

“Religion in a Globalizing World”

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MICHAEL CROMARTIE: In sociological theory, Professor Berger has written dozens of books. His book *The Social Construction Reality* is a contemporary classic in sociological theory. His book *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* is one of the best books on the sociological theory of religion. He’s written about theology. One of those is called *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*. He’s also written on economics, international relief and development. He wrote a book called *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. His book on capitalism called *The Capitalist Revolution* is a tour de force.

Today, Dr. Berger is going to speak to us about religion in a globalizing world, and we’re delighted to have him here. Thank you, Peter, for coming.

DR. PETER BERGER: We live in an age of overwhelming religious globalization. Three weeks ago I was in Europe, and my first stop was Amsterdam. The majority of children in the incoming grade school class in Rotterdam public schools are Muslim. I think there is no major world religion that is not globalizing in an impressive way. The Roman Catholic Church actually could be called the oldest global institution, and certainly is continuing this today, although it is very much changing its character. The geographical and demographic center of Christianity is moving from north to south, and within a very few years European and North American Catholics, and Christians of any sort, will be in the minority in the world. In terms of worldwide Pentecostalism, the estimates range within 250 million and 450 million adherents, which must be the fastest growth of any religious movement in history. It’s an unbelievable phenomenon.

Our research center at Boston University uses the term popular Protestantism. So for example, the Mormons, who most people would not consider exactly Protestant, still are very similar to this broad family of religious groups in terms of social characteristics.

Mormonism today is probably the fastest growing denomination worldwide — Pentecostalism is not just one denomination. The explosion of Islam, especially in Europe, doesn't have to be elaborated upon here, but the same is true of every other major religion. Judaism is certainly globalizing, American Hasidic agents have been very influential in Eastern Europe. Buddhism is spreading in the oddest places; the estimate now is that about 800,000 Americans are converts to Buddhism from other religions. Hinduism is spreading through a number of organizations like the Hare Krishna movement, the Sai Baba movement in a very interesting way. I suppose that of the major world religions, the only one that does not globalize is Shinto. It can't, it's too linked to Japan. Even Confucianism, if you want to call it a religion, is globalizing.

Let me present my major thesis this morning, which is what I want to talk about. My thesis is that what is happening with the globalization of religion is a globalization of pluralism. Pluralism has become a global phenomenon, and that has enormous implications, and I want to just draw out these implications this morning.

What is pluralism? The term, as far as I know, was coined by Horace Kallen, an American philosopher of the 1920s, who used the term pluralism to celebrate the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic, racial and religious groups in the United States. Pluralism in the meantime is used in a less value-laden sense to mean simply the fact, as a value-free description of a situation. And I would define pluralism as the coexistence in civic peace of different racial, ethnic and religious groups, with social interaction between them. That, I think, is very important. You can have a plurality of religious groups that do not interact, and then it's a little confusing to talk about pluralism.

I recently was on a panel with a very good Turkish sociologist and I talked about pluralism — modern pluralism. She said, well, pluralism existed in the Ottoman Empire, the millet system where you had Christians and Jews and various groups being sort of self-contained and given certain rights; that was pluralism. And I said, well, not really, because they didn't interact very much.

Or India, for example. Many Hindus are very proud of the fact that India has always been pluralistic. Well, there's the caste system, which made it extremely difficult for people to interact. The interaction is important in my concept of pluralism because as people talk

to each other, as they converse with each other, they influence each other, and that is the real challenge of pluralism. If I am a member of religious community X and next door there are people from religious community Y, if I don't interact with them and if we agree not to have conflict, it can be a quite tolerable situation, but we're not going to influence each other very much. People influence each other by conversation, and that's a very important element of pluralism.

Now, my proposition is that modern pluralism is different not because it's unique, but because of its global spread and its pervasiveness. There have been pluralistic situations as I defined pluralism in earlier periods of history — very important for the history of Western civilization. The late Roman Empire was pluralistic. Not so incidentally, Christianity came in at that period.

So if you were in metropolitan centers of the Roman Empire — like, let's say, Alexandria — you had a very pluralistic situation. Or in the Book of Acts when the Apostle Paul went to Athens, he found temples and altars to every conceivable god. So that was very pluralistic, and if you look at the literature from that period, it strikes us as very modern. Stay with the example of Alexandria, if you went up the Nile for 50, 60 miles, I think you would come on a world of villagers and towns which were totally non-pluralistic, which were very self-contained. Today it is extremely difficult to find places in the world, which are self-contained in that way. And also the speed with which pluralization occurs today is unique.

Now, I would also argue that in terms of the effect on religion, pluralism is about the most important global fact to look at — not secularization. Until quite recently, most scholars who dealt with religion in the modern world adhered to the so-called secularization theory. So did I, by the way, when I started work as a sociologist of religion. And I was not alone: Most people had the same idea. The idea was very simple: the more modernity, the less religion. Modernization means a decline in religion. And I would say this was not a crazy idea, there were some reasons for saying that.

I think it was wrong. And I, along with most people in the field, changed my mind about 25 or so years ago, not for some philosophical or theological reason, but simply because the empirical evidence made it impossible to adhere to this theory. Most scholars of

religion today, I think, would agree that secularization theory has been massively falsified. We don't live in an age of secularity; we live in an age of explosive, pervasive religiosity.

There are two exceptions to this statement about the religious character of our age. One is sociological, the other one is geographical. The sociological exception is, there is a relatively thin, but very influential stratum of people internationally; broadly speaking an intelligentsia who indeed is secular. And that's even true of the United States. In many countries including the United States, this intelligentsia or cultural elite, if you want to use another term, is very much in conflict with the religious populace. It is a very important fact in many countries.

The other is the geographical exception, which to my mind is the most interesting question today in the sociology of religion. That's Western and Central Europe is the only important part of the world that is highly secularized. There're some others: Australia apparently. We haven't done any work in Australia, but what I've seen of Australian data, that's highly secularized. Very interesting place not very far from here is Quebec, which rapidly secularized itself in recent decades. But I think in both cases we're really dealing with extensions of Europe.

One reason why secularization theory just collapses under its own weight is the United States, a strongly religious country, and if modernity is the key variable, are you going to seriously argue that the United States is less modern than Stockholm? I mean, it doesn't make any sense. And some people would say, oh, it's an exception. Well, it's too big an exception to keep the theory going. Something's wrong with the theory.

While secularity is not a necessary consequence of modernization, I would argue that pluralism is. And the reason has to do with some very basic processes of modernity: mass migration, mass travel, and probably most important, mass communication — films, television, the internet, you name it. What does it mean? What does globalizing communication mean? Everybody talks to everybody else, and as everyone talks to everybody else, a highly pluralistic situation is enhanced by technology and people begin to influence each other.

