

## Viewpoints

## Religious and cultural influences: An exposition

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Article Information	Abstract
<b>Keywords:</b>	Religion and culture seem to be complicated concepts from an international relations viewpoint. Scholars and philosophers have, after all, long discussed the meaning of these words and their influence on our understanding of the social world. The purpose of this paper is to provide a diagram of religion and culture in international politics. The purpose was to highlight the significance of religious and cultural influences in understanding world events. The process consisted of identifying the characteristics of each concept and analyzing their impact on personal, national, and international experiences. This work argues that understanding religious and cultural issues is necessary to engage in some of the most important discussions about current world affairs. This work submits that there is nothing in modern IR that does not include religion, culture, or both. This research is carried out using critical and contextual analysis methods.
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## 1. Introduction

If religion is a cultural heritage, can religion and culture be separated? Is it possible to be a part of Western society while still practicing Islam? Can a white Christian in Africa exist without being branded a colonizer and oppressor? Is it possible to be African without being labeled as primitive and susceptible to magic? Has religion become a sign of cultural identity in South Africa, delineating the boundaries between people? Membership in a certain religion means membership in a particular culture. This perspective leads to the simplistic generalization that belonging to a certain culture means belonging to a specific religion. Religion and culture cannot be separated; that is obvious. Ali and Al-Owaihan (2008) argues that Islam, in particular, cannot be considered a culture. Islam's core is religious. Numerous devotees of other faiths will concur if this is applied to their religious views. However, religion cannot be dismissed as a cultural manifestation (Kippenberg, 2002).

Culture and religion must be seen as close cousins in this way, and this has repercussions for how religion is studied. If religion is seen as a component of culture, then the study of

religion becomes an exercise in anthropology and ethnography. The dispute over the relationship between culture and religion is ancient and ongoing. Since Aristotle's usage of the word "ethnos" to refer to groups of people living outside the Greek polis, implying that they were primitive, people of diverse cultures and faiths have been referred to as "outsiders, uncultured, and irreligious" (Beyers, 2017). During the Age of Enlightenment, Europeans adopted Aristotle's classification of all non-Europeans as "uncivilized". Nations and individuals were hierarchically classified as a consequence of the Enlightenment's notion that all reality is classifiable. This categorization was based on the individuals' presumed innate mental, physical, and spiritual skills.

According to MacKay (2000), the upshot was that "group identity was fundamentally defined in terms of race." Promey (2003) refers to this when he defines the 16th- and 17th-century European attitude regarding the natural residents of the Cape Colony as "less than human." This remained the prevailing discourse between cultures and faiths in South Africa, culminating in the Apartheid laws (Mrabure & Awhefeada, 2021; Ehirim et al., 2022). In post-colonial and

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post-Apartheid South Africa, societal institutions are being reconfigured. Examining the hierarchical structure of Enlightenment assemblages of civilizations, races, and faiths is necessary. This reconfiguration involves the study of the interrelationships across cultures, ethnicities, and individuals with diverse religious affiliations. This process may be labeled “reconciliation,” but it is a search for identity. A study of the religious landscape of South Africa should consider the imminent racial and cultural interactions. Only then is it feasible to responsibly reconfigure (or reconcile) ties between races, faiths, and civilizations.

## 2. Elements of Religion

Following the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 (often referred to as “9/11”), studies of religion in international politics increased sixfold. According to Robert Seidler (2003), the events of September 11 prompted the realization that religious fervor has often driven world-shaking political revolutions. In fact, the disruptions of a religion-led revolution, the work of religious development agencies responding to natural disasters, the peacemaking efforts of religious diplomats, and a multitude of other examples appear to support sociologist Peter Berger’s claim that “the world today... is as furiously religious as it has ever been, and in some places more so than ever” (1999, p. 2).

