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### When Geopolitics and Religion Fuse: A Historical Perspective

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## **When Geopolitics and Religion Fuse: A Historical Perspective**

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*This article provides a historic overview of the role of religion in international relations and discusses what the new pervasiveness of religion means from the perspective of critical geopolitics. Religion and geopolitics seem to have been caught in a zero-sum relationship. Religion helped to legitimate the world of states but receded when that world order developed its own logic (the Westphalian system). Where the (geopolitical) logic of the state system or security appears to fail, religion emerges as a source for the self-image of groups or the discourse on global relations. Religious visions in Christianity and Islam as holy land, holy war or millennialism (extensively discussed in this article) have a clear geopolitical character. They fit easily in the study of codes, script and narratives as practised in critical geopolitics. However in drawing general conclusions one should account for the completely different experiential world in which religiosity takes priority and for the independent causes of territorial conflict.*

### RELIGION AND (CRITICAL) GEOPOLITICS

Geopolitics is a way to wield or explain power by making territorial (geographical) distinctions. Religion is the ultimate denial of the significance of earthly distinctions. When charged with having proclaimed himself King of the Jews, Jesus, brought before the Roman procurator Pilate, did not deny the title 'King' but said 'My Kingdom is not of this world'.<sup>1</sup> The famous South Asian poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) declared

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'Islam is non-territorial in its character'.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, voices from the world of Geopolitics hardly ever devoted a speech or chapter to religion. What then justifies our expectation that religion and geopolitics might fuse? The obvious answer is the occurrence of political practices in the name of religion like the Crusades or Islamic *jihad*. Both Christians and Muslims have in due course accepted war as a religious assignment. That this was motivated perhaps just as much by the prospect of political or economic advantage is another matter. One may even doubt if the motives of the Church itself in encouraging the Crusades were merely religious. It was a way to deflect the emerging competition and aggression between lords and kings to a domain where they could do no harm to the reign (and properties) of the Church. The popes were not the least able geopoliticians (or *Realpolitiker*) in European history.<sup>3</sup> Here, in revealing religious imaginations as consonant with earthly desires, one encounters something that goes to the heart of the fusion idea. At the end of the Middle Ages the fusion between geopolitics and religion was pursued from both sides: Popes established armies and kings pretended to be the chosen treasurers of God on Earth. It did not bring Church and State nearer to each other, on the contrary.

One might be apt to think that unearthing the theme of Religion and Geopolitics from the grave of history is particularly inspired by recent world developments (perceived clash of civilisations, Islamic terrorism, etc.). This may be true but the resurrection of Geopolitics in the shape of Critical Geopolitics also brought an intrinsic interest in the world of the mind.<sup>4</sup> In defining Geopolitics as an ideological way of constructing or scripting the world that is often joined with popular sentiments, critical geopolitics should be responsive to religious visions of world order. A main issue in critical geopolitics is the construction of 'self' versus 'the other'. The Quran and Bible are filled with stories about good against evil armies or forces, both in an earthly and cosmic context. There are also messages of peace and tolerance but the problem is not what such texts say but how believers use them. The dominant focus of critical geopolitics on modern states, like the US, and the Cold War initially kept religion out of the limelight. According to a timely study 'Religion: The missing dimension of statecraft' (1994), American post-war foreign politics (Iran, Vietnam) suffered from the silent assumption that other nations have the same materialistic view as 'we' do.<sup>5</sup> Critical geopolitics also addresses ethnocentrism but (witness the publication of this issue of *Geopolitics*) perhaps not coincidentally discusses the subject of religion after Christian fundamentalism has been revealed as a possible influence on American foreign policy.

The fusion of geographical and religious notions about the world was already explored a long time ago in the seminal writings of a geographer who introduced the term 'geopiety'. John Kirtland Wright (1891–1969) whose work has been summarized under the title 'geosophy', understood geopiety as the belief and worship of powers behind nature or the human environment. His

basic text analysed the writings of early American theologians who among other things saw geological evidence of the Noachian deluge in the landscape and suggested that fertile or safe environments are the privilege of those races that enjoy God's favour.<sup>6</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, a geographer working in the same vein as Wright, has attempted to extend the analysis to other cultures with examples of mystic belief in the powers that shape a place (*genius loci*) or in the concrete identification of mountains or rivers with gods.<sup>7</sup> Geopieté may imply actions that go beyond prayer and sacrifice like protecting the environment or building on specific places. He points to the 'short step [from attachment to a place] to pride of empire or national state'. Tuan seems apprehensive of overstepping the boundary between (good) geopieté and (bad) nationalism. In terms of geopieté there is no sharp distinction between what has been called the 'sacred dimension of nationalism' and the attachment to a place that prides itself on Special Providence.

