

# WAR, HUMAN DIGNITY AND NATION BUILDING

---



## THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CANADA'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

Edited by

**Gary D. Badcock** and **Darren C. Marks**

War, Human Dignity and Nation Building:  
Theological Perspectives on Canada's  
Role in Afghanistan

Edited by

Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

War, Human Dignity and Nation Building:  
Theological Perspectives on Canada's Role in Afghanistan,  
Edited by Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2010 by Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2381-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2381-4

# War, Human Dignity and Nation Building

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume is based on the May, 2009 Conference of the Centre for Public Theology at Huron University College, London, Ontario. Financial support for this Conference and for the Centre for Public Theology's research was provided under the Aids to Small Universities program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	vii
Introduction .....	1
Gary D. Badcock and Darren C. Marks	
Warfighting, Counterinsurgency and Peacekeeping in Afghanistan: Three Strategies Examined in the Light of Just War Theory.....	16
A. Walter Dorn	
The NATO Club and Afghanistan: Northern, Rich, and White Nations Defend the Imperial Palace.....	71
Erika Simpson	
Muslim Opposition to the War in Afghanistan: The Case(s) of Bangladesh and Turkey.....	91
Rashed Chowdhury	
Afghanistan's Villages and Districts: Notes on A Forgotten Priority.....	113
Remmelt C. Hummelen	
Inculturation and Intervention in Afghanistan: Perspectives from Contextual Theology.....	118
Christopher Hrynkow	
Death, Interpretation and Prophecy .....	141
Howard Adelman	
No Choice but to Confront Afghanistan: Theological Reflections on the Impasse Between Policy and Theology .....	171
Darren C. Marks	
Reason, the Moral Order and Inter-Religious Dialogue: Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg Lecture .....	198
Craig A. Carter	

Christian Realism and Its Limits .....	212
Gary D. Badcock	
Reconciliation and the “War” on Terror: Canadian Churches Respond to 9/11 and the War in Afghanistan .....	231
Ernie Regehr	
Many Faiths, One Planet: The Perils and Possibilities of Religion in a Fragile World.....	253
John Douglas Hall	
Contributors .....	267

## INTRODUCTION

GARY D. BADCOCK AND DARREN C. MARKS

In his Foreword to the 2008 report to the Canadian Parliament of the Independent Panel on the Future of Canada's Role in Afghanistan, the distinguished Canadian politician John Manley wrote as Panel Chair of how Canada finds itself, as a NATO member and a sizable contributor to ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, "in a land that is far from us, little known by us and where our interests do not seem self-evident...whose recent history has been one long, unending tragedy, and whose prospects still appear bleak."<sup>1</sup> It was a fitting summary of the general problem faced, not only by Canada, by all the Western nations involved in the Afghanistan war. And yet, despite the fact that the Panel's Report made wide-ranging recommendations on the basis of an informed and realistic assessment of the prevailing situation on the ground, it was almost wholly silent on one of the central issues underlying and helping to sustain the conflict: religion. For it is religious factors, or, at the very least, cultural factors deeply interwoven with religion, that help both to make Afghanistan such an incomprehensible land to the average Westerner, and that equally help to make the presence of Western troops, diplomats and development agencies so ambiguous a blessing to the average Afghan citizen. But if Western governments, as represented by the Report of this Panel appointed by the Parliament of Canada, are silent on the question of religion's significance in the Afghanistan conflict, it is also true that religious traditions, particularly those of the Abrahamic family, have largely been silent on the conflict as well. Given the fact that Afghanistan is the longest running war in Canadian history and that Canadian casualties have been so heavy, and given the immense financial commitment made to the conflict since 2002, this is an astonishing oversight.