Statistics seem to support this assertion: more than eight out of ten people worldwide identify with a religious organization (Clarke & Halafoff, 2016). Are you one of the twenty percent or the eighty percent? Religion’s effect on international politics is a welcome contribution or a significant concern. Regardless of our perspective, it seems that a comprehensive investigation of the “religious question” is required to get a more comprehensive knowledge of international relations (IR). These four religious facets may serve as a good introduction:

### 2.1. God(s) and Forces in the Public Square

The first component of religion is the conviction that supernatural persons and/or forces are relevant to the meaning and practice of politics in the present and throughout history. These creatures are sometimes seen as knowable deities or deities, sometimes as legendary and symbolic characters from our distant past, and sometimes as impersonal powers beyond the physical sphere (Mrabure & Awhefeada, 2020).

Different religious traditions have diverse perspectives on the effect of religion on politics. Fundamental traditions claim that politics is a question of organizing a society in accordance with divine precepts (Gentile & Mallett, 2000). In Iran, for instance, the highest court is religious, taking its precepts from the Shia sect of Islam, the second-largest Islamic tradition in the world after Sunni Islam. This court has the authority to veto legislation enacted by the legislature and to determine who may hold power. Similarly, powerful religious monks in Myanmar (formerly Burma) have initiated a push to impose Buddhist values on the whole nation, including non-Buddhist minorities. Consequently, some religious politics are built on “fundamentals” that supporters feel cannot be altered without compromising society’s norms.

In contrast, traditions that take a “contextual” view believe that politics is about influencing society under divine principles but as part of a larger web of influences. For instance, Islamic development organizations such as the Aga Khan Development Network (also from the Shia branch of Islam) operate in Africa and Asia in health care and education fields without attempting to dominate whole political regimes. Similarly, during the so-called Saffron Revolution of 2007 in Myanmar, Buddhist monks stood with the impoverished in opposition to the prevailing military regime and in favor of the beginnings of multiparty democracy (Salih, 2002). In these instances, religious politics adapt to shifting conditions and considers the diversity of societal interests and beliefs.

Both fundamental and contextual religious traditions acknowledge that politics interacts with the purposes of gods (or God) and spiritual forces or with traditions influenced by them. This starkly contrasts secular methods that minimize or ignore the importance of religion in political affairs. Do you feel religion has a place in public discourse, or should it be limited to private spirituality? From an individual perspective, we may answer this issue by asking what it would be like to live in a society that is either completely religious or completely atheistic. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each circumstance? There is substantial evidence that neither scenario occurs in its purest form. Nonreligious and religious groups have risen in opposition wherever religion has been exploited to dominate the public space. Similarly, when religion is banished from the public sphere, religious actors and interests go underground and wait for an opportunity to reemerge.

### 2.2. Sacred Symbols (re)defining What is Real

The second component of religion is rituals, which reorder the cosmos in accordance with religious beliefs. People have always desired to see, touch, and smell sacred, despite the fact that the word “faith” is typically associated with belief in unseen things. Our senses are spiritual portals. Rituals are thus physical manifestations of the spiritual cosmos. Separate studies by Devji (2013) and Kirmani (2016) analyze the public rituals of Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, respectively. Despite their confidence in invisible realities, the research demonstrates that people have always longed to see, touch, and smell the holy. Our senses are spiritual portals. Rituals are thus physical manifestations of the spiritual cosmos. Devji (2013) and Kirmani (2016) are instances of separate studies that studies, respectively, the public rituals of Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Many religious rituals are performed in public or in a way that is easily accessible to the general public, whereas others are performed privately or disguised. As such, they constitute a component of public life, one of the basic definitions of “politics.”

