

Intra- and Inter-Religious Hate and Violence: A Psychosocial Model

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Man is the religious animal. He is the only religious animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion—several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat, if his theology isn't straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother's path to happiness and heaven.

-- Mark Twain

Hatred, discrimination, and violence in the name of religion are certainly not new phenomena, but rather date back through the historical record. The persecution of early Christians by the Romans and of Jews/Muslims during the Crusades are but two examples from history. Today, terrorist attacks in Israel, violence in Northern Ireland, ethnic conflict and genocide in the former Yugoslavia, and a host of other headlines remind us regularly that hatred and violence under the flag of religion still exist. However, for most individuals in the United States prior to September 11th, 2001, such violence was thought to occur primarily elsewhere on the distant horizon of international affairs. Freedom of religion and religious tolerance are viewed by most in the U.S. as fundamental tenets of our society. Furthermore, any

religious hatred and intolerance that exist in the U.S. are thought to occur only on the domestic fringe and are thus not major threats to the vast majority of Americans. Consequently, the attacks of September 11th, given the belief that the attacks were grounded in Islamic fundamentalism as part of a Holy War, has raised questions for many about the foundation of religious hatred and violence.

Unfortunately, most of the discussion of religious hatred in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks has focused on the specifics of Islam. Religious responses from various theological perspectives have occurred along a continuum of dialogue. At one end of the spectrum, many theologians have stressed the beauty and peace-abiding nature of the Islamic faith. At the other end, well-known Christian evangelists have offered harsher opinions. For example, Franklin Graham, son of the Reverend Billy Graham, stated that he believed Islam to be a "very evil and wicked religion,"¹ and Jerry Falwell called Mohammed a "terrorist."² While both have subsequently qualified their remarks, such comments exemplify a reciprocal foundation of religious intolerance that argues against a purely theological root for religious hatred, terrorism, and violence.

While theological rationales for the fomentation of intra-religious hatred

vary, there is commonality in the psychosocial roots of such enmity across religious boundaries. In this article, we will explore the roots of intra-religious hate and inter-religious violence within the broader framework of a model of mass violence. Examples from Christian anti-Semitism, groups associated with religious hatred and intolerance (for example, Christian Identity and Christian Patriots), the current upsurge of anti-Muslim hatred, and Islamic fanaticism will be provided throughout the analysis to highlight aspects of the model.

On a strictly theological basis, it is difficult to define what would be considered intra- or inter-religious distinctions. Within religions there are denominations and factions that may or may not view themselves as part of a broader whole. For example, is the violence in Northern Ireland between the Protestants and the Catholics an instance of intra- or inter-religious violence? If one perceives these to be simply denominations within Christianity as a religion, then this conflict would be identified as an example of intra-religious violence. However, if one identifies Protestantism and Catholicism as distinct religions, then this conflict would represent an instance of inter-religious violence. Therefore, for the purposes of the current analysis, definitions will be based on internalized perceptions of group membership—

the distinction between "us" and "them." The group with which an individual identifies is referred to as that person's ingroup. Conversely, the group the individual does not identify with is referred to as that person's outgroup. Consequently, intra-religious hatred consists of the negative attitudes formed by ingroup members about outgroups; inter-religious violence will be defined as aggressive behavior between ingroups and outgroups.

A Psychosocial Model

Staub, Rummel, and others have written extensively about the underlying root conditions and causes of mass violence.³ These theoretical models can be combined to create an interactive model of mass violence that can be utilized to assess the risk for ingroup fomentation of hatred and outgroup-directed violence. Factors included in this model are group cultural history, social psychological factors, situational factors, and the path of violence, including the role of stigmatization, dehumanization, moral exclusion, impunity, and bystander interactions. Each factor will be discussed more fully below in relation to intra-religious hatred and inter-religious violence.

Group Cultural History

All of us exist in a variety of cultures with distinct histories. These

cultures shape our identity and perception of what is considered normative. In relation to cultures that have a propensity for mass violence, we find three common patterns: the use of aggression as a normative problem solving skill, a perceived threat orientation, and an ideology of supremacy. Each can exist on the broad cultural level within nation-states as well as within more localized cultures associated with smaller groups or organizations.

Aggression and violence are so much a part of everyday life in the United States that they are often assumed to be the natural order of life. Cultures and groups within a culture vary in the degree to which they accept aggression as a primary problem-solving skill. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, are highly pacifistic, and while interned in Nazi concentration camps were often selected for work in the homes of S.S. guards because of their eschewal of violence.⁴ Conversely, the major genocides of the twentieth century were all committed by or within states with a history of aggressive conflict and war.⁵

Religions exist not only within the broader historical context, but also have historical contexts of their own. Many religions have within their histories a pattern of glorification of violence. Art, mythology, and oral history include representations of this glorification as a holy battle between

the forces of good and evil. Christianity, for example, as a theology teaches peace and love of one's neighbor. However, historically, the practice of Christianity has a long and bloody history, with the use of violence perceived as positive, righteous action. The Crusades, the Massachusetts witch-hunts, and the support of Nazi anti-Semitism within Protestant and Catholic churches (both officially and unofficially) are just a few of the examples in which the Church sanctioned violence as an appropriate means to achieve the greater good. In the light of 21st century hindsight, these episodes of horrible violence appear quite distasteful. However, the legacy of shame associated with these episodes is not always acknowledged or discussed, as they raise questions about the fallibility of one's religious organization.