To say this, it must immediately be acknowledged, is not to deny that

---

<sup>1</sup> *Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan* (The Queen's Printer, No. FR5-20/1-2008), [http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection\\_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf](http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf), p. 3.



the Afghanistan crisis involves a great deal more than religion, as well as much that is not authentically related to it. Much of the conflict, for instance, is driven by lawless elements in the society, including criminals involved in the drugs trade. Such people have distinct and very different reasons than does the Taliban to want no viable central government to emerge, for their future is contingent on the failure of any campaign for the "rule of law," whether Islamic or secular. Yet such diverse players are all perfectly prepared to use religious language in order to buttress their cause within the population. Sheer poverty is also a massive factor: where Taliban pay is much better even than that available in the employ of the Afghan National Army, never mind what can be earned from working on the land or in some trade, and where families go hungry, there must always be a ready supply of recruits to the insurgent cause. Corruption in government and in the security and police apparatus of the state is also a huge issue, helping to sustain hostility to the regime in marginal populations, and serving as an impetus to armed resistance against the regime. The tragic recent history of Afghanistan also feeds ethnic rivalries and provides a super-abundance of "scores" that must be settled according to the honour codes by which people live and die. To confuse such factors with religion per se would obviously be a mistake.

Nevertheless, though more than religion is obviously in question, the conflict also involves nothing less than religion. At its epicentre presently is a loose alliance of Sunni Muslims, drawn largely from the ethnic Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and reinforced by a steady stream of international jihadists allied sometimes closely, sometimes more loosely with the al-Qaeda cause, for whom the war is an overwhelmingly religious concern. Their fundamental loyalties lie either with a rigorist interpretation of Islamic law as formed by and enforced within longstanding tribal codes in the region, or else with the eschatological dream of a global Islamic Caliphate, bringing peace and justice to the earth by the enforcement of divine law (Sharia).

The former, as the case of Pakistan in recent months and years amply demonstrates, constitutes a power in the world of the sort that has long-since been forgotten in the West, but that in the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan is capable of marshalling formidably determined foes. It can compete in the sphere of "hearts and minds" in the region very effectively against the ideals of "freedom," "human rights," or even "development" on offer from Western democracies. Indeed, even beyond the immediate region, such Western ideals are as often as not understood to be religiously undesirable, related as they are to social change and grounding as they do the availability of pornography and the like.

The dream of a global Islamic Caliphate, for its part, though clearly vague and incapable of realization, is just for this reason the sort of apocalyptic vision suited to inspire rebellion among disaffected youth born to a culture that has learned, often for good reason, to be suspicious of and resentful towards Western influence. The whole movement to resist the West in its policy in Afghanistan, finally, though financed in part from the drugs trade (as noted, for instance, by Erika Simpson in what follows in this volume), and sustained by a flourishing black market, is also supported financially by extremely well-heeled private individuals in the Gulf states and beyond, who have overtly religious as well as economic and political reasons for hostility to Western influence in the Muslim world—and who are perfectly prepared, it would seem, to tolerate the suffering of millions in order to see the West fail in its present Afghan venture.

There is, of course, a reason to explain why it is that the Independent Panel on the Future of Canada's Role in Afghanistan, among a multitude of other agencies internationally, resisted any substantial reference to the religious dimension. The reason can be very simply stated: the Western political process is strictly incapable of engaging it. Given the particular history of relations between politics and religion in the Western world in the context of modernity, it is able to address the question of religious identity only to the extent that religion has already been rendered purely "private," and thus apolitical, something precisely not fundamental to the common weal. And yet such is what is at stake for those who at this moment stand against American and ISAF forces in Afghanistan; indeed, one of the central things resisted is just this marginalization of religious obligation in the political sphere of human life.

