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## Editor's Note

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

### I. Faith and Time

If the unfolding of history is tantamount to the humanization of our species, culture, a mode of living in the world, is both a supreme vector as well as a consequence of this long evolution of development. Two central aspects of culture are language and religion, which separately and collectively distinguish us from other types of life. While other creatures have ways of communicating or passing on signals, human language, despite great variability, is the only form of relating information that is made of symbols or signs that are expected, by common agreement, to be tightly associative with that which they are supposed to betoken. In addition, the making of language is not a one-time affair; on the contrary, it is a perpetual activity that, in turn, challenges the conceptual limits of a given age. In this sense, there is a direct link between the development of language and the extension of the horizons of human thinking and understanding.

But humanness is not exhausted by language alone. For, as Northrop Frye tells us, we "live, not directly or nakedly in nature like animals but within a mythological universe, a body of assumptions and beliefs developed from [our] existential concerns."<sup>1</sup> The "mythological universe" gives language the point of ignition as well as a larger hinterland for fruitful interpretation. The first is the frame for immediate signification; the latter is the context for the transmutation of indication into intersubjectivity and greater meaning. Of all the other constituent elements of culture, none seems to be as old as religion, or the encounter with divine providence.<sup>2</sup>

... in the absence of what we, in a common sense way, call religion, humanity could not have emerged from its pre or proto-human condition. It is, therefore, plausible to suppose, although beyond demonstration's possibilities, that religion's origins are, if not one with the origins of humanity, closely connected to them. The absolute ubiquity of religion, however defined, supports the attribution of such profound significance to it. No society known to anthropology or history is devoid of what reasonable observers would agree is religion, even those such as the former Soviet Union... which have made deliberate attempts to extirpate it. Given the central place that religious considerations have occupied in the thoughts and actions of men and women in all times and places, and given the amount of energy, blood, time and wealth that

have been spent building temples, supporting priests, sacrificing to gods and killing infidels, it is hard to imagine that religion, as bizarre as some of its manifestations may seem, is not in some way indispensable to the species.<sup>3</sup>

Religion, then, could be construed as a two-fold phenomenon: deeply held beliefs and commensurate practices. Strictly speaking, beliefs are the substrate where faith condenses and resides while acts or rituals are performances undertaken by the believer to instantiate the credo. The role of religion in culture and history emanates from both of these attributes. In the first sense, its value is to anchor human consciousness in a reality that transcends the physical environment. This metaphysical dimension connects human existence with encompassing, not fully accessible, and determining forces. This is the realm of the gods, spirits, the sacred or the ultimate code. In the second sense, religion is of this worldly experience to the extent that the socialization of the individual for both the quotidian and the conduct of civil life are calculatively infused, if not hemmed in, with subtle religious strictures and expectations. For, as the printed maxim, "In God We Trust," on the United States' currency illustrates, this is true even in those societies that are declared to be beholden to the idea of separation of the institutions and practice of religion and the operation of political affairs. In short, religion has significance for: reckoning with the tremendous anxiety collateral with the disjuncture between terminal time (i.e., in our lives) and eternity and associated mysteries; and the imperative of creating earthly habits capable of sustaining civic institutions. This coexistence of the spheres of the gods and human beings is neither fully immutable nor totally plastic. Rather, any religion is a dialectic, at once fixed in its deepest and central precepts yet subject to human experiences and the reference that must follow.

But it is not just any kind of sensation that has a discernible affect on the way a religion is lived. Normalcy and steady flow of everyday life lend themselves to a degree of predictable automaticity to consciousness and conscientiousness about faith and the performance of rituals. However, moments of severe disruptions trigger insecurities that accentuate the built-in vexation to such a degree that allegiance to the faith, ritualistic acts, and the texture of social and political activities all go through remarkable changes.<sup>4</sup> The reformulation of time, geography, political economy, and culture, denominated as globalization, currently underway is one such moment.<sup>5</sup> While there is not much

quarrelling over the salience of the profound mutations, the impact of globalization, and particularly its forceful technological and economic effects, varies widely.<sup>6</sup> For some discerning thinkers, globalization is tantamount to the universal victory of "technocratic positivism," whose most eloquent consequences are to be observed in hypermodernist cultural zones. Here, religion, so it is suggested, seems to have all but lost its eschatological as well as immediately directive influence. With a wakefulness reminiscent of the insights of an earlier sage, Fredric Jameson declared nearly three decades ago:

In psychological terms, we may say that as a service economy we are henceforth so far removed from the realities of production and work that we inhabit a dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience: never in any previous civilization have the great metaphysical preoccupations, the fundamental questions of being and the meaning of life, seemed so utterly remote and pointless.<sup>7</sup>

Jameson foretold of a creeping spiritual dehydration that his own more recent work and that of others have identified with the twin developments of centrifugence of late modernity and extreme monadism. But even here, and its worthy of note, religion is not totally eclipsed. From the Moral Majority of Reverend Falwell to the highly organized and vocal Christian Coalition, religion is *in* a tug-of-war over essential values and institutions.