Now, let me give a rather personal illustration of what I'm talking about. I'm not just talking about interfaith committees sitting around tables like this. My older son married

a woman from India who's a non-practicing Hindu — and he's a sort of non-practicing Protestant, but it is still a very interfaith marriage. When my granddaughter was about six, the people across the street were missionaries for Jews for Jesus, and the two little girls had theological conversations with each other that were absolutely fascinating. I would say inter-religious communication by 5-year-old, 6-year-old little girls is sociologically more significant than interfaith committees set up by the Vatican, because there are many more little girls than there are theology professors or whatever. It's a massive phenomenon, and I would say inevitable with modernity.

Now, what does that mean for religion? It means that both institutionally and individually, any particular religious tradition can no longer be taken for granted. And this has immense implications for the religious institutions and for individual human beings.

Religious institutions: what does it mean? I have argued before in different contexts that modernity in its essence means an enormous change in the human condition, from fate to choice; in other words, all kinds of practices, beliefs and institutions that for much of human history were simply an individual's destiny. You were born into a particular situation and that accidental birth determined almost everything you did, including your beliefs.

Modernity means choices, beginning with many choices in terms of technology, I mean, your tribe used one hammer for a particular task for hundreds of years. Now instead of one hammer, you have three technological systems. And there are choices in terms of consumption, production, marriage, occupation and in a sense most dramatically, even identity.

This movement from fate to choice affects not only individuals but also institutions. I would say in the pluralistic situation whether religious institutions like this or not, they become de facto voluntary associations. The prototypical modern, institutional form of religion is the voluntary association. Obviously this voluntariness is enhanced when you have a political and legal system, which guarantees religious freedom.

Even if you look at the world today, regimes that try to limit religious freedom — I would say Russia is a good example, China is a good example — of course they suppress the

voluntariness, but they can't suppress it completely. And you have all kinds of things springing up, which the authorities do not like and cannot control.

Another term to use here is the term "denomination." Richard Niebuhr, a church historian, said that denomination was a new form of religious institution peculiar to the United States. He defined it as a church which recognizes *de facto* the right of other denominations that do exist. So you can speak of a denominationalization of religion. And take the Roman Catholic Church as a very important example. Certainly it couldn't think of itself as a voluntary association, but it has *de facto* become one. Probably first in the United States and then after Vatican II, internationally it has now officially accepted that position with its very impressive doctrine of religious freedom.

Even Judaism: it is not easily understood as a voluntary association with its linkage of religion and ethnicity. In the United States, it has become denominationalized. No matter how you count it, there are at least three Jewish denominations in the United States.

Now, this leads to very significant changes. It obviously leads to changes in the relationship between religious institutions and the state. It changes the relations of institutions to each other. They become competitors in what in effect is a market, and it changes the relationship of religious institutions and their functions to the laity very significantly.

That's very briefly the institutional consequences of this globalizing pluralism. There are also very interesting consequences for the individual — again a movement from fate to choice. And increasingly you find individuals who put together their own particular religious profile. You find this very much in North America and in Western Europe. Robert Wuthnow, one of the best sociologists of religion in the United States, has used the term patchwork religion: People put together different elements of their own tradition and other traditions and say, "Well, I'm Catholic, but —." The "but" is very important and there are other things there.

For example, they believe in reincarnation. An enormous number of people in Europe and America believe in reincarnation, which is not exactly Christian doctrine. So that's part of "I'm Catholic, but I believe I've been here many times before," or something like that.

Danielle Hervieu-Léger, a French sociologist of religion uses the term “bricolage,” which means tinkering. You create your own little version of whatever it is you want to call yourself.

Now, one topic that I find very important is the interaction of two phenomena, which I would call relativism and fundamentalism. The pluralistic situation inevitably relativizes. If you lose the taken-for-granted status of the tradition, it becomes relativized, and actually our language says this very well. For example, one might say, “I happen to be Catholic” — an extremely interesting phrase. Or a more sort of Californian: “I’m into Buddhism.” Which, of course, suggests that tomorrow I might be out of Buddhism, and in fact chances are that I will; I’ll discover something else. So there’s a relativization takes place, which is a fact.

Now, relativism I would say is the philosophical legitimization of this fact. It’s a good thing, and I suppose the climax of this relativism in religion and in other things is the so-called postmodern theory. We all have our narratives. There’s no way of saying that one narrative is superior to another, and the real virtue here is tolerance. We should all tolerate each other’s narratives. When you’re dealing with morality, this is a recipe for social disintegration. Just take a simple example. You’re talking to a victim of rape and you say, well, there’s the rapist’s narrative and there’s your narrative, and you know, you have to respect — well, you can’t. If you do that, society will cease to exist. So relativism is a very dangerous direction.

Fundamentalism can be defined in different ways. I would define it as an attempt to restore or create anew the taken-for-grantedness of a particular worldview meaning in of a particular religious tradition, to be taken for granted against a relativization of the modern world. And that’s a very difficult project.

There are two models of fundamentalism. The reconquista model is to impose the restored taken-for-grantedness on an entire society. That is a very difficult project. I would say there is no significant Christian community today who wants to do that. The Catholic Church has long given up this project. The role it had during the Spanish civil war would be unthinkable today.

Unfortunately, there are significant elements in the Muslim world who do want to do that. It's a very difficult project because for the project to succeed, you have to control and eliminate the pluralistic dynamic, and that's very hard to do. As I've mentioned before with Russia and China, even if you have a totalitarian state, it is difficult to do.

The more modest, and therefore more possible, model for fundamentalism is a sort of micro-totalitarianism. You don't try to impose your ideas on the society as a whole, but you create a community within which it becomes possible. This is the sectarian or sub-cultural possibility. It's also difficult because the pluralistic dynamic is very strong and you have to have very strong isolation of your community from the surrounding society, which you have decided can go to hell because the truth is now within your community. But at least compared to the reconquista model, it is feasible.

Let me say that, again, in the dialectic between relativism and fundamentalism, looking at it now from the point of view of the healthy society or a healthy democracy, it seems to me both are equally destructive possibilities: relativism because it makes social order in the end impossible; fundamentalism because it creates either civil strife or, at worst when it succeeds, some kind of tyranny. And I think a very important intellectual and indeed political purpose would be to clearly define and occupy the middle ground, which is neither relativistic, in which all questions of truth become obsolete, nor a fundamentalist, militant adherence to absolute truth.