Anthony Smith has distinguished four aspects of the 'sacred dimension' of the nation.<sup>8</sup> The first one, *ethnic election* or the idea of chosenness, is embodied in myths like the angel appearing at Kosovo Polje. But Smith also recognises secular versions like the French Revolution and the idea of mission it implied for the French. A second aspect is *sacred territory*. In the national territory important memories find their place and artefacts. It is the cradle of the nation or the place where major events have happened and relics are visited. The idea of a Holy Land can of course be derived from the Bible. The third aspect mentioned by Smith is *ethno-history*. He appears to identify this aspect mainly with the recognition of 'golden ages', periods that embody the inner or true virtues of a community. Finally the idea of *national sacrifice*, blood spilled for the nation as commemorated in monuments for the glorious dead, reminds us of the nation's immateriality and eternity. Smith tries to outline parallels between religion and nationalism even if the latter contains no reference to God, holy writs or the hereafter at all. Here we move into the direction of equating religion with general values, albeit 'sacred' values. But when is something sacred? Curiously Smith fails to explicitly answer that question. Reading between the lines and in view of the examples given, we apparently should conceive of sacred as something existing outside the individual, demanding ritual actions and taboos and in general supposed to be essential to a person's life. When the nation is sacred it has become analogous to God.<sup>9</sup>

If a political discourse would be based on explicit cosmologies or theologies there is no ambiguity. Then the sacred would leap to the eye in contrast with *quasi*-religious talk on the nation. A complicating factor is that the latter discourse may appeal to religious people without directly evoking any religious commandment or holy scripture. Then religion is a hidden dimension. In writing about British relations with the East, Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) who was anxious not to be accused of a naïf belief in God, nevertheless used a 'discourse [that] was so thoroughly biblical that a knowledge of the English

Bible was needed for its elucidation'.<sup>10</sup> As classical theology was less fashionable in the era of high imperialism, writes A. F. Walsh, the pious may have found an acceptable substitute in Kipling's talk about 'the White Man's Burden'. Secular use of religious discourse opens a vista that would far exceed the limits of this article. It is important to be aware of this hidden dimension but the perspective in the next pages will be limited to coded religion (Christianity and Islam) and explicit religious judgments.

Not any religiously inspired thought about the world is immediately relevant from a political point of view. Geopietry is marked by the political aloofness of its pioneering thinkers, Wright and Tuan. The weak point of the geopietry discussion was its international aspect but this weakness is not necessarily inherent to the idea, as Newman's writings on Israel have shown.<sup>11</sup> How does a religious bond with place or territory influence behaviour towards other people and countries? And which prescriptions or cues for international action do Holy Scriptures contain? These questions strike a familiar note in critical geopolitics because they extend the idea of geopolitical codes (national perceptions of the hostility or friendliness of other nations) to religion. A less obvious issue, but no less important, is how religion has helped to constitute the international order with its sovereign states. Two of the properties mentioned by Smith directly touch on geopolitics: ethnic election and sacred territory. Ethnic election implies an asymmetric relation to other international actors and possibly conflict. Sacred territory has a similar capacity to engender territorial conflicts but this is not to say that 'the sacred' or religion is a factor that is predominantly destructive. One might as well presume a capacity to contain people happily within their territory.

The above suggests a preliminary structure for discussing the fusion of geopolitics and religion. The prime subject for discussion should obviously be the idea of sacred territory or holy land. The second concerns all religious prescriptions for international action, of which holy war is the most pervasive. The third subject comprises all other religious ideas about world order or God's dealings with it. Christian millennialism offers perhaps the topographically most detailed example. In developing a historical perspective, it is difficult to ignore theories that connect the role of religion with the changing world order or a group's position in it. Such theories refer to changes in the 'Westphalian' international system (Huntington<sup>12</sup>) to new forms of insecurity (Norris & Inglehart<sup>13</sup>) or to well-known patterns of adapting to modernisation (Gellner<sup>14</sup>). Since this paper focuses on how religion contributes to geopolitical visions from a historical perspective these discussions will only be indirectly touched upon.