Perhaps it is in regions of the world where peripheral modernity is being judged as a failure that a move towards greater spirituality and a charged interweaving of religion and politics are most visible.<sup>8</sup> In Islamic societies, for instance, political moslems have not only taken over in states such as Iran, Sudan, and Afganistan, but virtually all the rest are confronted with strong intellectual and organizational Islamist challenges. For many moslems, a reappropriation of the faith in ways that are relevant to the hour is the only viable response to triple and cognate alienations:<sup>9</sup> (a) the nightmare of modern history marked by both the sunset of Islam's glorious age and the onset and lasting damage of colonialism; (b) a bitter distaste for the current global order whose key precepts and actors are seen as the bearers of new forms of domination; and (c) a revulsion against domestic structures bent out of shape by corruption, compradorism, and drastic differentials of power. Religious awakening, in this context, is a godly commitment that conjures up a return to or an invention of what Ibn Khaldûn called

*Asabiya* and Machiavelli implied in his concept of *virtú*—an intention to form voluntary solidarity with relevant others to further the general good.

## II. The Roundtable

Three assumptions lie behind the theme for the 1999 Macalester International Roundtable: (a) that the end of the century and the millennium are characterized by new and complex intimacies; (b) that individuals (private) and communities (public) around the world are, once more, searching for spiritual convictions to mollify earthly concerns; and (c) that the potentials for both universal fellowship and its antithesis, mutual repugnance and demonization, are compounded. The following questions marked the parameters of our varied conversations:

1. Does globalization or hypermodernity present new challenges for spirituality and religion?
2. Are we condemned to a clash of identity driven by reaffirmation of exclusive religious belief?
3. Can religious pluralism become a basis for a universal fellowship and human civilization?

In commendable response to (post)modernist declarations that religion is *passé*, **Diana Eck** opens our discussions by asserting the incontestable relevance and power of religion in human affairs. Her central argument is this: our intensifying interrelations require both local and global mutuality of faiths, i.e., “interbeing.”

The first panel is led by **Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s** essay. He begins by informing us that this calendrical structuring of time is not universal. For instance, Islamic religion and civilization have a different way of ordering history. Nasr underscores both the critical challenges to Islam, as well as the intense reclamation of Islamic spirituality in the face of aggressive modernism and secularism. **Geneviève Piché** points to the essay’s strength in identifying the contemporary test points for Islamic societies and affirms the profundity of the meditations. Nonetheless, she proffers that the most commanding issue, one that is not fully dealt with in the essay, is the rise of militant “fundamentalism” within the *Umma*, in the context of globalization. **James von Geldern** reminds us of the evolution of Christianity and Islam, partic-

ularly the peculiarities of the second millennium and the accompanying tussle between a life ruled by faith and the aggressive forces of secular habits and power. He urges us not to give in to a quick dismissal of the claims of fundamentalist Christians and Muslims. Their stress on a return to God's side as the only way to deal successfully with human shortcomings in general and the disorder of the age in particular, has captured the allegiance of many.

The second conversation is brought off by the ideas of **Hava Tirosh-Samuelson**. She focuses our attention, through a reflection on the Jewish historical experience, on, in her opinion, a galloping uniculturalization of the world. For Tirosh-Samuelson, Jewish struggle to maintain their "religio-ethnic identity" in the face of a long history of relentless majoritarian conformity teaches us about the preciousness of pluralism — including within the present day state of Israel. **Lucy Forster-Smith** joins the discussion by articulating Macalester College's own heritage, as well as its commitment to internationalist pluralism. This response includes a long overdue reminder of the unavoidable responsibility of retrieving, and yes honoring, the founding tradition, as we face the newest challenges of a more and more diverse community. **Martin Gunderson** undertakes a philosophically analytical examination of Tirosh-Samuelson's arguments. The crux of his response is this: a call for a pluralism of faith from the perspective of one religion is difficult to sustain in the eyes of those who belong to another. Gunderson suggests some form of secular thinking, *à la* John Stuart Mill, has the potential to convince those who are outside of a particular belief.