Recently, large-scale efforts have been made to apologize to Muslims and Jews for the atrocities of the Crusades.⁶ However, others within Christianity today still identify the time of the Crusades as a righteous war against Muslim aggression.⁷ Remnants of this identification of Christianity with a holy war struggle can be seen today in hymns such as "Onward Christian Soldiers" and the structure of groups such as the Salvation Army. Of course, Christianity is but one example of an identified religious group that has within its history a record of violent action.

Correlated with this history of aggression is a perceived threat orientation, or what Staub refers to as an “ideology of antagonism.”⁸ In the absence of good intelligence or the free exchange of diplomatic information, states with a perceived threat orientation may assume that the other nation presents a risk, and therefore prepare for or initiate military conflict. For many decades, the former Soviet Union and the United States held each other at bay through the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The aforementioned military build-up was in response to an initial perceived threat, which then became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Religions may also operate from a perceived threat orientation. This can occur both in the absence of information and in the face of distorted knowledge. Following the attacks of September 11th, there was a concerted effort in many educational institutions to increase students’ knowledge about Islam. The motivations behind such efforts reflect a belief that if we know more about a particular religion, we are less likely to demonize that religion. Unfortunately, such efforts have not always had a positive outcome. The University of North Carolina recently selected *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* by Michael A. Sells for its freshman reading program. The selection was met with a lawsuit, a bill before the North Carolina legislature,

editorial condemnation, and public outrage. Bill O'Reilly, the national radio and talk show host, compared it to requiring students to read *Mein Kampf*.⁹ Public outrage was grounded in fear, distorted information, and the perception that Islam represents a threat to the American way of life, and in fact to life itself. Similar reactions to students' reading the Bible in college courses have not occurred in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in the United States linked to self-described Christian, white supremacist militia groups (for example the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma and the 1995 derailment of an Amtrak train in Arizona). Because these instances of domestic terrorism occurred within the context of the dominant religion within the United States, it was understood that these acts represented the deeds of groups on the fanatical fringe. Therefore, the threat came from individuals and was not perceived to be associated with Christianity.

Christian anti-Semitism is also built on a foundation of perceived threat. The severity of this threat is exemplified by the portrayal of Jews as the killers of Christ. The depiction of Jews in art, literature, and folklore as demons, parasites on society, and sexual predators reflects the objectification of this perceived threat. The blood libel accusing Jews of killing young

children so as to drain their blood for the making of Passover *matzot* (unleavened bread) is a theme that recurs throughout history. It is hypothesized that the underlying root of Christian anti-Semitism is the fact that Judaism has not been subsumed within the new covenant with the Creator. In other words, Judaism is a threat to the validity of Christianity as a religious belief system precisely because Judaism continues to exist in both theology and practice. Either the “chosen people” who had the original covenant with the Creator have elected to now align themselves with the side of evil, or there may be a flaw in Christian ideology. Obviously, there are more than these two possibilities, but for many, anti-Semitism, in all of its manifestations, may reflect a perceived threat to Christian identity.

Mass violence also correlates with a group's blind acceptance of an ideology of supremacy. Members of such a group view themselves as innately and fundamentally superior to the objects of their aggression. For example, the Nazis viewed themselves and all people of "Aryan race" as fundamentally superior to the "sub-races" (that is, Jews and Gypsies). The Hutu leaders and elite declared Hutus superior to the Tutsis (who were referred to as *inyenzi* or cockroaches) during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Religious theology can also harbor an ideology of superiority. The

fundamental belief behind religious proselytization is the idea that one person's religious belief is better, truer, more fulfilling than the currently held religious belief of someone else. The unbelievers need to be converted to achieve salvation or be considered worthy of favor. Around the world, hybridizations of Christianity exist, as indigenous populations sought to meld their existing belief systems with Christianity. Only through such a blending could people retain the beliefs of their ancestors and still be eligible for the extra benefits associated with conversion, such as education, food, and health care.

Clearly, all of the aforementioned group cultural history variables interact to facilitate intra-religious hatred and inter-religious violence. However, the mere presence of these factors within a religious organization does not guarantee that the group will in fact adopt a doctrine of hatred or inter-religious violence. Religions with the following characteristics are at particular risk for inter-religious violence: 1) a culture and history of violence, 2) a theology that identifies itself as the one, true religion, and 3) an orientation that keeps it operating as if it were threatened. These factors, coupled with the variables discussed below, place a nation or group at risk for such violence.

