CEO of the International Crisis Group, and, most recently, chancellor of the Australian National University. David Hamburg, a physician and Stanford University professor, was president of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, and, later, president of the Carnegie Corporation. John Heidenrich was a senior security analyst at the Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) with a BA in political science and

an MA in public administration. Herbert Hirsch is a professor of political science at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University. Matthew Waxman is an adjunct senior fellow for law and foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. Thus, manifesting little or no professional expertise in the discipline, it is little wonder that, collectively, they (and others) have ignored this aspect of genocidal behavior. (This observation is in no way intended to dismiss their important work out of hand; nor does it imply a lack of significance of the very real and practical suggestions they offer to address this ongoing horrific tragedy of the human community.)

Where, then, do we begin? To the degree to which the human community affirms that genocide is among the primary threats to the future of humanity—along with nuclear annihilation, which we may, perhaps, label “omnicide” or “speciecide”—then the appropriate responses are to begin to chart courses of action that may lead to its elimination. Thus, the following are offered as *beginning points* of much larger conversations, with an eye focused on turning them into concrete action plans.

#1: For the religious communities of the world, there *must* be an initial *acknowledgement and recognition* that one’s own religion, to a greater or lesser degree, is a “player” in the work of genocide. And the place to begin such conversations is the Parliament of the World’s Religions, whose next scheduled gathering is in 2014 (place to be determined; the 2009 gathering took place in Melbourne, Australia). According to its website (<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org>, n.d.), its mission is “to cultivate harmony among the world’s religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world” (“Our Mission”). Yet, a quick search of its materials finds genocide more associated with the Holocaust/Shoah than a phenomenon in and of itself, and *no recognition whatsoever* of the role the religious communities have themselves played in the perpetration of genocide. Because its gatherings represent, by and large, the totality and diversity of the world’s religious communities composed of committed activists in a true spirit of dialogical encounters, placing the elimination of genocide among its own foremost priorities would speak loudly to the world’s religious persons. Further, returning to their own home religious communities, such persons potentially have the ability not only to become a vanguard international anti-genocide community, but also to energize their own parochial communities to address this issue. Whatever materials are developed in the course of their own deliberations and conversations would themselves well serve as starting points for local conversations regarding ways to combat genocide.

#2: With acknowledgement comes *education* within the broadest pos-

sible frameworks, from initial parochial educational environments through advanced seminary and other locales. But such anti-genocide education is far more than a mastery of one's own religion: It is also the committed dissemination of education in psychology, social psychology, and sociology so as to make the members of the world's religious communities much more fully aware of what it means to be a human being, how human beings function in group settings, and how groups themselves function not only with regard to their own internal cohesiveness, but also in their orientations and behaviors regarding groups external to them. It is also a re-thought process of ethical and behavioral education designed to ask difficult questions about one's own group and its history and theology, past and present, and the responsibilities shared by all human communities, especially religious communities, to, ultimately, create a world human community if our species is to survive.

Addressing the four precipitating factors discussed earlier:

#3 (#1): Religious communities are equally tribalistic communities as are all other kinds of communities. No more; no less. Transparent recognition of that which unites them in their ongoing quest for a meaningful existence, while lending itself to a supposed perceived superiority, need not do so. The very diversity of the human species—how both individuals and groups, affected by history, culture, geography, physical differentiations, and the like, results in different responses to the problems and difficulties that afflict us all—must be re-thought, re-seen, and re-experienced as a positive, lending itself to the necessary anti-genocide process of consensus building. Muslims drawing upon the Qur'an and Qur'anic traditions, Christians drawing up the Old and New Testaments and their traditions, Jews drawing upon the Torah/Hebrew Bible and their traditions, and other religious communities as well, committed to such anti-genocide work and all learning from one another, constitute a well of strength that has remained largely untapped.

#4 (#2): Exclusivism speaks of superiority-inferiority. Yet, if truth be told, religious communal boundaries, both historically and contemporarily, are far more porous than was and is perhaps initially realized. The majority of all such groups and communities throughout history have welcomed outsiders, those not born into their constituencies. Some have made the journey more difficult; others less so. But all have created vehicles by which outsiders can become insiders, and while there is a darker history of former religionists in one community's negativizing their former co-religionists and the religion and religious community itself, that need not remain the case, most especially in anti-genocide work. Objectively speaking, regardless of one's sacred traditions and sacred texts, no one religious group is superior to another, just as no one religious group is inferior to another. All

are what they are: attempts to explore the *mystery* of life itself from first breath to last, to find meaning in the journey, to answer questions that often come unbidden to human consciousness as the result of human experience, and, if appropriate, to encounter the divine. In anti-genocide work, the greatest strength is to draw upon all to eliminate this scourge of human existence.