I think that is possible, and I would say in most western countries, most people indeed occupy that middle ground. I think if you look at survey data which some of you on around this table know better than I do, you'll find that most Americans are somewhere in the middle on most of the neuralgic issues of the culture wars. So it's not an impossible project I'm suggesting.

What I think is important is to find the intellectual definition of what such a middle position means. In terms of religion, I think I know exactly how to do it in my own case from the position of the theologically very liberal Lutheran. But I think it can be done from other positions, and in fact we've now set up an international working group — about half American, half European — to define such a position in terms of a number of so-called Abrahamic traditions.

It's a difficult issue when we get to morality because while I think it is possible to have religious beliefs without certainty, you can't convince me of certain moral judgments are simply relativistic because of history and geography and my own position in life.

JAY TOLSON, *U.S. News & World Report*: I think the most interesting case still is Europe. The exception that seems to sort of suggest that modernization theory wasn't all wrong. And I wonder the effectiveness of the ideology of secularism as something being taught in schools and relatively inculcated in Europeans, is at least one of the top seven, one of the top three or four in that list. Because it does seem to me the most interesting case, and certainly when American journalists are trying to talk about Europe and comparisons between Europe and America, a lot focuses on the difference between our notions of secular and religious, and European notions.

DR. BERGER: Brief answer: yes, I agree with you. If you go back historically, much has to do with the nature of the Enlightenment in Europe and in America. The Enlightenment, at least on the continent of Europe, was very anti-clerical and event to some extent anti-Christian. That was not the case in America at all.

Sociologically, who were the social carriers of the Enlightenment? It was intellectuals. Then you have to ask what institutional avenues were available to these intellectuals to propagate their ideas. And there I would say the diametrically opposed cases are the United States and France. Why? Well, in France even today education is controlled by the national government, which sends out its corps of teachers throughout the country. Who were these teachers? Well, they were, in one way or another, intellectuals or aspiring intellectuals, and they brought their notion of Enlightenment to these children. Unless there was a Catholic school nearby, parents had little choice. As soon as education became compulsory, the children were exposed to the influence of these teachers.

It is a totally different situation in America. Even now, education is mainly a local matter, not quite because of unions and state interference, but basically it's still local people who control the schools. In America, if parents didn't like the teachers teaching their children, they'd fire them. The unwashed, unenlightened populace had the power over education, which it never had in France. Now, in other European countries it is more complicated, but I would say that's a very important factor, so I'm agreeing with you.

The secularism then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, because throughout Europe now the idea is that to be modern is to be secular, and that becomes self-fulfilling.

I think it's too early to say this is changing, but there are some indications that it may be changing. In terms of sociology of religion data, there's a slight up-tick of church adherence in most European countries. There are other indications of discussion and people becoming interested in religion. The challenge of Islam is, I think, an important factor. But it's too early to say whether it's a real change. It's still a very secular part of the world.

MR. TOLSON: Do you think in some ways that the nationalization of debate over curriculum via court cases forces this issue in this country — even though we are mostly accurately characterized as a highly religious nation,— and that a lot of the issues that were resolved in the European context through this strong adherence to the Enlightenment ideology are now in fact being adjudicated at the national level though these debates that are often brought to trial over curricular matters?

DR. BERGER: Oh, absolutely. And I think the term “culture war,” while it may be a slight exaggeration, refers to something which is sociologically real. I would say, looking at the United States that what you have is a heavily religious population with a highly secular cultural elite, and it's out of that cultural elite that these court cases come — outraged atheists in Arizona who object to Christmas trees or whatever. I view two extremes as Sweden and India. Sweden — highly secularized society, minus 2 percent believe in God, that kind of thing — and India, where you take four steps and you meet six gods. Well, you could describe the United States as an Indian society with a Swedish cultural elite, and much of the history of American politics since 1963 — a pivotal year because of the Supreme Court decision on prayer in public schools — has been dominated by increasingly pissed-off Indians.

MIKE ALLEN, *Time*: I was interested in your remarks at the beginning about the growth of Pentecostalism and the Church Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I was anxious to get your view of how much of that is effort on their part, and how much of that is the appeal of their message?

DR. BERGER: Well, both. This is a very missionary community, so there's a lot of effort. They try to spread their truth, and the message is very powerful. It is not just the message, but also the way of life that is being propagated here.

MR. ALLEN: Are there other denominations or schools of thought that make similar effort without that kind of result?

DR. BERGER: Well, some do, and there are good results. I mentioned, for example, the Mormons, who are doing surprisingly well with a very different message and a very different community. But I think the Pentecostal package, if you want to call it that, is very hard to beat because it combines very strong communities that are created by grassroots people. And if you look at Latin America, Africa, where this is really exploding, these are very poor people who have never had institutions of their own. They create their own institutions and they run them. That's very powerful. Enormous solidarity, mutual help, all of these are socially significant things. Add to this a form of worship which is highly emotional and it creates a very strong emotional catharsis for people in very difficult circumstances, particularly given the emphasis on healing, which goes from physical illness to all kinds of social problems. Now, put all of this together, that's a very powerful package. David Martin, a British sociologist, used a very nice term. He says it makes the package very transportable, so it adapts itself to very different social and cultural milieus in much of the world. So I think we can explain why Pentecostalism is so powerful.

E.J. DIONNE, *The Washington Post*: My first question goes to back to Jay's question on Europe, which is not a monolith. You said France is kind of the extreme case with laïcité and secularization imposed from above, whereas I was thinking Germany, by contrast, is a place where the main deal that had to be done was to get Protestants and Catholics to live together, and their whole system of governance of religious matters really accepts pluralism in a deep way, even with sort of public subsidies. I'm curious if you could talk about differences across Western European countries.

And secondly, where does China fit into all this? If I were holding on to the old secularization theory, I think I'd look at China and Russia and say this is an awfully big part

of the globe both geographically and in terms of population where the secularization theories may prove right after all.

DR. BERGER: I don't think either Russia or China supports secularization theory. In Russia we've had a project focused on the Russian Orthodox Church. My impression is that there is a genuine religious revival in Russia, most of it Eastern Orthodox in character. Yes, you have a secular part of the population but it's shrinking. You get high majorities of people who say they're Orthodox or they are Christian and that percentage is growing. And also it's now the regime that pushes it, the Putin regime.

In China, there's an explosion of Christianity all over the place. Much of it is semi-legal and unregistered and therefore it is difficult to measure. We didn't have a study of that sort in China, but based on what I hear about China and what I've seen when I've been there I don't think this is secularization, and the elite is certainly no longer Marxist.

On Europe: yes, there are significant differences, and one can certainly take the German model. It has an easier time dealing with pluralism. You don't have this *laïcité* ideology that the French do and so do the British.

