Introduction

IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL milieus across the globe, religion and violence are often linked dramatically by the actions of violent religious agents, and intellectually by academics, commentators, and authors who seek to understand these actions.[1] The link between violent struggle and the Koran has become commonplace in Western media since the events of September 11, 2001. More broadly, diverse groups and individuals across the religious spectrum have been involved in violent actions: so-called Christian groups blow up abortion clinics for the purpose of killing health professionals involved with acts of abortion; Jewish fundamentalist groups defend militarily their perceived religious right to the land of Israel; Islamic groups carry out suicide bombings, in the claim that they are doing the will of God. The aim of this book is specifically to understand the link between religion and violence by religious agents who are concerned to bring social and cultural change through violent struggle and usually with a political outcome in mind.

The link between religion and violence is also a common theme in the polemical narratives of current atheistic thinkers such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris.[2] Visitors to their websites and readers of their books find them espousing religion as a detrimental influence on social progress; a cause of division, violence and hatred; and as intellectually deficient in the light of knowledge from the natural and human sciences.

Broadly reflecting on the experience of religion and violence, the International Theological Commission, a consultative body of the Catholic

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1. See Bellinger, "Religion and Violence." Bellinger gives a long list of books on religion and violence written post September 11, 2001.

2. Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*; Dawkins, *God Delusion*; and Sam Harris, *End of Faith*, 26–30. Harris attributes the death of millions of people to religion and describes faith as the "mother of hatred."

Church, released a document in December 1999 titled *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*. The document was a response to earlier actions by Pope John Paul II, who had asked forgiveness for the past sins of the church, sinful actions supposedly in the service of truth. These actions included sins committed against: other Christian communities, Jews, the dignity of women, and the cultures and religions of other people.[3] The document exhorts the church to admit complicity with those who sinned through violence and to make reparation for its faults and errors from the period of the Crusades to the Holocaust. In effect, John Paul II—as pope, symbolizing unity and authority in the Catholic Church—was seeking forgiveness for violence perpetrated by Catholic Christians in the name of Christ. Through the commission's document, there was an invitation to a purification of memory. The call to purification highlighted that oppression can have a terrifying effect on victims and perpetrators to such a degree that societies develop the capacity to turn way from suffering, to forget witnessed horrors, and to suppress the memory of the past, thus affecting their identity and ability to grow. The way ahead requires a restructuring of memories and a remembering of the truth so that believers might be effective vehicles for liberation.

In seeking to understand more broadly the phenomenon of religiously motivated violence, we may ask: Is religion a force for healing in our world or is it a force for violence? Why do certain people religiously commit themselves to violent change? How and why is a distorted religious imagination joined to political goals by those who perpetrate violence? If violence is a mark of our not living as we should toward the other, can we construct an account of authentic living with the help of religion that may help us discern a path that goes beyond violence and that contributes to better human living?

I address these questions in this book, drawing upon the insights of the Canadian Catholic philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan. In chapter 1, I will justify my choice of Lonergan for this task. Then in chapter 2, I will engage in a selective literature review around the link between religion and violence. This review will identify a number of key symbols by academics and commentators from the social and human sciences who are trying to demonstrate how religion and violence are intimately related. These key symbols are: cosmic war, martyrdom, demonization, and warrior empowerment. Through a dialectical engagement of these symbols, I

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3. See John Paul II, Homily; Accattoli, *Pope Asks Forgiveness*. Accattoli documents the pope's sin apologies from the beginning of his pontificate to 1999.

will unpack the truthful and mistaken assertions around the link between religion, warfare, and social order.

In chapter 3, I will give an exposition of some of Lonergan's key theological and philosophical insights that will help us understand how religious aberration emerges and endures, and thus contributes to violence, and how authentic religion can yet be a source of healing for overcoming violence. An exploration of the four key symbols mentioned above will then be the subject of chapters 4 to 9, using the insights offered by Lonergan and by others as a way of critiquing the validity of certain claims.

Accordingly, in chapter 4, I will explore the term "cosmos" within the symbol of cosmic war. I will argue that a better way of understanding the violently motivated religious believer is through the dialectic of grace and sin. However, I will show that such a dialectic carries a number of dangers and that the practice of violence as a means to political and social change is fraught with error since it does not grasp the subtlety of human world processes. Using the distinction between the secular and the sacred, I will discuss how a secular order can be a combination of both culturally legitimate and illegitimate meanings and values, and I will explore how a sacred order can be a combination of both culturally legitimate and culturally illegitimate meanings and values.

In chapter 5, I will explore the term "warfare" within the symbol of cosmic war. The claim is made that religion and warfare work naturally together since both have the goal of establishing social order. I will argue that this is usually the outworking of distorted religious traditions, which can be a tool in the hands of those who would seek to justify warfare within both religious communities and secular societies, so as achieve certain political ends. In chapter 6, I will present a constructive view for approaching warfare drawing on the just war tradition, which has come out of the Christian tradition and privileges the demands of justice with love of God and neighbor. I will offer a dialectical engagement with the three major criteria that inform *ius ad bellum* or deliberations on whether to resort to warfare.

In chapter 7, I will dialectically engage with the symbol of martyrdom, which has become a key category used by militant Islamic groups to honor those motivated by religious violence. I will seek to give some normative understanding of martyrdom within both the Christian community and the Islamic community, exploring an authentic meaning of self-sacrifice as distinct from the self-immolation of suicide martyrdom. In chapter 8, I will dialectically engage with the symbol of demonization, arguing that there is a difference between demonizing the other and naming the demonic. Without an understanding of this difference, victims and perpetrators may never arrive at a place beyond violence. In chapter 9, I will engage with the symbol

of warrior empowerment, arguing that the insight of warriors engaged in violence for the sake of feeling empowered is only a partial account of what is going on in the hearts and minds of warriors. Religious imagination carries the possibility of empowering warriors; however, I will argue that what matters is the kind of empowerment being enacted. I will argue that warrior empowerment can be both an authentic and an inauthentic development and that both occur in different religious and cultural contexts. Yet within religious traditions we can find an understanding of warrior empowerment consistent with authenticity. In chapter 10, I will state my conclusions, briefly summarizing the arguments of the previous chapters.