What a nation such as Canada faces in Afghanistan is, therefore, something profoundly foreign not only to its base values but also to its available political conceptuality, so that it is difficult to see how it can ever come to understand what it fights against. "Islamofascism" is a neologism much used by the Bush regime after the attacks of 11 September, 2001, as well as by a range of political scholarship, to define the enemy faced. It has prominent intellectual defenders (such as Christopher Hitchens, who credits the Scottish Islamic Studies scholar Malise Ruthven, writing in the British newspaper, *The Independent*, with its invention on September 8, 1990).<sup>2</sup> From the standpoint of religion, however, it is a poor word to use, ill-adapted to the motives of Taliban and jihadist alike, and thus prone to

---

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "Defending *Islamofascism*," *Slate*, October 22, 2007, <http://www.slate.com/id/2176389/>. A more detailed treatment was provided by William Safire, "Islamofascism," *New York Times Magazine*, October 1, 2006, 6.20.

badly misrepresent the underlying views of the enemy. Ruthven's original reference in the article, in fact, was to the disturbing strain of authoritarianism evident in Islamic politics in nations such as Pakistan and Morocco—administrations which the Taliban and the jihadists uniformly detest—and so was basically an *ad hominem* use of language intended for a predominantly Western audience. It nevertheless caught on, perhaps because, as projection onto the “other” by the West, it made a kind of sense. The term “Islamofascism” succeeds, in short, to the extent that it makes the “other” something made in our image, and so comprehensible in our own terms. The fact of the matter is, however, that the Taliban themselves have as little interest in Fascism, which in its main twentieth century representations was an anti-religious political philosophy in which talk of freedom and modernization featured prominently, as they do in the Liberalism that in the twentieth century triumphed over it. Their political goal is something else altogether, and that has nothing to do with the Fascist vision. The goal is a sacred Islamic state living under divine law, and it is to this extent a political order that resists and rejects the political claim of modernity (whether Liberal, Fascist or Communist) altogether.

In a certain sense, then, the problem of Afghanistan represents not just a crisis for the military strategist, the diplomat or the aid worker, but a crisis that places in question a whole set of assumptions foundational to modern Western politics itself. For in its politics, modernity is the universal claim of a practical reason that has abstracted itself from religious commitment in order to further a purely human good. The wars of modernity hitherto have concerned, for the most part, the details of that project. What has dominated is whether the aim of this or that modern state is the more human, and whether within the state it is Fascism, Liberalism or Communism that makes the more rational claim, thus (axiomatically, it seems) securing human freedom. Short of simply imposing a political vision on the world though military and economic means, as in the era of grand imperial ambition, or by attacking religion as *praeparatio* for the happy dawn of the secularist ideal, modernity in its political outlook has very little idea how to deal with a culture that rejects those broad assumptions altogether.

Since some are already calling the conflict that we face—with our children, on some accounts—“World War IV,”<sup>3</sup> we might do better in our own context to address the religious question anew. Rather than continuing to pretend that, like all things religious in modern democratic liberalism, the religious question in Afghanistan too is a political

---

<sup>3</sup> Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

irrelevance, perhaps it is time we asked some basic questions concerning the wisdom of the modern political stance. For religion is patently no irrelevance in the Afghanistan war. While an approach which takes the public dimension of religion seriously could obviously not resolve the conflict, the roots of which are tangled together with all manner of motives and grievances, it might at least help us to understand the sources of the conflict better, and to communicate more effectively concerning both means and ends.

Not the least of the potential shifts needed, for instance, is an abandonment on the part of Western politicians and pundits of the language of "Islamofascism," which almost wholly obscures rather than illuminates the problem and the potential alike of politics in the Islamic world. However, the conceptual shift needed extends well beyond this, to such things as what the West instinctively wants to think and say and do in connection with that distinctively modern conception termed "human rights," and to the kind of political ideals that not only can but actually ought to be embraced in a nation such as Afghanistan now and in the future.