Social Psychological Factors

The identification of group cultural history factors allows for a better understanding as to why a particular religious group gravitates toward hate and violence. However, there are several underlying social psychological factors, not specific to any one group, that serve to facilitate the development of intra- and inter-religious hate and violence.

Social Cognition

The means by which individuals think about themselves can influence the likelihood of intra- and inter-religious hate and violence. According to researchers, we tend to divide up the world into "us" and "them," or ingroups and outgroups.¹⁰ In addition, the ingroup we identify with is often an important component in how we define ourselves and is referred to as our social identity.¹¹ According to Turner and Tajfel, it is advantageous for us to belong to groups that are held in high esteem so that our social identity is seen in a positive light. Consequently, people try to sustain their positive self-identity by assuring themselves that their ingroup is highly valued and distinct from other groups—a phenomenon referred to as the ingroup bias. Devotion to one's ingroup can produce outgroup-directed prejudice, discrimination, and, potentially, violence. However, this behavior is by no

means automatic. Negative consequences of the ingroup bias tend to occur when people couple an extremely positive view of themselves with a very negative view of outgroups.¹² Consequently, individuals who are more balanced in their impressions of their own ingroup and outgroups are less prone to the negative ramifications of the ingroup bias. Although the aforementioned cognitive perspectives are important contributors to the development of intra- and inter-religious hatred and violence, they also suggest that an increased understanding of outgroup religions may in fact decrease feelings of enmity towards "them."

The means by which we perceive the world around us can also aid in the formation of intra- and inter-religious hatred and violence. Specifically, we tend to use shortcuts or heuristics when processing information about the world.¹³ That is, we tend to avoid thinking very deeply about issues unless they directly impact our lives. Furthermore, we tend to seek out information that confirms our beliefs rather than material that disconfirms our views of reality—a phenomenon referred to as the confirmation bias.¹⁴ In addition, our tendency to form illusory correlations between unrelated phenomena further exacerbates the situation by providing seemingly credible evidence to support our beliefs.¹⁵ Once our beliefs are formed, we are extremely reluctant

to modify them. This phenomenon, referred to as belief perseverance, can account for the tenacity with which religious groups hold onto their beliefs—even if these beliefs are shown to be without factual basis.¹⁶

For example, prior to the attacks of September 11th, most individuals in the United States had little information and few strong beliefs about Islam. Given that Islam impacted very few individuals in the U.S., little attention was paid to it in the media or daily discourse. Unfortunately, after the attacks there was a rise in anti-Muslim bias, based in part on the media-fostered illusory correlation between a belief in Islam and violent behavior. As a result, many cities noted a rise in hate crimes directed toward Muslims. Sadly, the notion of belief perseverance suggests that these attitudes and beliefs will be difficult to challenge and change over time. It also means that the probability of inter-religious violence continues to remain high.

Another shortcut that we use when processing information is the fundamental attribution error—the tendency for individuals to attribute behavior to internal, dispositional causes, ignoring situational explanations.¹⁷ Thus, individuals are more likely to believe that Bin Laden or Hitler is just "evil" than to look for factors in the personal, political, and socio-economic environments that may have shaped their decisions. The tendency for

individuals to make the fundamental attribution error, coupled with their desire to believe in a just world,¹⁸ leads people to blame the victim for whatever unfortunate event has befallen them. For example, following WWII there were some who questioned whether the Jews were partly responsible for the Holocaust. However, it is important to note that the tendency to blame the victim may not hold true when large numbers of one's own ingroup have been attacked (for example, the September 11th tragedy). Instead, the ingroup is likely to further demonize the perpetrators. In summary, the typical manner by which people process information can potentially lead to the propagation of hate and can aid in the formation of inter-religious violence.

Social Influence

The nature of group dynamics within a religious organization can aid in the formation of intra- and inter-religious hatred and violence. For example, religious groups are often characterized by conformity. In fact, the pressure to conform can be overwhelming. Ritualistic behavior, a hallmark in many religions, helps to perpetuate conformity. In addition, there are often very severe penalties for not conforming, ranging from ostracism and verbal aggression to physical violence and the threat of damnation.¹⁹ Thus, group

members may feel pressure to engage in hatred and violence, knowing only too well the ramifications of not conforming.