## HOLY LAND

It is generally known that medieval maps of the world (the famous T-O maps) were strongly influenced by the worldview of the Bible. There was

simply no other understandable information about distant worlds available. Less well known is how religion also provided the (only available) *discourse* for talking about political authority and territorial identity. Even in the pre-nationalist era territorial identity sometimes cried for intellectual framing. When William of Malmesbury wrote his history of the kings of England around 1127 (*De Gestis Regum Anglorum*) he had to incorporate the awkward event of a Norman invasion in 1066. How to account for a historically legitimised rule when English territorial integrity and ruling elite had been so roughly violated? According to Robert Stein, William's solution was to dwell upon the holiness of the English territory on the eve of the invasion. His narrative constitutes a tour along the numerous places in England where the bodies of saints have been found 'entire after death typifying the final state of incorruption'.<sup>15</sup> Apart from marking the territory with miracles, the 'body that does not decompose' was itself a symbol of the country.

The linking of saints with a place was a practice in which both the Church and territorial rulers engaged. In the time of the Italian city states the Church brought its own strategy and rituals for recognising human remains as those of the relics of a Saint (*inventio*) and for connecting them to a place and cathedral (*translatio*).<sup>16</sup> Could such specific religious conceptions of power fuse with political power? That was indeed the great attraction for worldly rulers. In the fourteenth century city-state of Venice we see how the *doges* spatially associated themselves with the relics of the patron saint by erecting their own tombs in the baptistery of San Marco.<sup>17</sup> The baptistery was the site of entrance into the local Christian community, a symbol of both civic and Christian community. Similar fusions of holy places or saints and the civic community occurred in later nation-states like the role that the place of pilgrimage Jasna Gora played for Polish unity.<sup>18</sup>

In early medieval Europe it was customary to link kings with their counterparts in the Old Testament (Novus David, Novus Salomon, Novus Moyses).<sup>19</sup> In the kingdom of the Franks under Pepin (751–768) the sacred dimension was even extended to the Frankish people praised by chroniclers and the pope as 'chosen by God, fine soldiers and pious'.<sup>20</sup> The main emphasis seems to have been laid on the king's task to protect the faith. But Joseph Strayer has discovered another meaning in late medieval Europe. At that time religion in France was mobilised in order to establish the idea of the sovereign state *in statu nascendi*. When the thirteenth century Capetians tried to strengthen their hold on France they faced a double problem. As Strayer expounds, they on the one hand had to switch from the sphere of feudal and family relationships to a policy geared at fixing the boundaries of a sovereign state.<sup>21</sup> Clearly demarcated boundaries did not yet exist. On the other hand these kings wanted to claim the prime loyalty of all subjects living within a territory that enclosed many other autonomous authorities like the Church. By adopting the role of defender of the faith, supported by

an allegedly 'devout' people, the French kings achieved the conversion to a sovereign territorial state: a holy land governed by 'the most Christian king'.

Later on, in the wake of the Peace of Augsburg (1555) the state appeared in a different guise saving Europeans from internecine religious war although at the cost of identifying again with religion. In the same period 'republican' politics inspired by the theology of the Reformation (like the Dutch Republic and England/Scotland) strongly had resort to the Judaic theme of the book of Exodus and the idea of a Promised Land in order to legitimate their existence amidst autocratic regimes that rejected 'self-government'. Faced with a new kind of international order, a break with both the dynastic authorities that ruled the rest of Europe and the mother Church, they described themselves as a new Israel under God's protection. Religion helped to make sense of the new kind of 'democratic' politics tried out in these states and to represent the international order as well. The Old Testamentic idea of the covenant<sup>22</sup>, a free arrangement between equal people on the basis of moral principles, substituted the autocratic model of kingship. The religious connotations of the nation also involved the (protestant) clergy in disseminating the national idea. Michael Roberts, in his study of Sweden under Gustavus Adolphus, calls the clergy 'great public servants. In education, in the primitive social services of that age, they were the natural instruments of governmental politics.'<sup>23</sup> The new protestant clergy helped to disseminate the national idea by being the mouthpiece of the government and by interpreting the nation in religious terms. In a kind of proto-nationalistic interpretation English writers suggested ancient origins of the nation in Judaic tribes.<sup>24</sup> In Sweden the old story (first told by a Swedish bishop in 1434) was repeated that the Swedes were a Gothic tribe that had been separated from other Biblical tribes after the fall of the tower of Babel and the Flood.<sup>25</sup> The Dutch national anthem (written about 1570) compares the newly acquired territory of the Seven Provinces with 'a realm in Israel'. Such views automatically attributed to the outside world, more in particular the House of Habsburg, the role of Egypt or the Babylon from the Book of Revelations.