#5 (#3): Although psychologically meaningful and self-validating, privileging access to the Divine or divines through one's sacred texts, sacred rituals, and sacred ceremonials, and too often denying such access to other individuals and communities as a means of enhancing one's own faith in the eyes of one's fellow adherents, limits the God or gods by enclosing them in humanly confining ghettos of rather poor human construction. If the various religious communities truly take themselves seriously, among their commonalities is their understanding of deities as beyond human. For the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Yhwh/God/Allah is beyond the totality of human understanding. Indeed, the very languages by which these traditions attempt to concretize their understandings are themselves acts of human—not Divine—limitation. And such is equally the case among the other religious traditions of the world. Whatever else humanity is and may be, it cannot fully contain the Divine, no matter how hard it tries to do so. Thus, the notion of divine exclusivity as practiced by the various human communities is a false idea, the very reverse of which is true: It is we humans who are fully and truly limited in our faltering attempts to grasp that which we so weakly perceive as the infinite, limited not only by intellectual constraints, but by the physicality of our finitude as well. For one religious group to so regard itself as being in possession of such exclusive access not only does itself a disservice, but, equally so, does a disservice to the God or gods it affirms as infinitely superior to everything human. Thus, all such religious communities must be challenged to creatively come up with ways in which outsiders can access the divine while still maintaining their own inherent integrity.

#6 (#4): Using the model of what I and others (Knight, 2000; Moore, 2004) have come to regard as the "midrashic mode" of reading sacred texts, that is, a decidedly *non-literalist* but far more expansive manner of reading, opens doors to all religious communities to engage in dialogical encounters more than they have done in the past. Reading one's sacred texts in the physical presence of another who is decidedly outside one's own religious community provides a startlingly different venue that opens eyes across the table as to how such words have been read and understood by both those who affirm their very sacrality and those who do not. The affirmer, as a result, is challenged to truly attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the *meaning* of the words and how those words are perceived by outsiders. The

outsider is equally challenged to further fully understand how those words are perceived by a sacred community not one's own. Both readers are challenged morally and ethically to address how words seemingly innocent within the context of one's own religious community become hurtful or hateful when staring into the eyes of another. The aforementioned example of John 14:6—"No one goes to the Father except through me [Jesus]"—is one such example. For Christians, such a sacred text is an affirmation of solidarity, binding the individual Christian to both the group and the Christ. For Jews and Muslims, it represents an exclusivity that denies the older religious community its covenantal efficacy; and for the latter it closes doors to a religious tradition that accords Jesus prophetic status while affirming the singularity of a God affirmed by all three. The late French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and German-Catholic theologian Johannes Baptist Metz, both dramatically influenced by the Holocaust/Shoah, have equally advocated reading both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament in the presence of the other (i.e. Jews and Christians). In the United States, such work has preliminarily begun (see Fredriksen & Reinhartz, 2002; Greeley & Neusner, 1996; Holmgren & Schaalman, 1995; Knowles, Menn, Pawlikowski, & Sandoval, 2000; Linafelt, 2002). Such new ways of reading present opportunities to further the anti-genocide work advocated by showing the dialogical partners and communities how their own sacred texts have played a tragically destructive part in legitimating genocide against others, and, in the process, raises the question of what can be done to halt the process. It also contains the potential to enlist energized religious communities to no longer be part of the problem, but part of the solution. It, too, like the other preliminary suggestions offered, is understood to be a beginning point for conversations about genocide and anti-genocide that have yet to take place.

The very topic of this paper—that the world's religious communities have for far too long been unrecognized players in genocide except in very limited understandings by non-religious studies scholars (e.g. the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Rwandan Genocide; the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Bosnian Genocide), and that such involvements have come from particularistic and parochial ways of understanding one's own religion, religious community, and most especially others who are part of neither—is uncomfortable to research, and to write, think, and read about, as well as to discuss. Yet the scourge of genocide has afflicted the human community, as the examples given testify, and with the participation of such communities. That religion continues to play this kind of role today in the Darfur region of Sudan is a continuing stain on civilization and a present-day example, in part, of the divide between populations of Muslims and Christians (see Madut Jok, 2007). The current upheavals throughout the

Middle East have already led some to query whether that region will all too soon become the next staging ground for genocide. (Two of the six scholars participating in the March 2, 2011 panel at Clark University, Worcester, MA, on “Popular Protests, New Media, & Change in the Middle East”—Taner Akcam and Khatchig Mouradian—are affiliated with the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.) If “justice delayed is justice denied,” as British politician William Gladstone is reported to have declared, then failing to examine both the role religious communities have played in the perpetration of genocide and what steps may potentially be taken given the ability of religious communities to mobilize their adherents for those things they deem worthy of their efforts is a clear-cut case of justice delayed and denied. The victims of genocide demand nothing less than the reverse.

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