MR. DIONNE: Where do you see the European model going in searching for ways of [dealing with new religious minorities], because it is radically changing politics in a lot of places, particularly in the Netherlands?

DR. BERGER: I think most Europeans don't know where it's going. They're experimenting, and in the Netherlands — well, first of all they were very proud of their multiculturalism and they are very worried about that now. But they also refer to their pillarization system, that religious peace was established in the Netherlands by having four parallel communities: Calvinist, Liberal Protestant, Catholic and humanist. They had separate schools, separate everything, and the civic peace was maintained by the elites of those four pillars, as they call them. But again, some people have suggested Islam should now be another pillar, but some of the Muslims don't want to be part of this Dutch pillar. They want some kind of Shariah, and that's incompatible with the pillar system. So the impression I get in Holland, where I was just a few weeks ago and where I talked to relevant people, is a lot of uncertainty and confusion.

JANE LITTLE, BBC: You mentioned the Catholic Church. I'm wondering where you see the role of Pope Benedict right now? Before he was elected, he announced that his battle against relativism, which he often seems to equate with secularism in Europe, would be key. Where does he fall in your spectrum of relativism to fundamentalism?

DR. BERGER: I think since Vatican II, except for some splinter groups like Cardinal Lefevre and people like that, you cannot call Catholicism fundamentalist. Benedict has a very different personality from his predecessor, but he's following the same line, which I think is a very intelligent middle ground. On the one hand, he is affirming the truth of Catholicism. So he's certainly not a relativist. But on the other hand, first of all, he has a strong commitment to religious freedom, now grounded theologically, not just pragmatically. And also I would say an openness to dialogue, to discussion, which you can't call that fundamentalist.

MARK PINSKY, *Orlando Sentinel*: Among some evangelicals, in particular Southern Baptist Convention, the term tolerance that you mentioned has become a signifier for theological equivalence, and thus they reject it. I'd like you to talk on that if you would.

And regarding globalization, your take on the north-south split within the worldwide Anglican community over the sexuality issues?

DR. BERGER: What's happening with the Anglican Communion...you had progressive Anglicans in England and the United States and Australia saying we have to listen to the voices of the third world. That's a very important progressive Christian position. Well, now the voices of the third world are very loud. They say homosexuality is a sin, abortion is murder, et cetera, and they don't like what the third world is saying. So I don't know what's going to happen. Since the majority of Anglicans now live mainly in Africa and Asia, I don't know what's going to happen. The beginnings of a schism.

About the Southern Baptist, tolerance being the same. Well, yes I've heard that from evangelical circles and I think it's an unfortunate understanding of tolerance. Tolerance doesn't have to mean relativism. One should find a position that is open-minded and

engages other world views openly but also makes some claims to truth. And if one doesn't do that, one is actually committing an institutional suicide, because what's the point of belonging to a community that affirms nothing?

KATHY SLOBOGIN, CNN: You've characterized modernity as more choice. I'm wondering why in the United States, which is arguably the most modern country in the world, so many people seem to be choosing a form of religion — conservative Christian evangelism — that seems to be about less choice, more orthodoxy, more absolutism, or is that a misconception?

DR. BERGER: Look, there are certain dogmas in the evangelical worldview, which are rather rigid, for example, the notion of the Bible. There are elements in the worldview of secular intellectuals in America which are equally rigid, for example in gender roles.

MS. GROSSMAN: There's certainly more growth. There're more people choosing the evangelism than there are Harvard professors. I'm just wondering, how do you relate that growth to modernity — to the increase in pluralism? Is there a connection there?

DR. BERGER: Well, the growth of evangelicalism in America has been partly demographic because they have more children, while within the Protestant community, mainline Protestants don't have as many children. So there are more and more evangelicals around. There are also some conversions, some people moving into those churches, but I don't see there's any particular reason one has to explain this. Look, in terms of the American Protestant scene, which is the most vibrant religious community, the others are rather pale by comparison. This is lively, it's robust, people affirm something, and they create strong communities. By comparison, the average Lutheran or Episcopal Church or whatever is a pretty feeble operation. That people attractive something that's vibrant and affirms something, I don't find difficult to understand.

MS. GROSSMAN: There seems to be a numerical growth in the number of people who call themselves evangelical, but when you take apart the beliefs that they put underneath that label, are they actually following some of these beliefs? If you parse apart their

beliefs, it turns out that they've taken the banner label, but they haven't actually taken on these specific religious requirements of that label.

DR. BERGER: Well, that's true of every community. There's a disconnect between official positions and popular practice, I would say, in every religious community. I don't think it's any stronger among evangelicals, but if you go to an evangelical church, you know it's an evangelical church no matter what people say or they believe. It has a certain vibrant quality which is there, and I think, is shared by people who call themselves evangelical even if they don't believe in the literal inerrancy of the Bible or some other official doctrine, let's say, of the Southern Baptist Convention or whatever denomination they belong to. I think it's not unimportant if people call themselves that.

DR. PETER BERKOWITZ, Hoover Institution: On the one hand, we live in an age of globalizing pluralism. This elevates choice and makes religious affiliation voluntary. On the other hand, globalizing pluralism seems to launch this dangerous dialectic of fundamentalism and relativism. I was wondering whether you've identified any moral, political or sociological factors that prevent this good thing — globalizing pluralism which elevates individual choice and social, political and moral factors — from generating these extreme reactions?

DR. BERGER: Institutionally the most important thing that prevents the extreme reactions is democracy, and Turkey again would be a good example. If you can take a community, in this case Turkish Islam, which is in danger of becoming a fundamentalist, aggressive, militant thing, and induce them in some way to participate in the democratic game of mutual civility, you have done something very important. And I think it's not only in the Muslim world; for example, it's a very real struggle in Russia. In terms of the world situation, the most important thing that's going on right now in this area is a struggle for the soul of Islam. Who's going to win in terms of most of the Muslim world? The fundamentalists or people like the Turkish democratic Islamists? And I don't know how to predict this, so I'm not necessarily gloomy, but I think there are some very real dangers there.

MS. LITTLE: If we're talking about the apparent rise in militant Islam as a reaction to globalization, do you attempt to distinguish whether it is a genuine rise in religiosity that we're seeing in various parts of the Muslim world or whether it is just a use by certain militant forces of religion as an ideological tool, or is that distinction completely irrelevant?

DR. BERGER: Well, I think the distinction is quite relevant. It's a little difficult to establish. How do you determine empirically what is genuine and what is not? Look, if you take Muslim examples, in Turkey it is my impression that there's a genuine Muslim revival. It's genuine in the sense it's not just politically manipulated, it's people who want to have Islam as an organizing principle in their lives, for religious reasons.