Reading early state history would almost deceive us in believing that religion and (state-) geopolitics are inseparable if we did not know a period (or rather THE period) in which Geopolitics, written with the capital G, became the allegedly scientific and rational advisor of statecraft. When the word *Geopolitik* was invented those who used it believed in the hand of nature rather than in the hand of God. But one may doubt if the break was abrupt. Among religious people and in churches patriotism was still the commandment rather than, what would have been logical for the believers in a 'world religion', cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, late nineteenth century Geopolitics marked the breakthrough of a new kind of world awareness, of which the message was that our lives depend on events in distant places. It was the forerunner of the contemporary globalisation discourse. The mind-expanding awareness that rocketed the field of Geopolitics into an intellectual vogue, also enticed some

intellectuals to 'geopoliticise' their religious feelings. In Germany, the cradle of *Geopolitik*, Paul Rohrbach (1869–1956) made a turn from Christian pietism to acting in the world. Schooled as a historian and theologian, Rohrbach converted to geography after having made a honeymoon trip to Palestine in the 1890s.<sup>26</sup> There he suddenly realised that religion also meant a call for action in the world. Failing to secure a professorship in geography at a German university, Rohrbach engaged in journalism in which he often dwelt on the topic of Germany's *Weltpolitik*. Similar 'conversions' to the world as a religious revelation are reported from elsewhere for example the Swedish theologian Ejnar Billing, who wrote *The Ethical Ideas in Early Christianity* (1907),<sup>27</sup> emphasised the geopolitical event of Israel's rescue from Egypt as the crucial divine act.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Geopolitics, often considered as the apotheosis of state-centred thinking, coincided with a religious renewal in which other places were connected with human salvation. The idea of the holy land became (again) invested with millennialist quality that urged for action. It was the time that the Zionist movement got the Jewish migration to Palestine going. There was even a curious reverberation in the secular sphere: 'Holy Russia' became the intended focus of the World Revolution. In the twentieth century few countries officially entertained a self image in which a special religious significance was claimed. This does not alter the fact that the idea of election, being a chosen people, lingered on in popular myths like the Serb tale about the lost battle against the Ottoman Turks at Kosovo Polje in 1386. In this myth an angel offers prince Lazar the choice between two options: one, winning the battle and gaining an earthly Kingdom; two, losing the battle and gaining the eternal Kingdom of God. For any religious person the choice is obvious and this at the same time gives a satisfactory explanation for why the heroic Serbian people lost the war against the Turks. The experience of sacrifice and victimisation in the past is a reason to assume that one fulfils the special intention of God in an order higher than the international state order.

The most obvious holy places of today are to be found in the Middle East. They contain the shrines of the Prophet (Mecca, Medina) or his 'successors' Ali and Hussein in the Shiite holy cities in Iraq, Najaf and Karbala. Jerusalem has a similar significance for Christians, Muslims and Jews. Such centres have a truly cosmopolitan significance but only in the case of Saudi Arabia does their holiness extend to the state insofar that its rulers express a special responsibility for the Islamic character of the state. However, the geopolitical conclusions of this status were not drawn by the Saudi rulers but by particular groups or individuals like Osama bin Laden who perceive the presence of American troops as a violation of the holy land of Saudi Arabia. Whether Israel can be considered a secular state is up for discussion. Israel's official relations with other states are sometimes curiously coloured by the fate of local Jews (which after all are no citizens or migrants from Israel) and by the Holocaust (that was not committed toward Israel). Here the course of world



history and the concept of holy land fuse into a potentially dangerous concoction if it is connected with the fulfilment of a religious prophecy. Such millennial thinking will be further discussed below.

## HOLY WAR

Holy war is the catchword of an international order breaking up. The typical 'Westphalian' state keeps aloof from such projects. The closest approximation in the established international order was president Reagan's designation 'Evil Empire' for the Soviet Union. It evoked a distant past when a French priest and servant of the Capetians invented a pejorative for the German Empire by a wordplay with Empire: *en pire* (= worse). Perhaps the current world order is just as shaky as the European division of power in the early fourteenth century, at least in the American perception. President George W. Bush continued this image in the 'war on terrorism' and even repeatedly added the word 'crusade' against the explicit wish of his advisers. As we know both words 'war' and 'crusade' are often used figuratively. But the war on terror became a real war and one can understand the apprehension of those who have a negative association with the Crusades.