This pressure becomes even more salient upon the introduction of an authority figure. Milgram's obedience studies demonstrated the powerful effect an authority figure can have on our behavior.²⁰ In these studies, participants were given the opportunity to deliver increasingly higher levels of electric shock to a protesting victim (a confederate who never actually received the shocks). The majority of participants obeyed, continuing to deliver electric shocks (up to 450 mV) even when the victim stopped responding. When asking participants to deliver shocks, Milgram took advantage of the foot-in-the-door effect. Participants were initially asked to give relatively low levels of shock (15 mV) to the victim. However, as the experiment wore on, participants were asked to give increasingly higher levels of shock to the victim. Thus, by starting low, the participants ended up giving much higher levels of shock than they normally would have delivered. The presence of a strong authority figure, coupled with the foot-in-the-door procedure, is a proven technique that has been utilized by leaders to facilitate intra- and inter-religious hatred and violence.²¹

It is important to keep in mind that the Milgram obedience studies were

conducted at Yale University using a man in a white lab coat as the authority figure. The impact of an authority figure can be much more pronounced in a religious organization with a leader conveying the Word of God. We will spend more time discussing the specific characteristics of leaders later in the manuscript.

Religious groups, not unlike other groups, tend to foster a sense of anonymity among members. That is, a sense of deindividuation is fostered through membership in a group.²² Unfortunately, deindividuation can facilitate violence. By stripping individuals of their identities through increased anonymity, deindividuation causes people to become less self-aware, feel less responsible for their actions, and be more likely to engage in violence if placed in a provocative situation.²³ Consequently, tendencies towards intra- and inter-religious hatred and violence are enhanced within religious groups that foster a sense of deindividuation.

Common sense suggests that two heads are better than one. However, when it comes to tight-knit groups, that adage is not necessarily correct. Group polarization can occur within groups composed of individuals with similar attitudes. Several research studies have demonstrated that group discussion tends to enhance the initial leanings of the group.²⁴ For example,

liberal groups become even more liberal in their decisions following group deliberations. Unfortunately, the same can be said of prejudiced individuals, who adopt much more negative views regarding outgroup members following group discussions.²⁵ Very cohesive groups also cultivate a sense of groupthink. According to Janis, the mode of thinking in which people engage while in a very cohesive group tends to suppress realistic appraisals of the situation.²⁶ Instead, in the spirit of maintaining group harmony, groups tend to agree with the leader and ignore possible alternative viewpoints. Thus, the potential exists within a very cohesive religious group for a leader to advocate a policy of hate without being met by significant resistance from group members. In fact, group polarization may occur, resulting in even more extreme viewpoints.

Social Relations

Paradoxical as it may seem, religion, prejudice, and violence are intimately tied. One of the most effective ways to maintain social inequities is to cite Scripture. The dominant group in most religions is men. Therefore, it is not surprising that women are typically in a subordinate position within the hierarchy of religious organizations. The same fate awaits ethnic minorities. Furthermore, previously discussed social cognition factors, such

as the ingroup bias and social identity theory, dictate that other religious groups are held as inferior—promoting the formation of intra-religious hatred. For example, research has found that church members are more prejudiced than nonmembers.²⁷ However, it is important to note that although mere church membership is related to prejudice, there does not appear to be a relationship between prejudice and individuals who have a true understanding of scripture.²⁸

As has been noted, there is a long history of inter-religious violence. Indeed, the history of humanity is replete with examples. Inter-religious violence can be understood by applying realistic conflict theory, relative deprivation, and scapegoating. Realistic conflict theory suggests that competition between groups for scarce resources results in prejudice.²⁹ Although realistic conflict theory has primarily been applied to situations in which groups compete for land, employment, and other factors that impact the economy, it would also be appropriate to extend this conceptualization of resources to include cultural and spiritual needs. For example, this broad conceptualization of resources can be applied to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, in which land, economic resources, and holy sites figure prominently.

One of the means by which we assess our status in society is comparing ourselves to others. Interestingly, researchers have found that economically disadvantaged individuals are often satisfied with receiving few societal resources, whereas advantaged individuals tend to be dissatisfied with high levels of social resources. This phenomenon, labeled relative deprivation,³⁰ suggests that it is the most advantaged group members who will engage in collective action because they are more apt to compare themselves to those groups that are better off.³¹ Indeed, individuals who are economically advantaged relative to others within the religious community, typically the leaders or religious elite, initiate much of the collective action.

Given that relative deprivation tends to lead to frustration, collective action by religious leaders or elite may involve displaced aggression or scapegoating. For example, Hovland and Sears reported that the number of southern African-Americans lynched in the late 19th and early 20th century varied as a function of the price of cotton.³² When cotton prices were good, lynchings were down, whereas the opposite pattern held true when cotton prices were low. The researchers cited displaced aggression as the main culprit in this analysis. Groups that have a limited ability to defend themselves, such as women, children, and ethnic and religious minorities,

tend to be the targets of aggression. For example, Jews in Nazi Germany were targeted based on their minority status and the existence of stereotypes consistent with the notion that they had a hand in Germany's economic downturn after WWI.