Rituals reflect spiritual truths for religious adherents but may also influence how the secular world perceives authority. Thomas Merton memorably described in political terms his sight of Trappist monks conducting the Catholic Mass. He penned:

*The eloquence of this liturgy [communicated] one simple, cogent, tremendous truth: this church, the court of the Queen of Heaven, is the real capital of the country in which we are living. These men, hidden in the anonymity of their choir and their white cowls, are doing for their land what no army, no congress, and no president could ever do as such: they are winning for it the grace, the protection, and the friendship of God. (Hedström & Swedberg, 1996, p. 74)*

The experience of redefining power and influence via holy symbols that Merton had is shared by millions of individuals who practice hundreds of various religious rites daily. Beyond individual experience, states also seek heavenly favor. Currently, nearly one-fifth of nations are monarchies (such as a king, queen, or emperor). Although monarchs vary in the scope of their powers, ranging from figureheads regulated by parliaments to absolute rulers and variants thereof, they always derive their authority from religious or spiritual authority. The complex ceremonies of kings across the globe are seen by their subjects as a supernatural blessing for the realm and its residents, redefining the source of true authority.

### 2.3. Sacred Stories Connecting Past, Present, and Future

The third part of religion is the teaching of traditions based on stories of historical figures, events, and ideas, as well as beliefs about the future of time, such as a spoiler alert for the end of time. For some religions, however, time is an illusion, and rather than focusing on the link between the past, present, and future, the emphasis is on living in the now in accordance with sacred principles. These components—interpreting the past, anticipating the future, and living in the present—are also essential to constructing political ideologies. Consequently, religious and political groups may sometimes appeal to the same stories or notions, even though their interpretations or goals may differ considerably.

Jews and Christians saw the notion of "jubilee" as crucial to understanding the story and/or the promise of a Messiah who would usher in a new era of justice and peace (or "shalom"). In the 1990s, members of both parties used one aspect of Jubilee the Hebrew Bible's practice of debt forgiveness as the basis for addressing the debt problem facing rising nations (Donnelly, 2007). A few years later, US president George W. Bush used this revered tale for very different purposes when he greeted the 2003 invasion of Iraq by using a Jubilee passage from the Book of Isaiah: "Let the imprisoned go free and let those in darkness be set free" (Monbiot, 2003). Sacred stories, beliefs, and teachings from the past hold a depth and power that may affect our present political conditions and aspirations. It is not surprising that anthropologist Talal Asad (2003) said that religion and the realm of power have always been interwoven.

### 2.4. A Community Worshipping and Acting Together

The fourth characteristic shared by the majority of religions is the requirement for believers to join a religious community to practice sacred rites and accept the authenticity of holy stories. Certain religious traditions are in high demand and require stringent adherence to established standards and criteria to maintain membership, and other traditions are less popular and have more flexible membership requirements.

Both sorts of spiritual devotion are expressions of religion as "identity politics" about who we are (or how we think ourselves to be) and how we live.

The link between religion and identity politics may have both global and individual significance. For instance, people who are empowered by their participation in a religious organization can act in ways they would not work in isolation. Rosa Parks, an African-American woman who famously broke American racial segregation laws in the 1960s and sparked a national civil rights movement, is often praised as a hero. Rosa Parks was never a solitary member of a religious society that championed human dignity and divine principles of racial equality (Estes 2005). Many (if not most) faith communities have transnational memberships, and some of these have a significant impact on political issues ranging from religion-inspired terrorism against "Western" values (since not all religious politics is peace-oriented) to faith coalitions for environmental sustainability.

The four elements of religion indicated above—the significance of gods and spirits, the efficacy of holy ceremonies, the telling of sacred narratives, and participation in religious groups—seem to be, in their ways, vital aspects of the human experience in the twenty-first century. Even if many components of religious experience may be "politics-free," history and contemporary events remind us that these interconnected aspects of religion may have a political impact on individuals, nations, and global society.

## 3. Elements of Culture

We might tackle "culture" similarly to how we handled "religion." There are several proposed definitions of culture, ranging from elementary to complex. Despite the fact that each approach is essential for knowing the social context in which we live, we chose a reduced version that nevertheless delivers a large quantity of information. Therefore, we begin by defining culture as the cumulative effect of human-constructed social elements that let people cohabit. We analyze four cultural characteristics, highlighting each with examples from personal and global political experience.