No doubt most of the labour and pain required for any movement beyond the present impasse must take place in Afghanistan itself, as in the Muslim areas of South Asia generally. The problem that has to be faced emerges on two fronts, and it would be well for a moment to ponder the potential significance of each. The first concerns what can already be seen in Islamic religion and civilization today, and the second, what we are beginning to see in it, particularly in the Iranian setting, but which also must happen elsewhere as well if the first is allowed to continue. Nearly twenty-five years ago, the foremost non-Muslim interpreter of Islam in the West of his day, W. Montgomery Watt, observed the following in a essay written toward the end of his long academic career:

It is hardly too much to say that the conservative traditionalist ulema [the jurists at the centre of Islamic religion] are shutting themselves and the masses who follow them into a ghetto of their own where they are not open to what is happening in the rest of the world. In the long run this state of affairs must lead to disaster. There are so many weaknesses and contradictions...in the traditionalist Islamic self-image that sooner or later there is bound to be a great revulsion of feeling against those who are maintaining the image....It is almost certain, however, that only after much struggle and suffering will the medieval self-image be replaced by a

truer one and the power of the conservative ulema broken.<sup>4</sup>

The judgment thus expressed was based not on any antipathy towards the history and glories of Islam as such, concerning which Watt was regarded by Muslim scholars themselves as a trusted dialogue partner, but on an exceptionally well-informed sense of the recent character of Islamic religious sensibility, in which the self-image is, as he put it, "the product more of imagination than of reason."<sup>5</sup> Its profound deficiency can most readily be evidenced in the abandonment of any serious attempt at historical criticism within Islamic thought in the modern context. Watt traced the same deficiency, however, through a range of further themes: from the prominence of the view that Islam is totally self-sufficient and has nothing to learn from other religions and cultures; to the view that Islam has the final truth for all humanity from now until the end of time—which is not only an infantile idea but a profoundly unworkable one in a world of constant development and change (and is eerily similar to evangelical Christianity's grotesque "creation science"); to its inability to adapt Islamic law to modern conditions. Watt observed: "It should be noted that the movement of Islamic resurgence has shown little interest in the adaptation of [Islamic law] to the world of today. Its main emphasis has been on those practices which distinguish Muslims from Westerners, in order to strengthen the sense of Muslim identity...."<sup>6</sup> The trouble with such a strategy, of course, is that saying "No" in such a constantly reactionary mode turns out in the end to be a poor route to self-definition, and, quite literally, the pathway to a peculiar form of nihilism.

Watt's observations help to inform our understanding of the religious situation not only in Afghanistan, but also in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan—indeed, in the Muslim world generally. However, what his view also reveals is a rather prescient grasp of a second source of present and future contention, which is the crisis that must face Islamic civilization in the broadest sense if the religious situation does not improve. Watt said this, not of "secular" political systems such as obtained at the time in Syria, Iraq or Morocco, but specifically of Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. What may happen in Iranian religion, given "the great revulsion of feeling" that we are presently witnessing against the traditionalist *ulema* which seized power in 1979, is one of the great questions of the moment. It is so fundamental a question for Iran,

---

<sup>4</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, "The Muslim Tradition in Today's World," in Frank Whaling, ed., *Religion in Today's World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 248-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

indeed, that it can be doubted whether the Iranian *ulema* will survive it intact. What the future holds is uncertain, as again the capacity of the Iranian *ulema* to change is doubtful, but what has become all-too-clear is that further struggle and suffering are likely.

Afghanistan cannot be compared directly with Iran, for a host of reasons which include major differences in religious outlook, economics, educational standards, social development, tribal loyalties, and history generally. And yet, at the same time, many of the same dynamics that have shaped the history of Iran since 1979 and that have emerged so powerfully at the present moment are at the very least *echoed* in Afghanistan: from the genuinely popular desire for a more Islamic system of government; to the assumption that only an Islamic system can lead to a resolution of the troubles faced (both the Russian and Western-liberal alternatives being widely understood to be futile); to the existence of a powerful and highly conservative *ulema* which stands to gain from such a system of government; to the inevitability of failure in view of the inner self-contradictions and false self-image that its religious outlook represents; to the prospect of massive civil unrest and (especially in the Afghan context) the virtual certainty of curbed but continued violence. In this setting, it ought to be said here at the outset, the idea that the sending of a hundred thousand troops or even ten times that number to Afghanistan can resolve the problem is clearly a fiction. A surgical operation such deployment may be; a solution for Afghanistan's sorrows it is not. The bitter truth is that the path ahead will almost certainly lead through more sorrows—and this for the very reasons upon which Montgomery Watt put his finger a quarter century ago.