Most researchers agree that inter-religious violence is largely a learned phenomenon. That is, group members learn that violence is an acceptable means to assert the dominance of their religious group over those competing for the same hearts, minds, and purse-strings of the surrounding population. Furthermore, violence is often rewarded through increased publicity. This increased publicity can serve to draw attention to the religious group, attract potential converts, and serve as a catalyst for independent acts of violence in the name of that particular religion (that is, by lone wolves). This phenomenon was acutely observed when Buford Furrow repeatedly fired an automatic weapon into a Jewish day care center and killed a Filipino letter carrier in Los Angeles to bring attention to the Nazi-affiliated church called Christian Identity.³³

Situational Factors

While religious groups may carry the seeds for hate and violence within, other factors are needed to stimulate aggressive actions and the growth of

enmity. Thus, one must look to the current situation in which a group and its members find the stimulus behind such growth. Various factors can be included in this discussion, but the two primary issues are destabilizing crises and authoritarian leaders.

If we compare the major genocides of the twentieth century, a pattern of crisis appears in each case. Economic crisis, political crisis, and the effects of recent war were present in each of the following countries: the Ottoman Empire (the genocide of the Armenians), the Weimar Republic (the Holocaust), Democratic Kampuchea (the Cambodian genocide), the former Yugoslavia (the massacres in Bosnia), and Rwanda (the genocide of the Tutsis). Other factors that may destabilize a region include concerns over sovereignty of land and resources, third party dominance and interference (for example, colonization), disparate allocation of and access to power and resources, scarcity of resources, environmental crises, and threat of conflict or war.³⁴ All of these factors increase the likelihood of intra- and inter-religious animosity and violence. Note that three of the genocides listed above included broad elements of religious division. Interestingly, in Rwanda, Hutus and Tutsis had a shared religion and language, and lived in relative harmony until the advent of colonization and the inequitable

distribution of favor, based in part on the religious beliefs of the colonizers.³⁵

Crisis can be very destabilizing for individuals and results in threats to the individual such as loss of group pride, an escalation of fear, frustration of needs and wants, confusion regarding personal identity, and an increase in prejudice.³⁶ The classic research of Miller & Bugelski demonstrated that adolescents in a summer camp, deprived of an evening at the movies, displayed a sharp increase in prejudice directed toward groups with whom they had no contact.³⁷ In a crisis, groups can pull together and engage in remarkable constructive action. Unfortunately, groups can also respond by engaging in destructive actions. Religious groups are no different. Following the attacks of September 11th, many religious communities pulled together to assist not only their own congregations, but also their Muslim and Arab neighbors. Unfortunately, other religious groups responded by promoting hate and violence. Within the Christian Identity movement, articles such as “Ishmael, Edom and Israel and the Attack Upon America” by Ted R. Weiland blame the September 11th attacks on U.S. involvement and support of the State of Israel.³⁸ The rationale as to why support of Israel is problematic revolves around the notion that that Jews are not the true Israel, but rather usurpers of the land and identity. According to the Christian

Identity movement, the Celto-Saxon peoples are the true Israel. From a totally different perspective, there are many in the Arab world who believe that Israel and the Mossad are responsible for the September 11th attacks as part of a broader Jewish conspiracy.³⁹ Such reports and similar anti-Semitic themes have increased dramatically in the Arab press in recent years.⁴⁰

It should be noted that personal crises can draw an individual to religious groups, cults, hate groups, and so on. These organizations can provide a sense of belonging and identity to someone in time of need. In the film *Hate Groups USA*, an interviewee states that he joined a white supremacist group while in prison simply because on his birthday, he received a card from every member of the group.⁴¹

While crisis and the presence of destabilizing factors play a major role in the initiation of group hatred and violence, a second major situational factor needs to be included: group leaders. According to Rummel, it is not coincidental that only non-democratic nations in the twentieth century committed genocide or initiated a war.⁴² One key characteristic of genocidal states is the presence of a totalitarian ruler, or, as Staub calls it, a monolithic culture.⁴³ Such cultures often have a strong history of obedience to the state and authoritarian rulers. Each of the major genocides listed above occurred in

a crisis period following a failed attempt at democracy with a resulting rise to power of a totalitarian form of government.

Religious organizations are also deeply impacted by the leaders of those organizations. Leaders who demand unconditional belief and support are in a position to manipulate not only the information received by their followers, but whether the group functions to promote religious tolerance and constructive action or hatred and destructive violence. A quick scan of various Internet web sites for religiously based hate groups demonstrates that they focus on the latter. These web sites contain vile images of the outgroup (for example, Christian Identity websites include negative graphic portrayals of Jews and Blacks), violence-based graphics (including swords and fire), and fear-producing, inflammatory articles. Leaders can control the messages available to the group via the Internet and accepted readings. Those in positions of power are in a unique position to manipulate a host of social psychological factors that may then play a role in the development of intra-religious hatred and inter-religious violence.