### 3.1. Way of Life Prevalent in Society

The basic element of culture is a communal or shared life. Local, national, and global cultures need a remarkable degree of cooperation, despite the fact that media coverage daily emphasizes stories of war, conflict, and disagreement (Ekuri et al., 2014; Ekuri & Saba, 2016; Ekuri & Sanusi, 2016). How are we to coexist? Family ties ("you may select your friends, but you're stuck with your family"), economic interests ("what matters most is the color of your money"), and security concerns ("the enemy of my enemy is my friend") may sometimes forge shared alliances. However, people from varied backgrounds find ways to coexist at the social level by developing common concepts, behaviors, and values. This practice of communal living often gives rise to culture.

Sport gives excellent examples of culture in action (Sunday et al., 2014; Ogabor & Ekuri, 2016). Let us examine football (also known as soccer). Local football teams might be founded around community identity. Australians of Greek descent, for instance, may participate on a team sponsored by

the Hellenic Association. Clubs may represent either a neighborhood or a particular group. The Sydney Smithfield Stallions, for example, may have players of Greek, Ethiopian, British, and Turkish heritage. At the international level, all players from these clubs, regardless of nationality, are committed to the Australian national football team (Hill, 2008). The uniting factor is football, both a sport and a cultural activity. Consider how whole nations may be seen as representative of the deeds of their national sporting stars. Supporters from diverse nationalities will characterize their team's playing style, even if it is inaccurate and based on stereotypes: do all Eastern European teams play with structure and discipline? Does each South American squad use flair and spontaneity? The most crucial aspect for individuals and nations is a sport's capacity to establish local and international partnerships (Rees 2016). This relationship is an expression of culture.

### 3.2. Symbols of Collective Identity

The second component of culture consists of identifying symbols. The construction and comprehension of "signs" is a crucial responsibility in every society. In modern societies, the kinds of signs I am referring to serve as tangible reminders of who we are as a people. They include types of architecture (such as bridges or religious buildings), land or waterscapes that influence human activity (such as in port cities), monuments, flags, and other distinguishing banners, clothing styles and habits of dress, distinctive meals, etc. These signs are more than a tourist attraction; they are symbols that inform group members of their identity and promote group togetherness.

Consider, for example, national flags' personal and global cultural significance. Some individuals may be prepared to fight to the death for the honor of their country's flag since it signifies the "way of life" of the nation. The Star-Spangled Banner, the national anthem of the United States of America, symbolizes the potential of a national flag to inspire both individual and national allegiance. The famous words "O say, does that star-spangled banner still wave; O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" are from Francis Scott Key's rousing hymn to freedom, which he wrote in 1814 after seeing the American flag still flying after a night of fierce British bombardment (Ferris 2014). Key replied in the affirmative, explaining that the flag represents struggle and the hope of achievement.

Equally, oppressed communities inside a country may see a national or regional flag as a symbol of oppression rather than liberty, signifying a way of life that excludes them. Nationalist parties strive for autonomy or independence from the surrounding country or countries while flying alternative flags that represent their cultural uniqueness. For example, the flag of the Canadian province of Quebec has religious and cultural symbols that commemorate the region's origins as a French colony in the New World. Quebec nationalists who want independence from Canada have used the flag to promote the French language, cultural preservation, and Quebecois identity. National separatist organizations across the world are similarly inspired by the symbols of the culture they want to preserve.

### 3.3. Accounts of our Situation in the World

The third component of culture is narrative influence. Similar to how cultures use symbols, civilizations need stories. These may be about individuals or organizations, distant or recent historical events, stories of victory and defeat involving adversaries, etc. These narratives are provided to validate or even create views about a society's position in the broader world. Thus, stories are meant to influence how we see reality (Howard, 1991). Frequently, the best way to comprehend cultural differences is through the stories that civilizations tell about themselves. Thus, it is not unexpected that "culture transition" often involves a society adopting a new narrative about itself (or attempting to do so) in order to embrace a new social reality or a new viewpoint on its own history. Similarly, a "culture war" often occurs when competing narratives vie for public acceptance (Chapman and Ciment, 2013).