On the other hand, there are other situations where I think religion is manipulated. Take the situation in Bosnia, where you had a very tolerant, open-minded Islam. And as a result of the conflicts, there a more militant thing appeared. It was at least partly manipulated by Saudi influences or whatever. So I think they're not necessarily contradictory. In other words, you can have a genuine movement that then becomes a political tool for somebody.

PAUL RICHTER, *Los Angeles Times*: I wonder if over time the collision of these religious views with the mass media — doesn't that mean that the doctrines will become more like each other, that there'll be a filing down of the sharp edges?

DR. BERGER: Well, both could happen, and in a way the market metaphor is quite useful here. On the one hand, the market produces standardization. What's the real difference between different brands of toothpaste? They may all basically be alike, just the label differs. On the other hand, if you want to sell a particular item, you have to have marginal differentiation. Why should one buy your product and not somebody else's? So I think both are happening simultaneously, and on the one hand you do have the hard edges are being smoothed out — ecumenism in a very broad sense. On the other hand, you can't smooth them out completely or you smooth yourself out of existence. So you have a reaffirmation, say within the Christian world, of denominational identities, and at the same time people sort of become a little smoother in their relations with each other.

BYRON YORK, *National Review*: As you were talking, I was thinking about the incident in the Minneapolis airport a while back: As everybody was waiting to get on the plane, the imams were kind of extravagantly praying, doing things that you could reasonably interpret suspiciously. I wondered if you could just talk a little bit about what happens to a society that's trying to be good and pluralistic, and yet they're afraid that there are people that they're supposed to accept who are trying to kill them.

DR. BERGER: I would say both in the United States and in Europe governments on the whole have been very, very careful in not provoking the idea that they are basically opposed to Islam. In fact, it's rather remarkable how careful they've been, including the Bush administration after 9/11. So far, I would say the threat of terror has not fundamentally undermined the religious tolerance and freedom of Western democracies. This could change. Imagine one major attack on a European capital or imagine even worse, the use of weapon of mass destruction in a terror act in the United States or Europe, and things could become very ugly indeed.

MR. STEINFELS: Christian Smith directed this massive national study of youth and religion and he came to the conclusion that although there were real differences in the religiosity between evangelicals, Mormons, Catholics, black Protestants, et cetera, he ended up calling what he found a "benign whateverism," and described the God of young people as a combination between a kind of cosmic butler and therapist. He seems to be having second thoughts about the relationship between pluralism and secularization, and suggesting that it may be more powerful a corrosive force on at least traditional religious belief and practice. I just wonder what you might make of this set of second thoughts and whether the relationship is more problematic.

DR. BERGER: Every social science proposition is problematic, and I think being an empirical sociologist means in principle you're always willing to change your mind. I'm perfectly willing to change my mind again if I'm forced to do so by data. I don't think these data would make me change my mind. They deal with youth, and youth is always peculiar. I don't know whether this really proves anything very conclusive. I don't think it reestablishes secularization theory, but I may be wrong.

MR. STEINFELS: I guess what I'm pressing on is not necessarily a notion of secularization theory as regarding the public or personal disappearance of religion in a rather blanket sense, but the question of whether pluralism contributes to a mutation of religion in which it persists, but is really increasingly marginal to the important choices people make about their daily lives or the big choices in the course of their lives.

DR. BERGER: Does pluralism lead to a mutation? Yes, but not necessarily a secularizing mutation. And I would say what pluralism does is not so much change the "what" of religious belief, but the "how" of religious belief. In other words, a person may affirm very Orthodox positions in his or her tradition — Catholic or Jewish or whatever — but it no longer has the kind of taken-for-granted certainty that this individual's grandparents might have. In that sense it's a mutation in the way in which religious beliefs are held, rather than the content of those beliefs.

ALAN COOPERMAN, *The Washington Post*: I noticed when you spoke about fundamentalism, you gave two models and one is more modest and achievable than the other. When you spoke about relativism, you did not give any differentiation within the ranks of relativists. I wanted to ask whether it's not possible to have a greater and lesser jihad of relativism, and whether one ought not to speak up in favor of some way of the greater jihad of relativism, or whether in fact, you think it is inevitably a kind of sliding slope and once you step on that slope, you devolve into that area that you described as dangerous for morality.

I noticed also when you spoke about Mormonism growing very rapidly, you did not state that the reason is because of the divine truths in the Book of Mormon; and when you spoke about the growth of Pentecostalism, you did not explain Pentecostalism is growing because of the fundamental truths that Pentecostals believe in. In fact, as you described the reasons for the growth of these groups, you've mentioned no doctrine at all, and you spoke about the warmth of the religious expression and practice. But then when you spoke about the decline, essentially, of mainline Protestantism in the United States, you directly linked it to the lack of doctrine. So their doctrine seems to matter, so they have nothing that they seem to stand for. So this doctrine or lack of doctrine

accounts for the decline of mainline Protestantism in the United States, but doctrine has nothing to do with the success of these other movements?

Is it not possible that the decline of mainline Protestantism in the United States is more easily and better accounted for by the lack of warmth, the failure to create community and failure to do the kinds of things that have made these other movements so successful rather than the jihad of relativism that has taken hold?

DR. BERGER: I did not imply that it doesn't matter what people believe. With the Pentecostals, doctrine is not essential in the sense that they are not interested in minutiae of theological interpretation. It is very different, for example, from Catholics, where you have to believe a whole catalogue of things. But this does not imply that it is not important what they believe, and there are certain core beliefs in Pentecostalism that I think are absolutely central to their success. And the core belief actually is what you see on bumper stickers all over Central America: *Cristo salva et sana*, Christ saves and heals; Christ as a powerful force, a supernatural force in the world which heals sickness and social problems and saves you forever. That's not a doctrine, but it's a basic affirmation of faith.

So I did not mean to imply this is not important at all, and with mainline Protestantism in its decline, I don't think I would say it has something to do with doctrine in the narrower sense. It has to do with the fact that it's very difficult to know what these denominations stand for in any sense. And I would say what has happened in mainline Protestantism is essentially two things. One, which is older, has become a psychologized, religion becomes a kind of therapy — there're some good studies of this going back to the '50s. Then after the '60s, it became politicized: Religion is about this or that political agenda. From an institutional point of view, it is a recipe for self-liquidation because you can have the therapy and you can have the politics without the Presbyterian Church which advocates it.