Researchers have long been interested in the characteristics of individuals that make them effective leaders. Unfortunately, there is no one characteristic that seems to stand out. In fact, only modest correlations have

been found in this domain. Some of the variables researchers have found to be moderately related to leadership success include (in no particular order) charisma, a desire for power and dominance, self-confidence, self-direction, morality (and on the flip side, immorality), and intelligence.⁴⁴ However, Simonton collected information on the personal attributes of all the U.S. presidents and found that only three characteristics predicted effectiveness in office (as rated by historians)—height, family size, and the number of books published prior to taking office.⁴⁵ In short, personality characteristics appear to be poor predictors of leadership.⁴⁶ Rather, it is more likely that successful religious leaders are simply the right people in the right situation at the right time.

The Path of Violence

While all the factors discussed above may be present in a situation, the question as to why some groups function peacefully with their neighbors while others serve as a breeding ground for increasing levels of violence remains. As noted above, leaders have systematically utilized the foot-in-the-door procedure to facilitate various forms of violence, including inter-religious violence. This is key, as individuals and populations are reticent to commit extreme acts of violence without extensive provocation, but may

engage in more innocuous acts of aggression with little difficulty. Therefore, leaders must promote increasing levels of violence over time, while simultaneously maintaining the ingroup's positive sense of self. To accomplish this task, leaders often systematically remove the rights once enjoyed by the target group, thus making it very difficult for the target group to resist the increasing levels of violence. In addition, a series of parallel processes is often enacted to ensure that ingroup members are less willing to protest the treatment afforded to the target group. An understanding of the stages and processes necessary for increasing levels of violence can provide insight concerning the best point of intervention. The stages in the path to violence and the accompanying parallel processes can be visualized as follows:

	<u>Stages</u>	<u>Parallel</u>
	<u>Processes (Each increases over time)</u>	
Loss of opportunity and privilege		Stigmatization
Loss of civil rights		Dehumanization
Loss of human rights		Moral exclusion
Loss of existence		Impunity

Basic Stages on the Path of Violence

It is normative for ingroups to maintain stereotypes and negative attitudes toward an outgroup. Leaders within a group may promote or discourage such processes, depending on their own agenda and the interest of the group. Unfortunately, some groups may proceed down a path of greater violence that begins with loss of privilege and opportunity. Members of the outgroup may be denied access to certain services, excluded from organizations (for example, being denied membership in a country club based on race, gender, or religion), or limited in their ability to move past a glass ceiling in relation to educational opportunities or jobs. Unfortunately, these early actions are often easy and compelling rationales, for the “necessity” for them may be provided by leaders or existing stereotypes. If

this first step toward violence is accepted by an ingroup or population, it is easier to move on to the next step, which is loss of basic civil rights. In this case, members of the outgroup may be denied citizenship or the right to vote, find that certain laws apply differently to themselves relative to the ingroup, and not be permitted to own land or a business. Again, if little protest is raised in regard to the loss of civil rights, it becomes easier to deny an outgroup basic human rights. Individuals in the outgroup may be denied education and access to adequate food and shelter, and relegated to subsistence living. Finally, members of the outgroup may find their very existence threatened. It is the first steps in this path to mass violence that hold the greatest opportunity for intervention. This is why many have raised their voices expressing concern about the civil rights of individuals of Arab descent taken into government custody following September 11th.

During the Nazi era, Hitler did not begin his campaign against the Jews in Germany with genocide, but rather began with the organization of a small, one-day strike against Jewish businesses, and progressed to the passage of a law removing Jews from certain civil service positions. He closely watched the outcome of these actions, and since most Germans did not respond publicly in a negative fashion, he had his foot in the door. Later, the

Nuremberg Laws were passed, which resulted in the loss of a large number of basic civil rights for Jews, including citizenship and the right to live where they chose. Jews were conscripted into forced labor and placed in ghettos. Basic human rights were subsequently denied, as necessities such as adequate food, health care, and sanitation services were absent in the ghettos, and finally the process of mass deportation to concentration camps and death camps began. Hitler of course did not invent this path to violence; rather, it is one seen often in history, from the destruction of the America's indigenous populations to the genocide of the Armenians within the Ottoman Empire.

Parallel Processes on the Path of Violence

While the path to violence is demarcated by the aforementioned stages, parallel processes operate to smooth both individual and community movement along the pathway. These processes serve to decrease the likelihood of ingroup members' protest regarding the treatment afforded to the targeted group. In fact over time, these parallel processes may actually increase the ingroup's commitment to the path of violence.

Stigmatization. One of the first steps along the path of violence is the process of stigmatization. Beginning with an increase in stereotypes and derogatory images of the outgroup, the process continues with the targeted

group becoming further identified with negative attributes. This process of stigmatization may proceed through the use of identifying insignia or other means of classificatory processes. For example, during the Holocaust, Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing or an armband, the letter J was stamped on their passports, and all had their first names changed to Israel or Sarah. Such measures increase the ease with which the targeted outgroup can move through the stages of violence.