Holy war is an affair of institutions, movements and individuals outside the state. The medieval fusion of political and religious power did not only endow kings with a remarkable religious power but also manifested itself at the other pole: the wielding of political (military) power by the pope. Extra-territorial or frontier affairs like the Crusades, the Spanish Reconquista or the subjection of the Baltic tribes elicited the rise of religious military orders as the Hospitallers (1130), Templars (1120), the orders of St. Georges (1201), Santiago (1170), Alcantara (1183), the Teutonic order (1198), etc.<sup>29</sup> Here we witness a period, heralded by the reforms of Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085), in which the Church waxed assertive which inevitably unleashed a struggle for power between Church and kings. It was perhaps the most extreme manifestation of religeopolitics in European history.

The term religeopolitics was proposed by Lari Nyroos in discussing two 'fundamentalist' movements in the Middle East: Hamas and Kach.<sup>30</sup> Both movements appeal to a religious predestination of the area that has traditionally been known as Palestine/Israel and that in the eye of the (Kach) believer can assume a gigantic size even geographically extending to the river Euphrates. The pious Muslim (Hamas) or Jew (Kach) sees it as a religious assignment not to abandon this territory. These geopolitical visions and the violence they entail are in no way reconcilable with the ('Westphalian') international order that recognises border disputes but no exclusive claims on the same area in order to create a kind of theocracy. By definition such movements are political movements, which raises the question whether we talk here about political movements using religious power or religious movements

using political power? There is no point in juggling words. Whoever talks about movements has to account for the continuous switching between values directing personal life and political action. Only the (secular) state has drawn a sharp line between the private and the public.

There is a certain similarity between the medieval struggle for domination between the Church and the State which produced the Crusades and Islamic movements that ignore the established politico-territorial order (*ā la Iqbal*) in favour of a more polarised vision and resistance to geopolitical actors like the US as 'the Great Devil'. Some commentators cling to the distinction in Islam between *dār al-harb* (the abode of conflict or war) and *dār al-islām* (the abode of the faith or peace) in order to pinpoint the geopolitical core of Islam<sup>31</sup> but such distinctions are neither founded in Quranic terminology nor do they necessarily indicate territorial entities.<sup>32</sup> Actually more extensive studies of the (geo)political background of current Islamic movements conclude that much Islamic rhetoric is produced in order to defend the existing international territorial order. Shi'ites, in view of their link with the Iranian revolution often treated as one of the more hard-line anti-systemic forces in the Islamic world, are usually minorities fighting for their rights *in* states rather than *against* the state. Juan Cole writes 'On closer examination . . . it seems obvious that Shi'ite activism in the late twentieth century had the practical effect of integrating Shi'ites more closely into the post-colonial nations in which they found themselves'.<sup>33</sup> An analysis of the only institutionalised pan-Islamic foreign politics, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), concludes that it 'displayed neither "Islamic" rationale nor any extra-logical (e.g. theo-logical) determinant of preference pursuit'.<sup>34</sup> The OIC was established at the instigation of Saudi Arabia in response to such disturbing events as the rise of secular-nationalist Arab movements (the short-lived United Arab Republic of Egypt, Syria and Jemen), the Six Days' War in 1967 and the attack by a Christian fundamentalist on the al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969. First as an instrument used by the Saudis to reshuffle international leadership in the Islamic (Arab) world by drawing attention to their own central religious role, the OIC was subsequently 'hijacked' by Iran and Pakistan in order to serve their national aims.

A qualification of the 'holy war' interpretation of today's world conflicts has also come from the many books that try to delve into 'the mind of the terrorist'. According to Robert Pape most terrorist actions can be explained by the 'wish to liberate' occupied homelands.<sup>35</sup> Their actions and contempt for death would be comparable to the behaviour of soldiers on the battlefield rather than with religious fanaticism. As Christian Caryl remarks in a review of seven similar books, this explanation is perhaps too narrow since some terrorist acts seem rather to be the product of 'cultural dislocation', a deep feeling of injury among Muslims that exceeds territorial identity.<sup>36</sup> This is more in line with the idea of a disruption of the territorial order but it

certainly does not re-establish a link between geopolitics and religion in the sense of holy war. Religion is simply the only discourse available when territorial identity fails.