Now, in terms of relativism, should I have said there are different kinds of relativism? Yes, I think I should have said that, and you could differentiate between the relativism which is completely socially destructive like the example I gave: there's no way of really condemning rape. It's a matter of taste as it were, and a notion of morality that makes

some strong moral affirmations but yet is open to variation and various particular moral judgments.

KAREN TUMULTY, *Time*: Would you mind talking just a little bit about how pluralism plays itself out in electoral politics? Whether it's as the result of people demanding a religiosity of their leaders or I mean, the storyline for 2008 already is, will Americans accept a Mormon president if Mitt Romney runs or is this going to get in the way of his candidacy? Does this open people up to exploring the religiosity of their leaders more and accepting it, or does it make them more suspicious of it?

DR. BERGER: I don't know whether Mormonism is going to be a factor with Romney. I have no idea. Maybe yes, maybe no. But in terms of the politics of pluralism in America, every bit of data indicates that most Americans are not extreme on the neuralgic issues including abortion, you name it. They're somewhere in the middle. What has happened I think is that almost by accident the two parties have become identified with rather extreme groups of activists. So at that point, of course, I think it happened that the Democrats got one bunch of them, and the Republicans got another bunch. So by now I think the perception by religious voters in America that the Democratic Party has a secularist bias is not unfounded; at least in the official image of the party. Apparently the recent data that Pew has produced on the '06 elections seem to verify that across the board, the more religious people are, the more they tend to vote Republican, which I can understand.

I think it could have happened the other way around. I see nothing inherent in the history of those two parties that the Democrats couldn't have become the "Gods" and the Republicans the secularists. It didn't happen that way. There doesn't seem to be any change happening in this.

DAN GILGOFF, *U.S. News & World Report*: Are conversations actually transpiring between the secular elite in this country and Evangelical Protestants? How important is that exchange?

DR. BERGER: I think that exchange will be very important. I think a conversation between the growing Evangelical intelligentsia and the secularist part of the American elite is very

important. As far as I can see, it's not taking place. The Evangelicals see the secularists as sort of very evil people and vice versa. Yes, I would like to see some dialogue along those lines.

The irony is that while mainline Protestants are interested in dialogue with everybody from Tibetan monks to African sorcerers but they don't have dialogue with American evangelicals who are next door, and that's absurd.

MR. GILGOFF: Do you see any early symptoms or manifestations of what you would consider to be the undesirable or even pernicious results of not having that dialogue?

DR. BERGER: I don't think it's an immediate danger like the civil war in Lebanon. It's not that kind of danger, but on the other hand, if you reflect on it, depending on how you count it, there are about 80 million Americans who consider themselves Evangelicals, and if they are shut out of respectable intellectual discourse, that is not a healthy situation. So in that sense I think it's a danger. It's a breakdown of the kind of public discourse that a healthy democracy should have.

ERIC GORSKI, *The Denver Post*: You were saying that, as these different religious groups talk to each other, they're going to influence each other, and I think one of the examples you gave was in Boston with the Catholic Church. I'm wondering if you could cite some other examples in this country where you've seen that influence.

And also we've talked about the growth of Pentecostalism and Mormonism. I'm wondering if, given what you see as these dynamics, what other traditions might be exploding in the near future, other traditions beyond those two, and what groups you might see declining?

DR. BERGER: Globally the two big explosions are evangelical Protestantism and Islam. I have no question about that. Everything else is not as big. As to who would decline more, I'm not sure. The decline of mainline Protestantism seems to have been somewhat stopped. I mean, it doesn't seem to be getting much worse, at least in most denominations. I don't know how to predict future developments. The Eastern Christian Orthodox is a very interesting case, and I would say it's a genuine revival in Russia. It's not

doing badly in some of the Balkans. Is this a wave of the future? I don't know. There seem to be conversions to Orthodox Church in Africa; I don't know how big that is. Orthodoxy has a lot to offer when you look at what the package contains. But again, I wouldn't predict that; it's a possibility.

When I gave the example of the laity in the Catholic Church and the Boston incident, I wasn't referring to the effect of other religious groups; I was referring to the voluntary character of Catholic allegiance. That makes the laity important. So it's not doctrine or teachings or whatever of the Church; it's the laity who becomes important because without the laity you won't have a Church, which didn't used to be the case. I mean, the laity was a more passive entity within the Church.

I mean, as a result of this pluralistic communication some doctrines, some teachings become modified. I think it's happening within the evangelical community now — a belief in the literal inspiration of the Bible, or inerrancy, to use their term — becomes very difficult when you have higher education. So there's a certain dialogue taking place between young Evangelicals with college education and a dialogue between, let's say, what is considered intellectually respectable and their own previous beliefs.

MR. ALLEN: What were you referring there when you were talking about the appeal of the Eastern Orthodox Church?

DR. BERGER: Well, first of all, the liturgy is the most magnificent in the Christian world and that is still very powerful. If you look at the Orthodox Church in the United States, most of it is still ethnically defined, but you do have the OCA, the Orthodox Church in America, which has de-ethnicized itself and its liturgies are in English but it is still very traditional. Well, I'm friendly with the priest who runs the OCA Cathedral in Boston and he's Arab-American by background, but the congregation is about 50-50 people with ethnic orthodox background and people who come from elsewhere — Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, whatever. I've talked to some of them and it's very clear: The liturgy is absolutely essential.

In the old, probably legendary story of the conversion of Russia, the princes of Kiev decided, I think for political reasons, that it would be a good thing if the country became Christian. They had to decide between Rome and Constantinople, so they sent emissaries to both places. The emissaries in Constantinople had attended the liturgy at Hagia Sophia, and they came back and said, "We have experienced heaven on earth." Then they decided to become Orthodox rather than Roman. I think that is still very, very powerful.

MR. DIONNE: I'd like you to abandon your stance as a thoughtful social scientist and instead to speak as a thoughtful, theologically liberal Protestant believer, and to talk about your view of how liberal theology is important or relevant to this moment of radical pluralism that you've described so well.

DR. BERGER: I would say something very Lutheran here: The central affirmation of the Reformation was an enormous act of liberation, expressed in the phrase "sola fide" — we are saved by faith alone. Now, this had a lot to do with notions of justification, which I don't find terribly convincing at this point. But that my religion is based on faith and not on knowledge, I find absolutely central. That means it is not based on certainty. And faith by definition means "I don't know." I believe, I gamble, I decide to affirm this, for good reasons but not out of certainty.

Now, I find this personally an intellectually unavoidable position. I'm profoundly skeptical of every person who claims he or she is certain about his or her religion. I acknowledge there are such people who may have had some experience that they find absolutely convincing. I'm skeptical about that experience and if an angel appeared to me tonight, I think tomorrow morning I'd call a psychiatrist. Maybe I'm going back to the point about whether there are different kinds of relativism. You might call this a kind of relativism, but it's not the kind where I can no longer say anything that I claim to be true.