Dehumanization. To facilitate movement along the path of escalating violence, leaders promote increasing levels of dehumanization. This process of dehumanization begins with increased promotion of stereotypes and negative images of the outgroup. This is often a necessary tool to reduce the cognitive dissonance that may occur when individuals behave negatively toward other human beings.⁴⁷ Propaganda is a vital tool used by the ingroup elite to stigmatize and dehumanize the outgroup, as well as to present the outgroup as an imminent threat to the well-being or existence of the ingroup. Within religious groups, the outgroup may be presented as being in partnership with the devil or as a seductive evil seeking to steal one's children. The history of anti-Semitism is replete with images of Jews portrayed as demons, predatory animals, and vermin. Hitler encouraged

the public display of existing anti-Semitic imagery and tales, appointed a Minister of Propaganda, and commissioned the creation of films designed to further dehumanize the Jews. *The Eternal Jew* portrayed Jews as parasites on society with odd religious practices, who spread like rats across the globe disseminating plague in their path. This film combined the dehumanization theme with a call for the removal of this "cancer from the body of Germany." Similar sorts of imagery and themes appear on many Internet websites associated with the Christian Identity movement and other online religious-based hate groups.⁴⁸ Unwittingly, when individuals write of genocide as the extermination of an entire people, they retain the vermin metaphor used by the perpetrator.

Moral Exclusion. The process of dehumanization and the path of violence could not be taken without the underlying process of moral exclusion. Over time, ingroups begin to view the outgroup as excluded from the ingroup's normal moral boundaries.⁴⁹ In other words, certain moral principles that may be applied to one's own group do not pertain to those outside of the group. For example, it is unfortunate but acceptable to kill an enemy during war when the soldier is identified as a member of the threatening outgroup. Inter-religious violence can also be excused or

qualified when the targets of that violence are deemed to be outside the boundary of the Creator's sanction and blessing. Thus, violence against the "heathens" or "infidels" may be described as a necessary evil or even a great calling, and the killing of doctors who perform abortions may be labeled righteous action.

Impunity. Whether a group or nation moves down the path of violence is decided in part by whether the aggression will be met with acceptance or punishment. An atmosphere of impunity increases the probability of violence.⁵⁰ In the late 1800s, the Ottoman Empire began a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Armenian population. World outrage and the threat of sanctions, particularly by Great Britain, halted the destruction. However, with the advent of WWI, the risk of sanctions became irrelevant and the Armenian genocide occurred unabated. So too, inter-religious violence can increase if left unchecked by forces outside of and within the religion. The Spanish Inquisition was able to happen precisely because it had the full support of Church and political leadership. This is why it is currently so important for leaders from various religious perspectives and governmental officials to speak out and act against anti-Muslim hate and violence in the United States.

Role of Bystanders

The final factor that influences the path of violence is the role of bystanders. There is substantial research that examines why bystanders often fail to take action in times of crisis.⁵¹ Rationales include diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance. In times of crisis, individuals in crowds are less likely to intervene, as personal responsibility to help becomes diluted. Additionally, we tend to look to others for assistance in understanding a situation and may decide that if others appear unconcerned, then there is little reason for intervention. These and other reasons may deter bystanders from acting or providing aid.

Bystanders have the ability to quell violence through action or by virtue of their presence. Unfortunately, they also have the ability to provide tacit approval for hatred, discrimination, and violence, through inaction. Would the Holocaust have occurred if the world community had responded to earlier aggressive behavior with direct involvement as opposed to appeasement? This question is difficult to answer, but most certainly fewer Jews would have died if some action had been taken. Simply opening the doors of immigration would have saved untold number of lives. After the Holocaust, the phrase "Never Again" resounded on the lips of Jews and Christians alike.

Sadly, the words "Never Again" ring hollow in the face of subsequent mass violence and genocide. Lack of will, economic and political self-interest, national sovereignty, and prejudice have all stood in the way of action in the face of violence.

Unfortunately, many instances of large-scale inter-religious violence in various regions of the globe have been left unchecked or with little peacekeeping intervention. In part, these conflicts are a mixture of inter-religious dispute and other factors such as political concerns, access to resources, and land disputes. Thus, the conflicts in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland are in part religious, but extend beyond simply a religious explanation. Interestingly, the rationale often provided for lack of action among other nations and parties around the world is the fallacy that no action is possible, since these groups have been fighting since the beginning of time. This is an interesting twist on the notion of diffusion of responsibility, because not only is responsibility diffused across nations, but it is also diffused across time.

Inter-religious aggression can take many forms. Furthermore, movement along the path of violence depends on the cultural status of the religious organization. Dominant religions within a culture can move further along the

path of violence as large ingroup biases may be at work. In other words, their actions may occur within a context of impunity, and little challenge may come from bystanders. Historically, state-sponsored forms of inter-religious violence have been exceptionally destructive. The targets of such violence have been religious groups traditionally discriminated against but experiencing the greatest level of current assimilation. Subordinate or marginalized religious groups are more likely to commit acts of terrorism, as impunity and bystander inaction cannot be assumed.