The Iranian revolution (1979) is by far the most anti-systemic event in the Muslim world because it did not stop at securing a national domain for operating a theocracy but also aimed at exporting its revolution. Khomeini defiantly declared 'In Islam there are no frontiers' but in this case the result was a sharp international polarisation. In diabolising the US and the West, the Iranian spiritual leadership also targeted the Saudis, faithful servants of the Western cause. However the OIC would not move along in that direction. At most it followed the Iranian line in safe foreign policies like the condemnation of Rushdie's book 'The Satanic Verses' or in collecting lavish financial support for the hard-pressed Bosnian Muslims. In the end, however, Iran recognised the UN when it needed mediation in a crisis over killed Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan. The OIC rather remained an arena that allowed Iran to counter its (partly self-induced) feelings of encirclement. A similar utility was assigned to the OIC by Pakistan but then in connection with the hot security issue of Kashmir and its relations with India. How important geopolitical considerations are in the functioning of the OIC is revealed by the fact that India with its large (160 million) Muslim population has not been offered OIC membership whereas it includes countries like Gabon with a 99 percent non-Muslim majority. With the exception of the Palestine membership, the OIC apparently accepts the criteria of the Westphalian world order but it does not accept certain countries as members even if they contain large Muslim minorities. The result is that more than a quarter of the *umma* remains outside the OIC.

Concluding that the political resurgence of Islam has not induced the rise of a strong Islamic force on the World political scene, as an anti-systemic force unifying all Muslims or as a consensus or alliance between Islamic states, does not necessarily deny that religion is a new and significant political force. As Naveed Sheikh argues, the impossibility of finding unequivocal directives for foreign politics in religious ideas or holy writs should not diminish our interest in Islam as a retrospective legitimator of political preference.<sup>37</sup> That means we should not search for geopolitical visions in the canonical texts themselves but focus on the continuously changing interpretations of the world against the background of sacred writings and jurisprudence (*badith* in Islamic practice).<sup>38</sup> The OIC is a cognitive community that primarily allows its members to enact their Islamic identity whatever that may mean for the geopolitical views taken. This new body does not simply help states to redefine their national interests – that is how common IR theories look at inter-state ventures – it also is the reverse, a way to adapt pan-Islamic universalism to the regulatory mechanisms of the Westphalian international order. The aspiration remains, in contrast to a form of intergovernmental cooperation as the EU, non-territorial.

## MILLENNIALISM

Religious rejection of the international territorial order can also proceed without strong political action or 'voice', but simply by 'exit', to use Hirschmann's concepts. The Puritan migrants to America left an evil world (Europe) in which political power was equated with tyranny.<sup>39</sup> Since they initially did not make a geographical distinction between evil and holy lands one may doubt if their move should be called a form of religeopolitics at all. In any case they created the special American attitude that John K. Wright defined as geopiety. As a discourse analysis of sermons preached in New England between 1740 and 1800 showed, religious attention focused on the world in a very general way.<sup>40</sup> At most the world was seen as the theatre for the Second Coming of Christ. "I trust the whole earth shall soon be filled with the knowledge of the Saviour", declared one of the ministers in a sermon.<sup>41</sup> Only one geographical detail qualified this inclusive vision: In view of the religious health of the American communities one expected that the new millennium would start in America. This ecstatic embrace of the world was not sustainable but millennialism was stirred up anew by the military engagement of the New Englanders with the French at Louisburg in 1745 and even more intensely by the American Revolution three decades later. Now the content of the religious messages had changed. The focus was on the civil and religious liberty that in the 'New American Israel' would be ensured. The war with the French unleashed an endless series of images of enslavement, prisons, torture, and popish power that would befall America if the French were to win. The enemy appeared in apocalyptic discourse as 'offspring of that Scarlet Whore', 'Mother of Harlots', 'Babylon the great'. The victory was accordingly hailed as unequivocal evidence that the kingdom of darkness could no longer restrain the latter-day glory.<sup>42</sup> All this did not arouse any feeling of moral superiority to England. The military victory was attributed to 'God's British Israel', stronghold of liberalism and Protestantism, as well. How dramatically these feelings would reverse within only a few years. During the Revolutionary years 'civil millennialism'<sup>43</sup> as unleashed by the war with the French, was brought to bear on England itself. Enraged by such measures as the Stamp Act (tax on all legal documents) and other duties, the increasing number of placemen and the presence of a standing army, England was imagined as an even more insidious enemy of liberty than the French. It was one of the apocalyptic forces of darkness, the horrible wild beast of the book of Revelations. Sermons dealt with the themes of Exodus and Israel's struggle for liberty against the Pharaoh in an unmistakable reference to the players England and America.