It would, however, obviously be short-sighted to treat the religious dimension of the conflict only in terms of the need for an in-house conversation within global Islam on the question of accommodating modernity, or even to see the underlying issue as that of a coming of age within Islam with respect to the political dangers of theocracy (as has been suggested by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain).<sup>7</sup> For the fact is that there has for the most part been a failure of theological responsibility on all sides. To speak plainly, the editors of this volume in setting the Conference on which it is based had reason to anticipate, within the Canadian Christian fold, that the peace churches would align themselves with the theme of protest against violence; that the more established traditions such as the Anglican would move to respond pastorally to soldiers and their families and thereby mainly avoid politics

---

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Sacks, "Islam Must Separate Religion from Power," *The Sunday Times*, 6 November, 2009.

and criticism; and that evangelicals might be more politically realist at best or at worst selective in discussion of Islam. Such expectations were sometimes realized, but what was too often clear was the lack of theological foundation upon which the standard responses represented were built. The one possible exception to this was the peace churches, who did speak with a John Howard Yoder-esque inflection. With rare and laudable exceptions, however (and even these have been under-resourced and have gone largely unheard by the average pew-sitter, such as those examined by Ernie Regehr in this volume), there has mostly been silence on the war in Afghanistan within Canadian faith communities, both in those classically associated with *de facto* establishment, and in those more clearly on the margins.

The Canadian Muslim response was something of an unknown quantity at the outset, though it was perhaps to be expected that Muslims, who are overwhelmingly relatively recent immigrants, would for the most part want to keep heads beneath the parapet on the question of the Afghanistan war. Some, however, did join the debate to make highly constructive contributions concerning, for instance, the importance of the strand of religious tolerance that can be identified in Islamic tradition at its source in the lifetime of the Prophet, or concerning the widespread perception of many women in parts of Afghanistan today that things were *better*, not worse, for them under the Taliban, in view of the present danger of sexual assault. However, at this point it is also imperative that we be as honest about the deficiencies of Canadian Islam as we have been about those of Canadian Christianity. David Goldberg, a former University of Toronto professor and now an independent analyst, points out that the three largest national Muslim organizations in Canada have increasingly become more “extreme” in terms of dialogue with Jews, civil action, and Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> These organizations, he notes, undermine more moderate and likely more representative groups at the grassroots, who work in closer proximity to the other Abrahamic faiths and are likely more disposed to favour inter-religious dialogue. It may be, as Goldberg suggests, that moderates make up the majority, but the truth of the matter is that these are not the ones informing public opinion at large, or who are most visibly securing the “hearts and minds” of the average citizen. In Goldberg’s rather depressing estimation, in other words, too much of Canadian Muslim-Christian-Jewish dialogue in the public sphere has become

---

<sup>8</sup> David Goldberg, “Jewish-Muslim Interaction in Canada,” (interview by Manfred Gerstenfeld) *Institute for Global Jewish Affairs* 57 (2010), [http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=4&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=614&PID=0&IID=3934&TTL=Jewish-Muslim\\_Interaction\\_in\\_Canada](http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=4&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=614&PID=0&IID=3934&TTL=Jewish-Muslim_Interaction_in_Canada).



uncomfortably extremist in character.