Toward Peace and Tolerance

At a conference following a talk on the psychosocial roots of genocide, one of the authors was approached by a person who stated, "I now know what you have to do to prevent mass violence: You have to change human nature." While it may appear that mass violence, whether committed in the name of colonialism, fascism, imperialism, or religion, is an inevitable result of the human "survival of the fittest," there are several steps that can be taken to reduce intra-religious hatred and inter-religious violence.

On the most fundamental level, pluralistic and democratic states are at lower risk for mass violence. One reason is that these cultures tend to be more individualistic and thus more willing to stand up to authority figures, as

opposed to more collectivistic societies.⁵² Consequently, bystanders and ingroup members from individualistic societies are more likely to speak out against actions that they view as wrong, and in turn are less likely to be swept up in the tide of groupthink. Concomitantly, a media free from governmental restraints is essential. Such freedom of speech and press maintains pluralistic dialogue and discourse.

A clear separation of church and state is imperative. The power of the state and a dominant religion are significant forces in a culture. In the United States, these forces have provided a balance. The state has worked to keep the role of religion within society in check, and religious people push for what they consider to be moral decisions by the government. When these two forces become combined, however, there can be great risk. As noted above, state-sponsored forms of inter-religious violence through the centuries have left in their wake untold millions of individuals oppressed or dead. While Congress's singing of "God Bless America" on the steps of the Capitol Building brought hope to many Americans on September 11, 2001, this action also sent a message that these attacks could be considered as part of a Holy War between a Judeo-Christian and an Islamic God.

Education regarding diversity is imperative. Continued efforts need to be

made both within religious communities and in the larger society to teach respect for and understanding of difference. Numerous organizations already participate in or coordinate such efforts. For example, diversity materials can be acquired on-line through <http://www.tolerance.org>, a web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. This website is particularly useful, as it has information and materials for children, teens, parents, and teachers. The Anti-Defamation League's *A World of Difference* program has been used around the United States to teach an appreciation of diversity and tolerance. More programs such as these need to be taught within our schools, religious institutions, and communities.

While there is a correlation between religion and prejudice, it is important to note that this relationship exists only if religion is measured at a very superficial level (for example, by church attendance). In fact, Allport and Ross demonstrated that individuals for whom religion is an important component of the self evidenced less prejudice than those individuals who attend church for more secular reasons (such as socializing).⁵³ Other researchers have reported similar findings across a variety of situations.⁵⁴ Therefore, it follows that one potential means to reduce intra-religious hate and inter-religious violence is to increase knowledge about one's own

religion and that of people across the world. As Gordon Allport concluded, “The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice.”⁵⁵

Additionally, inter-religious cooperation and involvement is essential. Research demonstrates that familiarity with outgroups assists in reducing negative outgroup biases. However, familiarity alone is not enough to reduce prejudice and violence in instances in which inter-religious violence has already occurred. Groups that work together on projects that require the cooperation and commitment of each group are most likely to experience prejudice reduction. While significant efforts have been made over the years to repair Christian and Jewish relations, similar activities need to be undertaken to repair relations with Muslims.

While teaching tolerance and respect for diversity is important, it is equally important to educate our children and ourselves in nonviolent, effective conflict resolution skills. When one of the authors asked a group of well-educated, upper-middle-class junior high school students in a religious class what you should do if someone calls you a derogatory name, the consensus was that you should hit the name-caller. Clearly, we have taught the lessons of violence well. However, our children need to be taught the

differences between winning or the attainment of power, and effective conflict resolution. These are not synonymous terms. They need to learn the fundamentals of congruent problem solving as opposed to avoidance, submission, compromise, or aggression in situations of conflict. Many organizations provide information, training, and assistance with conflict resolution and peacebuilding.⁵⁶

Finally, is there a means to eliminate or reduce the number of religious-based hate groups? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. These groups are founded on hate and intolerance. Leaders within these groups are unlikely to change, given that this action would necessitate forfeiting their leadership and all the benefits that accompany that position. As such, they are also unlike to tolerate change within their followers. For example, in the Middle East, with each step Israelis and Palestinians take toward peace, the level of violence escalates. This may be due in part to fundamentalist religious beliefs. However, it is also likely the case that the leaders of associated terrorist organizations are resisting peace because it will necessitate that they relinquish power and perhaps face punishment. In addition, hate organizations target

youth for recruitment. To challenge the growth of religious-based hate groups, we need to examine the needs that are met by these organizations. Whether it is a need to belong, to be valued, or to find oneself, it can be met in a constructive environment. Resources need to be allocated to organizations aimed at steering at-risk children, adolescents, and young adults away from hate.

For it isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it.

And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.

-- Eleanor Roosevelt

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