MR. COOPERMAN: Wouldn't that degree of certainty or uncertainty, but having something to say, be sufficient for mainline Protestantism? Why do you say that faiths built on that degree of uncertainty have nothing to affirm and therefore are bound to commit institutional suicide?

DR. BERGER: Because the mainline churches aren't doing that mostly. I mean, if you listen to sermons in mainline churches, they're mostly either rather trivial moral preachment or they are therapeutic — religion is good for you — or in many cases they are political. In the case of mainline Protestantism, they are usually left-of-center politics. That is not what I mean by *sola fide*, in fact there's no "fide" there. Even if one likes either the psychology or the politics that is being propagated here, it's self-liquidating. I mean, I can hate Bush without going to an Episcopal church, and I can be interested in my mental health without going to an Episcopal church.

MR. COOPERMAN: I guess a counterexample that I would give would be the liberal theological side of the emergent church, which has no more, as I see it, "what" than what you're describing, but has much more of the "how." Its warm worship creates a strong community, great sense of solidarity and is growing very rapidly, but I don't necessarily think that mainline Protestantism has nothing to say in terms of faith. I'm not sure that you do either. But if it had the "how," the "what" might be sufficient.

DR. BERGER: Well, I mean that's obviously a question of how one sees mainline Protestantism and it has diversified, it's not monolithic. I mean, there are different branches, there are different denominations, but I think on the whole it's fair to say that in the mainline Protestantism, there's been a loss of religious substance, not just in terms of doctrine, but also in terms of what is being basically affirmed. I think that unless you have certain basic affirmations of faith, the whole operation becomes implausible. E.J. asked a more theological question, let me amplify my theological view of this, if you don't mind.

The great Rabbi Hillel made a statement, which was quoted by Jesus as the meaning of Torah: "Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself" — which I think is an impossible demand, but leave that aside. I think the essence of Christianity can be affirmed even more shortly: "Christ is risen." Behind both the noun and the verb of this sentence is a lot of stuff. That is the center. If that is not affirmed, Christianity becomes an uninteresting proposition. That statement might not be true, but that's what it seems to me is *thesine qua non* of a plausible Christian church, I mean, surely, people recite the Nicene creed, the Apostles' Creed or whatever they do, but as a central statement of what

we are about, this has become rather limited in mainline Protestantism, certainly in the official denominations. You get local congregations where this is very much the case.

MR. TOLSON: It seems to me that the liberal traditions did try to come to terms with the meaning of "Christ is risen" or other core religious concepts in relation to what science and scientific understanding was doing. This is a very difficult reconciliation. Maybe there is no reconciliation; it's living with the contradiction. But I think everyone fears it is such a difficult reconciliation or attempt at coexistence that the fundamentalists will ultimately prevail. And I wonder if you fear that.

DR. BERGER: Do I fear that fundamentalism will prevail? Well, the question is where? In the United States, I don't see any real danger. Islamic fundamentalism is a very real danger. And you get a lot in the liberal press, which I find kind of strange that Evangelical fundamentalism and Muslim fundamentalism are sort of seen as somehow equivalent, which is crazy. I don't know of any Pentecostals who are running planes into skyscrapers or cutting people's heads off. I mean, it's a very different phenomenon.

I don't see the demonization of the Christian right in America; it's not very plausible to me. It doesn't mean I agree with their positions, not at all, but I don't think it's a terrible danger. Islamic fundamentalism unfortunately is a danger and we may as well face up to it. That's why I said before, one of the really globally speaking crucial issues is the struggle — I used the phrase — "over the soul of Islam," which is happening everywhere, even in Iran. I think all of us have an enormous stake in how this struggle is going to come out.

MR. TOLSON: I would agree with you that it's far more acute in the world of Islam, but I can see fundamentalists of non-Islamic stripes driving planes into buildings. They haven't done it yet, it doesn't mean that they won't. You have people hunting down, shooting people at abortion clinics and bombing people. There's been violence; it's not a monopoly of Islam.

DR. BERGER: Hindu fundamentalism is a very dangerous business right now, but mainly in India, while Islamic fundamentalism is a danger in London. And there's Buddhist

fundamentalism in Sri Lanka, there's Jewish fundamentalism in Israel. Nobody comes out pure out of this. But in the United States, I find it very difficult to regard evangelical fundamentalism, even if I disagree with it theologically, as a big danger. I can't see it. And also there are changes occurring, you mentioned the use of science.

I mean, a very interesting movement has happened in America in the evangelical world: the shift from creationism to intelligent design, which the court has decided is the same thing. It is not the same thing. I mean creationism basically denied evolution, which it seems to me impossible to do for a person who has any kind of knowledge of biology. Intelligent design does not deny evolution; it says that it's impossible to look at the evolutionary process without a mind behind it.

Now, I think then any religious person is going to say that. Christian, Jewish, Muslim, you name it. But the mistake they made they think this can be done scientifically. Well, no, it cannot be done scientifically because you cannot falsify it. But it's a very different thing from creationism. So you already see a shift here in the evangelical position away from what I would call fundamentalism. I think a crucial question will be dealing with the Bible. One of the remarkable events in the history of religion was in 19th-century Protestantism, especially in theological faculties in Germany, when modern critical scholarship was first applied to the Bible, with very dramatic results. Protestantism managed to absorb this process without losing its core. I think Evangelicals will have to come to terms with this in a way that many of them have not yet come to terms, but I think are beginning to.

RACHEL MARTIN, NPR: If you accept the premise that the United States is a model of what a successful pluralistic society looks like, why doesn't Europe work?

DR. BERGER: There are differentiations within Europe, but I think it's fair to say that for most Europeans, when nationalism developed around 200 years ago, the nation was conceived of essentially in terms of a common ancestry: we, Germans; we, French; or whatever. France, perhaps more than any other major European country, also defined itself ideologically in terms of the republican ideals, but there were two Frances — conservative and republican — and they were at war with each other for many decades. Still, it's difficult for European countries, even now, to define themselves in terms other

than a common ancestry; that is to define themselves culturally or ideologically. That, I think, is beginning to happen and the challenge of Islam is very crucial here.