Indigenous (or "First Nations") peoples in the United States, Australia, Canada, and other countries, for example, consistently and with good reason question the colonial story. National festivals may act as a reminder of invasion and relocation in such places. In 1840, the British colonists and the indigenous Maori tribes drafted and signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which gave rise to the nation of New Zealand. Although the treaty's terms continue to be questioned, particularly regarding "the lack of Maori involvement" in those circumstances (Orange, 2005), they did provide Maori people ownership rights to their lands, forests, fisheries, and other possessions. Such ownership, as an effort to safeguard the independence of the Maori nation(s), was essential to the maintenance of their cultural story. Sadly, indigenous nations in Australia and the majority of Native American tribes in the United States and Canada do not tell this story. Collectively, these depictions of preservation and loss show the role of language, ritual, geography, and tradition in the individual and global cultural story.

### 3.4. Agreement on What is "Good"

The fourth component of culture is how a society determines what "a decent existence" entails. Societies, like biological organs, have growth and decline, health and deterioration, and fitness and harm. Extending the parallel, one might argue that culture is a tool for determining a society's psychological and emotional health (Ushie et al., 2021a, 2021b). The United Nations Development Program considers "wellbeing" and "the pursuit of happiness" to be essential to a community's long-term health (Steele & Lynch, 2013). For international peace and stability, UNESCO prioritizes "building intercultural understanding" via the "protection of heritage and support for cultural diversity" (Foradori, 2017). These descriptions illustrate what people and other cultures consider to be healthy culture. As a result, culture implies agreement on the sorts of things that are advantageous for society and may contribute to its prosperity. "Culture clash" occurs when different civilizations have different conceptions of what is "good."

The struggle for gender equality in areas like education, employment, reproductive, and marital rights is one of the key frontlines of global cultural warfare. The narrative of Malala Yousafzai from northwest Pakistan reminds us of the

ability of a single individual to galvanize a worldwide reaction to the crucial problem of girls' education (Douglas, 2017). When Malala was 12 years old, inspired by her father, a teacher, she began advocating for the right to education, which was becoming more restricted due to the Taliban's presence in Pakistan. Malala survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban in 2012, during which she was severely wounded, and upon her recovery, she became a courageous advocate for the many millions of girls who were being denied an education due to specific cultural beliefs about women's place in society (Douglas, 2017). She was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Award in 2014 and pledged her prize money to the establishment of a secondary school for girls in Pakistan. Malala's story reminds us that culture is about how individuals and societies define "good" and the extent to which individuals like Malala, global networks inspired by her story, and even those like the Taliban who oppose this vision are willing to campaign for what they consider to be cultural rights (Douglas, 2017).

#### 4. Religion and Culture: Similarities and Contrasts

We have investigated issues of religion and culture and presented some brief personal, national, and international examples. Despite the need to examine each issue separately to illustrate the distinct ways in which religion and culture influence international relations, there are clear linkages between them. For a very long time, theorists have established such linkages, which are pertinent to our topic. For example, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously characterized religion as a "cultural system" consisting of myths, rituals, symbols, and beliefs created by people to give our individual and communal lives meaning (Woodhead, 2011). Consider the connections between the characteristics of religion and culture covered in this article, such as the significance of symbols and stories in both narratives and the pursuit of life according to religion or culture considered the best living standards.

