



***Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations***

**Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004**

**Robert Seiple & Dennis R. Hoover, editors**

In global security today, religion is not only part of the problem but also part of the solution. This book explores the positive nexus between religion and security, paying particular attention to the resources within the Abrahamic faith traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that foster sustainable peace.

The Study Guide below is designed to guide discussion and prompt readers to apply the book's themes to their own study and practice of international affairs.

Study Guide by Peter Dyrud

## **Questions**

*Introduction:* Dennis Hoover argues that religion is essential to the study of international affairs. Why have international affairs scholars or practitioners been traditionally hesitant to discuss faith issues in relation to foreign policy, and vice versa? Do you think that religion should be included in the study of international relations?

1. Pauletta Otis mentions a tendency toward “theological overattribution.” Can you think of any behaviors or beliefs that you have ascribed to an unfamiliar religion? Who or what informed those beliefs (your own religion, the media, others’ opinions, personal encounters)? Is it possible that our misconceptions may have more to do with political, cultural, and economic factors than with a religion itself?

2. Philip Jenkins offers some compelling factors that link religious persecution with political instability. How can we engage in dialogue with traditionally closed societies about the benefits of religious freedom for social stability and development? Who would be best suited to partake in this conversation—religious leaders, political leaders, or both? What would be an ideal forum for such a discussion?

3. Chris Seiple and Joshua White compare and contrast the blatantly violent methods of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan with the Hizb ut-Tahrir’s mixed message of non-violence and forced conversion. Which movement would be more difficult to engage from a national security standpoint—one that is up-front about its use of violence, or one that displays hatred for outside religions and cultures but seems to promote non-violence?

4. Manfred Brauch asks us to consider Israel's "holy war" tradition, documented in the books of Joshua and Judges, as an example of the bitter conflict that has historically characterized the Abrahamic traditions. However, many "people of the book" believe these campaigns were commanded and blessed by God. How can we reconcile our understanding of God as the bringer of justice and peace with the Biblical documentation of holy war as commanded by God? Do you believe that Christians, Muslims, and Jews can peacefully co-exist in light of such a tense history?

5. Some Christians have tried to characterize the tension between unhealthy spiritual rigidity and untenable universalism by saying, "We have the absolute truth, but we can't know it absolutely." Do you think Christopher Hall would agree with this statement? Do the dialogical virtues typically help strengthen or weaken a person's spiritual development and understanding of religious truth?

6. Osman bin Bakar quotes Seyyed Hossein Nasr as saying that, while many Muslims certainly desire increased religious and social freedom, they do not want it imposed on them as a Western ideology. Have external efforts to promote a foreign understanding of democracy and freedom in Islamic nations increased or decreased religious radicalism? What are some culturally sensitive methods of initiating a conversation about "freedom" in a non-Western setting?

7. Jean Elshtain addresses the theological roots of just war theory. For whom do you think it is more important to understand these roots: government practitioners or religious communities? Why?

8. One possible reason for Hitler's rise to power in Germany may have been the humiliation felt by the Germans after losing World War I to their fellow Europeans. Could any of the nine dimensions of peacemaking listed by Marc Gopin, if employed in the interim, have helped avert World War II?

9. Kevin Hasson argues that French-style secularism is inconsistent with human dignity. When you hear the word "secular," does it imply hostility to religion? Do you think that, regardless of religious persuasion, foreign policy practitioners should have "temporal" goals? Is it important for national governments (such as that of the U.S.) to have a "secular" or "temporal" outlook on international relations?

10. Harold Saunders presents the perspective of an elderly Tajik man, who felt that extremist leaders were likely beyond the restorative power of regional and social-political dialogue, but the rank and file members could still be engaged. Is it possible to persuade members of extremist organizations to leave if their charismatic and coercive leaders remain? How can such leaders be deprived of influence or successors?

*Conclusion:* Robert Seiple quotes John Milton as saying, "...whoever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?" Do you believe that truth always wins out over falsehood when the playing field is level? How do oppressive dictators typically respond to this question? How do democratic leaders typically respond? What fears are at the root of religious persecution?

## Case Study Exercise

### The 2008 Summer Olympics in China

#### *Background:*

China was recently selected by the International Olympic Committee as the host of the 2008 Summer Olympics, which is a source of great national pride for its leaders and citizen alike. The government views the Games, which will be held in Beijing, as a key opportunity to enhance China's international image, which has been tarnished by their historically substandard human rights record.

While the Chinese government, and President Hu Jintao in particular, have pledged public support for increased civil liberties (including religious freedom), people of faith continue to be persecuted in the months leading up to the Olympics.<sup>[i]</sup> Especially in rural areas, several house churches have been closed, and Christian pastors, Uighur Muslims, and Falun Gong practitioners are said to have been arrested and even tortured for practicing religions that are not sanctioned by the state. Between April and June of 2007, more than 100 foreign nationals were expelled from China for participation in religious activities deemed illegal by the state. Many around the world took issue with China's policy of sending captured North Korean refugees (some of them Christians) back to their home country, where they were imprisoned or executed.

In response to China's ongoing human rights violations, a growing number of advocacy groups are calling for the international community to boycott the Olympics if China will not improve the treatment of its citizens, including religious believers. Many fear that the government already has and will continue to crack down on "civil disobedience" in anticipation of the Games, as it wants to maintain a strong and healthy image for the international press. Despite these objections, Chinese leaders and the Olympic Committee have made no indication that the Games will held elsewhere. Recently, the Political Bureau publically stated: "We should continue to follow the principles of hosting green, high-tech and people's Olympics and the goal of high-level Olympics and Paralympics with distinguishing features."<sup>[ii]</sup>

Perhaps it is unrealistic for the international community to expect an immediate turn-around in a historically oppressive country. Or perhaps the Olympic Committee made a grave mistake in selecting a historically oppressive country to host the Summer Games. In choosing a location for the Olympics, the International Committee bases its selection on a city's potential to host successful Games and examines "...a number of technical criteria, such as government support, public opinion, general infrastructure, security, venues, accommodation and transport."<sup>[iii]</sup> They do not officially consider a country's human rights record, but at the same time, "public opinion" could pertain to how a nation is perceived by others. Hosting the Olympics places a spotlight on China, simultaneously exposing oppression, heightening government concerns about international reputation, and presenting an opportunity for reform.

*What would you do?*

You are a member of the International Olympic Committee. Advocacy groups around the world are demanding the relocation of the Summer Games away from Beijing, and threatening major boycotts if the move does not take place. The Chinese government is thrilled for the opportunity to enhance their international reputation and improve their trade relations. By moving the games, you risk alienation and potential hostility from one of the world's superpowers. By continuing to host the Games in Beijing, you are potentially sanctioning egregious human rights and religious freedom violations. How would you respond to this tenuous situation? To whom would you turn for insight and guidance? How would you foster dialogue between opposing groups in an effort to reach a mutually agreeable solution?

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[i] [http://tibet.cn/en/news/tin/t20071025\\_285117.htm](http://tibet.cn/en/news/tin/t20071025_285117.htm)

[ii] [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/30/content\\_7529204.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/30/content_7529204.htm)

[iii] [http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/cities\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/cities_uk.asp)