Thus the failure in the Canadian political context to take the religious dimension of the conflict sufficiently seriously is also broadly mirrored in a theological reluctance or even paralysis in undertaking responsible conversation about Afghanistan—indeed, the two failures are surely related. For Christians, whether in mainstream churches or smaller sectarian denominations, the issue is perhaps equally their misgivings concerning the “relevance” of such engagement within a culture that officially only permits “private spirituality” on the one side, and a paradoxically related inability to separate between religious values and those of the wider culture on the other. If religion is conceived to be something purely private, in short, then one has a religious duty to keep it so. Canadian Jews for the most part are naturally worried about Muslim extremism nationally and internationally, and increasingly about the clear tendency of many Canadian Christians to avoid so much as hinting that this might just be a defining issue; in the public space thus left vacant, knee-jerk reactions in support of the state of Israel’s every gesture are only to be expected. The wider debate concerning Afghanistan has not, for the most part, been something that Canadian Jewry has much joined.

Happily, however, there are also instances of more developed theological reflection and criticism, and the papers represented in this volume reflect hope for the possibility of a deeper theological engagement with questions of realism, peace, and the spectrum in-between, as well as with the conduct of the Afghanistan war specifically. Though, in many of the churches, response to date has largely been driven by cultural cues, parroted theologies or indeed no theology at all, there is growing awareness that both criticism and support ought rather to derive from theological foundations—else the community in question clearly fails to take seriously its own religious dimensions. As terrible as it might seem to the Western mind, at least the Taliban has the wisdom to know that there is a connection between theology and human life as social reality. Ought we not to demand of the Judeo-Christian traditions in the West a similar commitment themselves to reflect seriously on these themes, and thus on how we might serve as co-agents in the mending of the world according to God’s will? And could Islam be expected ever actually to listen to what we have to say and to take it seriously if we have not first taken this crucial step?

It cannot be underscored enough that were faith communities deeply to engage with Afghanistan and with one another on Afghanistan, and then with their governments, the issue of the war might well seem less bleak than it appears at present. But as John Douglas Hall maintains in his sage



and sane contribution to this volume, such engagement might also have other, more unexpected benefits—not only for inter-religious understanding, or relations with secularists and secular government, or for future policy in Afghanistan—but also for each of the faith traditions themselves. Real dialogue among the traditions entails that each will be driven to discover why it is that it advocates what it does, and indeed, what that might and might not mean (the meaning of religious words being inherently subject to hermeneutical gloss). What passes for dialogue between faith traditions is too often only a kind of “dinner-club” friendship rather than serious engagement about serious issues, drawing as deeply as possible upon the resources of each faith. In any inter-religious dialogue of substance, however, it should for instance be possible for Judaism and Christianity to ask deep questions of Islam—and *vice versa*, let us say in the context of Christianity’s collusion with colonialism. In fact, the truth is that such real dialogue among the traditions scarcely ever happens. We ought not to be surprised, therefore, that what we do have tends to yield superficial results, or that in the absence of meaningful critique from within or without, more radical and entrepreneurial groups are so able to further their particular agendas in the name of religion. Multiple sources influence such things, of course, not the least of which is the history of modernity itself (e.g., in connection with colonialism). In the present context, however, we are driven to say that the lack of theological responsibility has the effect of yielding the field to theological *irresponsibility*, so that, at one and the same time—and for some of the same reasons—we get the kind of chauvinistic, right-wing religious rhetoric that helped sustain the Bush administration’s policies in Afghanistan, the distorted religious outlook of radical Islam, and the commonplace Islamophobia of the media and of many Western populations.

The end result is an incipiently weak theological voice, the utterances of which are steadily becoming more and more irrelevant to the cultural and moral fabric of society. Thus, as this Introduction is being written, the Canadian Parliament is challenged by the failure to meet a basic human—and, dare it be said, divine—mandate in the probable torture of combatants arrested, detained and given over to local officials in Afghanistan by Canadian soldiers. The official stance at least suspected by opposition parties (who, of course, would have done the same thing if in power—and indeed did do so even more egregiously in the case of the Liberals in the early years of the war) is that state security in the post 9/11 world must on occasion preclude the protection of basic human worth. However, all three of the Abrahamic traditions would surely be of a single mind that state security must be measured against a deeper awareness of what kind of