An important question to investigate is whether "culture" must unavoidably be seen as the larger, more significant factor in international relations, with "religion" often viewed as a subset. In the contemporary world, no religion encompasses a whole society, and no culture adheres completely to one set of sacred standards and practices. In contrast, religious authority and identity may be more significant under certain conditions than any other cultural aspect. In 2003, when American soldiers visited the Iraqi city of Najaf to negotiate security arrangements, neither the mayor nor the police chief had the most sway. The influence of the reclusive religious leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani impacted not just the city but also a substantial chunk of the nation. In the 1980s, when Communist authorities confronted striking dock workers in Poland, unions and even the Catholic Church fought, with priests conducting religious rituals and openly defying the government. In both cases, religious components are equally or more significant than cultural ones. Consequently, it may be most acceptable to see aspects of religion and culture as continuously interacting.

#### 5. Can we all Live Together?

The question of whether religious and cultural actors and agendas have a more positive or negative effect on international politics is one of the most significant issues relevant to this topic. These elements are connected to some of the most fundamental levels of individual and global human experience, as we have shown. Should governments seek to release the strong energy of religious-cultural identity to construct a better society, or should they "put a lid on it" for fear of unleashing forces that might jeopardize our capacity to coexist with others?

##### 5.1. The Benefits of a "both/and" Strategy

Because of the presence of religious-cultural identity between conflict problems and potential for cooperation, the study of international relations suggests that both approaches may be required. This method may be seen as an adaptation of Appleby's essential idea of the "ambivalence of the sacred" (Appleby et al., 2020), which states that the features of religious-cultural politics that we have considered so far are capable of both violence and peace. This strategy is useful because it liberates us from the confines of an "either/or" thinking about religion and culture (i.e., conflict or collaboration).

Instead, we may adopt a "both/and" view that allows local and global examples of both (i.e., conflict and cooperation) to shape our understanding of the global politics of religion and culture. According to Marty (2003), such an approach enables us to understand international politics better as it occurs. In light of this "both/and" logic, we examine contrasting examples of religious-cultural identity in international politics that emphasize conflict and cooperation. As you read on, consider further situations in which religion and culture have led to violence and peacebuilding.

##### 5.2. A "Clash of Civilizations" is Caused by Religion and Culture

In 1991, with the ultimate collapse of Soviet Communism, US President George H.W. Bush hailed the beginning of a "new global order." This remark was accurate in many ways, since the struggle between the Soviet Union and the West had dictated the course of international events for half a century. Nevertheless, what would this new order involve? Samuel P. Huntington stated in 1993 that world politics would no longer be driven by a fight of ideologies (such as communism and capitalism), but by a "clash of civilizations." With this argument, Huntington projected that conflict would continue to shape international politics to the same degree as during the Cold War. The biggest change in thinking concerning the role of religion and cultural identity in defining the course of the conflict. According to Huntington (1993), a civilization is "a cultural entity... defined by external characteristics such as language, history, religion, customs, and institutions and by the subjective self-identification of people" (pp. 23–24). Notably, Huntington includes a cultural or religious link in his classifications of the major civilizations: "Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and maybe African" (p. 25).

Thus, the central argument of Huntington's controversial theory is that the cultural and religious factors discussed in this chapter contribute to basic worldwide inequities. This creates fault lines between individuals and communities, inevitably leading to deadly conflict over these fundamental and permanent disparities. Not surprisingly, Huntington's opinions have been both criticized and praised. In 2001, the phrase "clash of civilizations" became popular as a way to interpret the 9/11 attacks as a confrontation between Islam and the West. It is important to note that the George W. Bush administration did not apply the concept in the manner proposed by Samuel P. Huntington. However, scholars were using the phrase well before September 11, 2001, and its applications today vary greatly, from commentaries on Turkish politics to describing the tension of multicultural policy in Western regional cities. Regardless of the merits of these cases (and many more), they demonstrate how politicians, pundits, and academics utilize Huntington's theory to characterize conflicts in a dynamic global landscape. Religion and culture are essential components of this worldview.