This example from the foundation history of the United States reveals a remarkable event: the sudden geopoliticisation of religion or 'civil millennialism'. The preceding period of colonisation had shown that even a dominant role of religion in the daily life of a group does not inevitably evoke

a religeopolitical vision of the world. Only when a threat to the freedom of a group arises that involves an infringement of the life-space by other human groups does religion appear capable of offering inspiration or narratives for describing the world in terms of a territorial struggle. Among Christian nations the Exodus theme of the chosen people led by God out of their exile in Egypt is the favourite narrative. It became an important theme in the self image of South African Boers as well, but again not from the first moment when they arrived in Africa in the seventeenth century. Only after British colonial expansion in the nineteenth century put pressure on indigenous tribes, which subsequently started to move, did the cornered Boers emphatically embrace this Biblical image.<sup>44</sup> In both the New England and South African cases geopoliticisation of religion preceded the creation of a state. The reverse situation, geopoliticisation of religion following the creation of a state, is also explicable particularly if the state is in peril. It is somewhat less surprising than the previous cases because once created, a state always evokes a geopolitical discourse. But there are similarities with the politically unorganised religious bands of the Puritans and Boers. The creation of the Dutch Republic of the United Provinces (ca. 1580) was actually the outcome of a (protestant) liberation movement that was initially more unified in what it rejected than in what it politically aspired toward. Compared to the dynastic and authoritarian politics of the remaining part of (continental) Europe, the new republic indeed was a movement or band rather than a state. There was a tenacious resistance against rule by one person in the administrative affairs of the Dutch republic that reverberates in its twentieth century democratic corporatism. No wonder that its self-representation soon arrived at stories about the Jews in Egypt (tribes), Moses (as a leader pointing to rules instead of devotion to persons or idols) and the theme of the chosen people.<sup>45</sup>

The Exodus theme also inspired American thinkers on the threshold of Independence. This was revealed by such iconographic exercises as designing a Great Seal for the new Union. One of the designs made was Benjamin Franklin's 'Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God' showing:

Moses standing on the shore and extending his hand over the Sea, thereby causing the same to overwhelm Pharaoh, who is sitting in an open Chariot, a Crown on his head and Sword in his Hand, Rays from the Pillar of Fire in the Clouds, reaching to Moses, to express he acts by Command to the Deity.<sup>46</sup>

Yet when a final design had to be chosen among several competing submissions the overtly Biblical themes were disregarded. The winning design showed the American eagle and on the reverse side of the coin, among others, an eye overseeing the world as a single reference to 'the Deity'. It might even be interpreted as deification of the American union itself. Religiousness

seems to have subsided in the private sphere after the US emerged as an autonomous political body.

A new political impetus to embrace religion occurred only when America for the first time was really threatened by a single strong global antagonist (or at least perceived such a threat) during the Cold War. As is well-known the Cold War produced an unprecedented witch hunt in domestic politics in the US and a distinct vision on the spatial diffusion of communist evil. It went along with a strong revival of religious practice in the US and a reformulation of the Pledge of Allegiance.<sup>47</sup> Originally formulated in 1892 by Francis Bellamy the pledge ran: 'I pledge all allegiance to my Flag and to the Republic for which it stands; one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all'. After some minor changes during the subsequent decades, specifying whose flag and what nation, it was proposed in 1951 to add 'under God' to the pledge. In Congress this was explicitly motivated with reference to the communist danger: 'America must be defended by the spiritual values which exist in the hearts and souls of the American people. . . . Our country cannot be defended by ships, planes and guns alone' (senator Homer Ferguson).<sup>48</sup> The final agreement about the new text came in 1954 and today it seems unthinkable that someone should propose to drop it again.