It's fair to say that nobody in Europe could historically identify with the Americans' slogan "E Pluribus Unum." It's just not there. Now, it has to be there now, but that's what the struggle is about. In terms of the absorption of immigrants and how this relates to religion, the United States has been very lucky in two ways. One, the overwhelming majority of immigrants to the United States are Christian, OK, mostly Latin American, Catholic, increasingly Protestant, but they don't raise the issue of Islam. And most Islamic immigration, which has been relatively small compared to Europe, came from professional upper middle class people in South Asia who assimilate rather easily — very different from these unfortunate young second-generation Moroccans in the suburbs of Paris.

I think the United States has been lucky not because it's such a wonderful model, but because it has a history and has the cultural capacity to absorb people in a way that Europe hasn't had to develop until now. And secondly, because the immigration has been easier culturally than what's happening in Europe.

MR. VAN BIEMA: We've talked a lot about the parallels of fundamentalism, but regarding relativism and its parallels, the example that you used was the example of rape, which strikes me as a caricature. I would like to ask, from your point of view, what the real-world objections to relativism are.

DR. BERGER: As a real-world example, let's go back to Europe and the issue of Islamic integration. Now, look at the debate in Holland. They were terribly proud of their multiculturalism, which in practice meant that the gender definitions of rural Morocco were accepted by the Dutch welfare state, and then increasingly people think this is not tolerable. Well, basically subjection of women to their husbands, brothers and fathers in the extreme case lead to a surprising number of honor murders. In less dramatic cases women were not allowed to have higher education and were beaten up by their husbands or brothers or fathers, and the state did very little to stop that because one had to respect their culture. That, I think, is a very real danger and it's a danger of relativism, of a multiculturalism that becomes nihilistic in a way. And so now you begin to have the strong

affirmation with political expression as well: We cannot tolerate this. There are certain Dutch values, European values — whatever phrase they may use — which don't permit this.

BARBARA BRADLEY HAGERTY, NPR: It seems to me especially in the United States, and I wonder if globally maybe with the exception of Africa, what we're seeing is realignment not along denominational lines, but along orthodox versus progressive lines. Evangelicals might have a much better dialogue with Orthodox Jews than they would with their mainline brethren, for example. What I'm wondering is whether you're seeing this kind of realignment, the kind of two tectonic plates globally, is that coming to pass? And if so, couldn't that hurt pluralism in the sense that you just have two big sides and they're only willing to talk to each other and the edges get sharper as progressives do not want to talk to conservatives and vice versa?

DR. BERGER: I think you'll find that religious conservatives from different traditions find they have much in common with each other, but that doesn't mean the lines then therefore disappear. I don't just mean between Orthodox Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, but Evangelicals and others that you cite. They may find they agree on, say, the nature of marriage or about something like that, but there are still very sharp disagreements in terms of other things they believe in. I don't think these would therefore disappear even if they form temporary alliances on this or that political issue.

MS. HAGERTY: I guess I'm less optimistic about the advance of pluralism because I see a hardening of positions.

DR. BERGER: Well, some of it is happening. It's certainly happening on the unofficial level and I'm quite convinced in the United States and I think it's true in Western Europe. Most people are in the middle; they are neither fundamentalist nor relativist. As long as you have democracy and you have some freedom of expression, this middle asserts itself one way or another. Sure, there could be developments whether fundamentalism hardens and you get really sort of absolutely irreconcilable camps to the point of civil war, but I don't see that as a realistic probability in Western democracies. I may be wrong.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG, *The New Yorker*: I'm wondering what you believe would be the preconditions necessary in the Muslim world that would allow for conditions in which the inerrancy or errancy of the Koran could be openly debated; for instance, something that would lead to a softening of some rather hard Islamic doctrines, or is there something in Islam that prohibits the sort of reforms that have taken place in Christianity and Judaism?

DR. BERGER: Well, there are some elements at the core of the Muslim tradition which makes this more difficult. And it has to do, I think, with the understanding of the Koran. And as somebody pointed out quite correctly, it's a mistake to think of the Koran and Islam the way in which the Bible is thought of in Judaism and Christianity. It's much more like the Koran plays a role in the Muslim worldview similar to Christ in the Christian worldview. The logos existed from before the Creation, the Koran existed before the Creation and the Koran is the actual word of God — in Arabic no less. These are longstanding Muslim beliefs, which are more difficult to modify than the Jewish and Christian notion of the nature of the Bible.

MR. GOLDBERG: Traditional Judaism was handed down, written by God, handed to Moses at Sinai. I mean, it doesn't play a Christ-like role, nevertheless, Judaism did reform itself, or parts of Judaism reformed itself to deemphasize the literalness of that.

DR. BERGER: My understanding is that modification was done under enormous pressure from the Enlightenment and happened mainly in Europe in the 19th century, and the Jewish professors dealt with it just like Christian ones had to do, and there's no comparable thing in Islam. There are some inherent difficulties in Islam for this kind of modification.

On the other hand, I am impressed by the fact that there are many good Islamic spokespeople, scholars who say, yes, we can do that, and they go back to a Muslim tradition which says that the meaning of the Koran has to be interpreted. The meaning is not immediately clear. It has to be interpreted and an historical context has to be taken.

What conditions are necessary to allow this to happen? Well, not necessarily democracy, but at least a degree of tolerance on the part of the state. I mean, if you can get executed

for blasphemy if you suggest something like this, then obviously these are not conditions conducive to a liberal Islam.

But there are very big differences in the Muslim world and one area that I find very interesting and very important is Indonesia. First of all, you have a tradition of very moderate Islam in Indonesia. I know a lot about Indonesia because the associate director of our institute is an Indonesia expert, Robert Hefner, and he has mainly written about Indonesian Islam. And the two major Islamic organizations that are the biggest in the world, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which have millions of adherents, have a very liberal Islam.

While radical Islam in Indonesia has become louder and more dangerous and the government has been a little fearful in dealing with it, there are trends in the Muslim world that I think are hopeful. I say this only half tongue-in-cheek — a good condition for the development of a liberal Islam is if an illiberal Islam runs the government, and Iran would be the example of this.

JOHN GREEN, The Forum: You said that you had certain moral certainties upon which you were unwilling to compromise, and I was wondering if you thought that sense of moral certainty that people in the world have places a limit on the spread of religious pluralism?

DR. BERGER: No, because you can hold these moral beliefs no matter what your religion or lack of religion is. I'm quite convinced of that. I mean, take a case of torture, and the belief that torture is utterly unacceptable, in violation of basic human dignity and rights. That doesn't seem to me to hinge on any particular religious position. That affects moral pluralism, but not religious pluralism. While I'm quite convinced one can be religious without certainty, I don't see how one can avoid certainty in certain moral judgments. In terms of religion, I disclaim any certainty. In terms of morality, I claim certain admittedly limited certainties.

♦ END ♦

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