Our third essay is by **Jane Marie Law**. She starts with unforgettable memories from key undergraduate years in Colorado — the first instructive chapter in the costly mix of the imagination, racism, and identity. By examining Japanese history, she shows the dangerous pitfalls of religious nationalism. For Law, the moral of this saga is its "negative example" — a milieu in which a diversity of meaning of faith and difference is crushed out by a concentrated pursuit of nationalist ideological unity. **Emily Mandelman** finds Law's observations revealing. However, she asks of the essay to pay greater attention to the thick detail of a historical context that convinces people to embrace exclusive religious claims. **Sarah Pradt** stresses the essay's value in detecting the danger of a marriage between religious fervor and national politics. She reminds us that while ultra industrialization has had a

“stripping” effect on religion, there is in Japan, nonetheless, some yearning for the transcendent.

We close this Roundtable with the contributions of **E. Valentine Daniel**. Boldly and provocatively, he declares at the outset that not only is “religion . . . not a human universal,” but what we call religion is primarily a Christian phenomenon. Drawing on his knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism, Daniel relates to us experiences from zones of the world familiar to him to illustrate his principle point. Angela Schulz throws an intellectual gauntlet by offering, *contra* Daniel, a definition. Additionally, she points to a growing necessity for reformulating religion in a dramatic way that links it to cosmopolitan civic life. **James Laine** emphasizes the relationship between the mutative tendencies of religion relative to other cultural vicissitudes. He concludes with the suggestion that the urge to rigidify and institutionalize religion is not confined to Christianity; rather, this aspect is most common in locations and periods of cultural collision.

The 2000 Macalester International Roundtable will be organized around the voices of women from a variety of perspectives.

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## Notes

1. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981), xviii.
2. Vico, in one of the most original treatises on the beginning of human culture, asserts:  
We observe that all nations, barbarous as well as civilized, though separately founded because remote from each other in time and space, keep these three human customs: all have some religion, all contract solemn marriage, all bury their dead. And in no nation, however savage and crude, are only human actions performed with more elaborate ceremonies and more sacred solemnity than the rites of religion, marriage, and burial. For, by the axiom that ‘uniform ideas, born among peoples unknown to each other, must have a common ground of faith,’ it must have been dictated to all nations that from these three institutions humanity began among them all, and therefore they must be most devoutly guarded by them all, so that the world should not again become a bestial wilderness.  
Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, translated by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968 [1744]), 97.
3. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-2. Also, Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Amanda Porterfield, *The Power of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Joel Martin, *Native American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4. Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, in three volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bulligen Series, 1958); Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); and Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

5. Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Culture and Society*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996, 1997, 1998); James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Barbara Stallings, ed., *Global Change and Regional Responses: The New International Context of Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Tyler Cowen, *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

... on a social and historical level, the temporality that modernization promised (in its various capitalist and communist, productivist forms) has been eclipsed to the benefit of a new condition in which that older temporality no longer exists, a disorder after the end of history. Meanwhile, it is as though what used to be characterized as the Third World has entered the interstices of the First one, as the latter also demodernizes and deindustrializes, lending the former colonial otherness something of the centered identity of the former metropolis.

Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 20.

6. Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: New Press, 1998); and Mark C. Taylor, *Economics of Faith in Virtual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

7. Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), xviii. For a work that underscores the distancing of religion from society in the modern West, see Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

8. Even Machiavelli, the apostle of realism, underscored the unifying power of religion as well as its function as a barometer of the health of a polity. He writes that, "the observance of religious teachings" guards "the greatness of republics" and, therefore, "one can have no better indication" of degeneration and decay than "to see divine worship little valued." See Niccolò Machiavelli, "Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius," in *The Chief Works and Others*, translated by A. Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), 225-226. See also, Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, translated by Alan Braley (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

9. Mustapha Kamal Pasha and Ahmed I. Samatar, "The Resurgence of Islam," in James H. Mittelman, ed., *Globalization: Critical Reflections* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996); John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); John L. Esposito, *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997); Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Fawaz A. Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and*



*the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Western Dominance and Political Islam: Challenge and Response* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 1997); Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, eds., *Islam, Globalization, and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Said K. Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite* (London: Victor Gollanez, 1997).