After a period in which the political role of religion was primarily that of supporting the self image of a holy land, the attacks of 11 September and the war in the Middle East have again spotlighted the role of American millennialism. There is no evidence for millennialist thinking in the White House but the relationship between George W. Bush's worldview and Christian fundamentalist leaders is beyond dispute. Evangelists, who are seeking the limelight with books that sell into millions of copies, tell us that there is a close correspondence between the description of the Day of Judgment in the Bible and current events in the Middle East. For them the invasion in Iraq is the first part of a series of events that are clearly predicted where the Bible states that four angels 'which are bound in the great river Euphrates' (Rev. 9:14) will be released 'to slay the third part of men'. When Israel will have reoccupied all its former land the final winding up of man's history will start with the 'Rapture', the transportation of the true believers to heaven. Such beliefs cannot but only have potential negative consequences for international peace efforts but also for attempts to prevent an environmental catastrophe.<sup>49</sup>

#### WHEN RELIGION AND GEOPOLITICS FUSE: FOOD FOR CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS?

As medieval practices discussed earlier in this article showed, religious discourse can transmit 'proto-geopolitical' views in a situation where a geopolitical discourse is not available or permitted. This reveals a profound need for territorial order even in a situation where religious cosmopolitanism

prevails. Saints or the Biblical narrative of the Promised Land offered strong symbolic tools and story lines. When the 'Westphalian' international order materialised, religion receded into the background without becoming entirely inactive. Nationalist or imperialist ideas could easily resonate with old religious reflexes or discourse types but officially underpinning foreign policy decisions with religious views had already become outrageous on the diplomatic scene of the seventeenth century.

Contemporary statesmen, even Iran's leadership, are usually reticent about turning religious aims into an explicit geopolitical doctrine. Yet it does not mean that commonplace decisions in foreign politics like giving (financial) support to other countries, promoting mutual exchange of the cultural elite and even the choice to declare war are not *tacitly* influenced by religious norms and affinities. American support for Israel cannot be explained without the special religious tie. But when Palestinian negotiators told BBC interviewers (2005) that George W. Bush, in personal communications, had described his involvement with the Middle East as an assignment of God, the White House was keen on rejecting the claim.

There is no real evidence for the assumption that religion is (increasingly) causing international conflict<sup>50</sup> but some territorial conflicts like the Palestinian issue have acquired a particularly vicious character by the involvement of religious fanaticism. Moreover, war, once started, always arouses religious sentiments about the adversary even during the intra-European 'World Wars' of the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, we cannot say that identification with the state in Muslim countries inevitably veils itself in Islamic fundamentalism (there is definitely a non-Islamic Indonesian or Malaysian nationalism) but it is striking that governments in these countries are often upset about the plight of (non-national) Muslims elsewhere in the world. We may consider this an attitude that simply mirrors Western interference with 'human rights' conditions in other places of the world. Muslims did not pioneer the violation of national sovereignty in the name of 'values'. However, solidarity with Muslims in distant countries also reflects the deeper feeling of victimization in the Muslim world. This is not a religious vision but existential dislocation. The latter may promote religiosity but it is not yet clear what it means for *religeopolitical* visions.

Most of the contemporary examples of a fusion between geopolitics and religion are recorded from non-state institutions or actors: religious or political movements or religious leaders. But those who actively practise what sometimes is called a holy war, international terrorism, have very inarticulate geopolitical visions or codes except for the wish to expel non-Muslims from Muslim lands. Whereas the state gave some coherence to the linking of geopolitical visions (either popular or more formal in books) with foreign politics, this coherence is absent in the case of such disparate phenomena as terrorism, religious movements and Muslim states. This poses a problem for a critical geopolitics which, notwithstanding its criticism on state-centred thinking, owes its existence precisely to the politics of states. It is, as in the case of

Marxism, powerful in deconstructing the (capitalist) state without having much to say about the world that follows its demise (socialism).

Studying geopolitical codes and visions in religious texts or messages is an opportunity but no real new challenge to critical geopolitics. The challenge is rather to understand how religiosity as such influences basic attitudes toward the world. Religion is the substitute worldview for those who have no tie to a nation-state. Whereas leaders may use religeopolitical codes as incentives for mobilisation, for the masses religion means an escape from the harsh reality of daily life, the promise of peace rather than war. As bad luck will have it, religious images are also useful when territorial conflict has erupted. We should not reverse the causation.

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### NOTES

1. John 18: 33–38.

2. Naveed S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam. Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States* (London: RoutledgeCurzon 2003) p. 31.

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38. See also Graham Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege. The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1995) p. 103: 'In effect, it is not religion that is evoking radical behavior but specific conditions that are evoking radical responses couched in religious terms'.
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