### 5.3. Religion and Culture Spark Civilizational Conflict

Others, unlike Huntington, saw the end of the Cold War as an opportunity to reevaluate the management of international affairs. What would the political system look like? Some policymakers foresaw a future in which many actors, and not just powerful governments, might contribute to a communal process of stability and accountability. Increasingly, religious and cultural perspectives were deemed crucial to this discussion.

In 2002, a United Nations consultative body known as the World Public Forum created the Dialogue of Civilizations as an alternative to Huntington's approach. The purpose of the discussion is to "bring together the worldwide community's efforts in defending humanity's spiritual and cultural values... infusing the spirit of cooperation and understanding in the everyday lives of people of other cultures" (Dallmayr, 2002). In stark contrast to the notion in "Clash of Civilizations" that religion and culture are causes of conflict, "Dialogue of Civilizations" uses the same broad features as resources for building bridges between individuals and groups with the goal of sustainable peace and cooperation. What is this modification's value?

The "clash" highlights religion and culture as extensions of power-based politics, and the fact that some governments are (much) more powerful than others is one of the perennial issues of international politics. The Dialogue of Civilizations may give a more equitable approach in which religion and culture are transformed into political extensions based on shared interests. Noting that religious-cultural groupings are often transnational rather than state-based, the dialogue's emphasis on "spiritual and cultural values" helps to create an open-ended space for international cooperation that transcends countries' defensive power objectives.

### 6. The Significance of Accurate Thinking

Which structure seems most logical to you? Does the rise of religion and culture in international politics foster conflict or

dialogue? Due to the religious and cultural dimensions of politics, are we able to live together in cooperation, or are we alienated in ways that lead to conflict? Using the logic stated at the beginning of this section, one explanation is that religious and cultural factors contribute to both confrontations and talks, as well as to both conflict and cooperation. This methodology offers two advantages. First, it invites us to examine particular features of religion and culture, as we have done in this work, rather than reducing such complex phenomena to a single assumption, either conflict or cooperation. "Islam is neither a religion of peace nor a religion of violence," says Reza Aslan (Davis, 2006). This ambiguous viewpoint helps us assess how specific components of religion and culture are used brutally and peacefully.

Second, applying a "both/and" logic requires us to analyze specific examples of international relations, as we have done throughout the chapter, without categorizing religious and cultural traditions by linking them with specific occurrences. When initially apprised of religion's limits, the Hindu spiritual leader Ramakrishna stated, "Religion is like a cow." However, it also generates milk (McCormick, 2012). We see equal healing and peace-related cultural symbols for every cultural symbol of hate. An equal number of religious organizations are pushing for peace as religious groups are campaigning for war.

This "both/and" approach to religion and culture has become more widespread among policymakers interacting with individuals, local groups, and national, regional, and international organizations, representing a fundamental shift in our view of global politics as a whole. Beyond the question of peace versus war, it has helped us see the importance of closely examining the religious and cultural influences on international events. Regarding religion, Jonathan Fox (2008), for example, writes:

*Fuller picture of the world's religious economy would show secularization—the reduction of religion's influence in society—occurring in some parts of the religious economy and sacralization—the increase of religion's influence in society—occurring in other parts (p. 10).*

In terms of their effect and manifestations, cultural elements are also dynamic. According to Nye (2000), cultures "do not stand still for their portraits" (p. 10); hence, the influence of culture on individual and global politics must be carefully considered.

### 7. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to provide a diagram of religion and culture in international politics. The purpose was to highlight the significance of religious and cultural influences in understanding world events. The process consisted of identifying the characteristics of each concept and analyzing their impact on personal, national, and international experiences. Hopefully, you are convinced that understanding religious and cultural issues is necessary if you want to engage in some of the most important discussions about world affairs today. There is hardly anything in modern IR that does not include religion, culture, or both. Similarly,

as a last point, it is vital to recognize that we have only begun to study these issues and that we need to investigate the relevance of religious and cultural actors and interests in more depth. Understanding them can assist us in comprehending a world that is growing more complex and divided.

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