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to Religion and Violence
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The Blackwell Companion
to Religion and Violence

Edited by

Andrew R. Murphy
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Acknowledgments

The production of a volume such as this one—involving the contributions of more than 40 scholars—depends on many individuals’ hard work, good will, and attention to detail. My chief debt of gratitude, of course, goes to the contributors themselves, who showed both careful attention to deadlines and welcome patience with the inevitable delays that a project of such magnitude inevitably brings with it. Some of these contributors, the reader will note, are eminent scholars in their fields, while others are newly minted PhDs or in the relatively early stages in their careers. But all have borne with the bumps in the proverbial road with good cheer.

At Wiley-Blackwell, the Companion to Religion and Violence has been unfailingly supported from its inception by Rebecca Harkin, who commissioned the volume and kept careful tabs on it as it made its way through the publishing pipeline. (Our annual meetings at the American Academy of Religion conference helped to keep the book on schedule and to assure me that there was indeed light at the end of a long, religiously violent tunnel!) At various points, a number of other folks at Blackwell—Isobel Bainton, Lucy Boon, Sally Cooper, Bridget Jennings, and Sue Leigh—helped move a very large manuscript forward in a very short time. This combination of swift progress and careful attention to detail was helped too by the careful copyediting of Ann Bone.

This Companion was first envisioned while I was a member of the faculty in Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University. If it possesses any interdisciplinary virtues, they are in large part due to my time at Christ College, where I spent every working day with a tightly knit group of colleagues who approached the scholarly study of religion from many different disciplinary backgrounds. Since coming to Rutgers in the fall of 2008, I have been fortunate to have supportive colleagues in both the Department of Political Science, my academic home, and the Department of Religion. As this volume was going to press, Jim Johnson of the Religion Department hosted a campus-wide forum on religion and violence and graciously invited me and another colleague to share some insights on the topic. To our collective surprise, several hundred people attended, a number that (even allowing for the awarding of extra credit by some faculty in the Religion Department!) illustrated, if illustration was really
needed, just how timely a topic is taken up in these pages. That may be a sad statement about the world in which we live, but also – one hopes – about interest in subjecting the phenomena of religion and violence to scholarly analysis, in the attempt to envision a less violent future.

Andrew R. Murphy
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The relationship between religion and violence – however one defines either of those terms – forms a central part of the political discourse, as well as the lived reality, of modern times. In the summer of 2010, Americans from all corners of the nation passionately debated the propriety of a Muslim cultural center just blocks from the site of the World Trade Center attacks, a debate that revived all the painful memories associated with that event and fed ongoing arguments about whether Islam was a “violent religion” or a “religion of peace.” Daily headlines bring news of violent conflicts in hotspots around the world, many of which are fired by religious rhetoric, while a steady stream of publications by the “New Atheists” denounce the tendency of religions of all kinds toward violence, irrationality, and destruction, in the process spawning a counter-literature even more extensive than the work it arose to contest (Hitchens 2009; Dennett 2006; Harris 2005; McGrath 2010; Haught 2007; Dawkins 2008).

And yet so many important questions go unaddressed in these sensationalized headlines, the charges and countercharges of polarized political debate, and the provocative claims of the New Atheists and their critics. If religion and violence, and their (apparent) close connection are all around us, far more rare are accounts of these two phenomena that do more than scratch the surface or report the most egregious or provocative atrocities committed by believers of various sorts. What do we mean when we speak of “religion” and “violence”? Is all, or most, or even any, of the “religious violence” on display in the headlines really driven by religion, or is religion a convenient rhetorical tool invoked to justify violence sparked by other factors and serving other ends? After all, as part of the social landscape in the twenty-first century – much to the surprise or chagrin of those who envisioned its demise as secularization and modernization swept the globe – religion is just one of a number of phenomena that both shape and are shaped by human beings seeking meaning and value in their daily lives. And so we are led, from this consideration of religion and violence, to explore broader and
more subtle interconnections between religion, ethnicity, nationalism, race, politics, gender, and economics; we are led into a more subtle and complex (and, quite frankly, a more interesting) reality.

The chapters that follow provide a guide of sorts to that more complex reality. This Companion to Religion and Violence does not, and does not attempt to, present a comprehensive treatment of every aspect of the religion–violence nexus. (It is hard to imagine any one volume doing so.) It does, however, offer a wide-ranging set of essays covering a variety of important topics, a varied set of perspectives on religion, violence, and the connection between the two, from an international and multidisciplinary roster of contributors. Many of the contributors have been researching and writing on these topics for decades, while others are at earlier phases of their careers. Each one brings his or her own particular expertise to the broader questions lying at the heart of this volume.

The Companion is organized into five sections. Part I, “ ‘Religion’ and ‘Violence’: Defining Terms, Defining Relationships,” begins the volume with two chapters exploring the difficulties of definition and conceptualization raised by these two key terms. John D. Carlson and William T. Cavanaugh consider a variety of ways in which scholars have defined these two terms, and probe the various ways in which they might (or might not) be related to each other. These provocative opening chapters set the stage for the many different approaches to religion and violence that follow in subsequent sections of the Companion.

Part II, “Disciplinary Perspectives,” turns to the contributions of a range of humanistic and social scientific disciplines to the study of religion and violence. Contributors bring the insights of economics and rational choice, sociology, anthropology, evolutionary biology, law, visual media, and gender studies approaches to bear on issues central to this Companion. Each understands religion and violence somewhat differently, and each offers unique insights into the multifaceted relationship between the two. When we look at these issues as refracted through such widely varied disciplinary lenses, we see that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary if we are to appreciate the complexity of the issues before us. Somewhere in the interaction among the varied approaches offered by the chapters in Part II lies a rich and nuanced understanding of religion and violence, both historically and in our own times.

But of course most religious believers encounter neither their faith traditions nor violence through academic lenses, but rather through lived experience and ritual, through sacred scripture and collective memory. The chapters in Part III, “Traditions and Movements, Concepts and Themes,” take up some of these phenomena and analyze their relationship to violent words or deeds. Some authors probe the internal dynamics of religious traditions and movements; others cast a broader eye on the historical development and evolution of the tradition under consideration. And since religious traditions and movements often communicate fundamental categories of meaning, value, and identity through key concepts or themes, other contributors to Part III take up a variety of such terms – jihad, just war, martyrdom, terrorism, sacrifice, and humiliation. Many of these terms are age-old, but have taken on new and important meanings in the post–September 11 world, evoking a range of relationships between religious believers and violence endured or inflicted on others.
INTRODUCTION

Of course there is no way for one volume to cover all, or even most, examples of the intersections of religion and violence. In-depth studies of concrete historical examples, however, can often illustrate and clarify the theoretical, conceptual, and disciplinary insights offered in the Companion’s previous sections. Part IV, “Case Studies: Religion and Violence, Past and Present,” offers a range of studies that illustrate the many different ways in which religion and violence have been intertwined across time, place, and culture. From American slavery to pogroms in Russia; from British India to gender and the Holocaust; from Puritanism to Chinese popular religion; from South Asia to Africa and the Middle East: the contributors to Part IV reflect on the connections between religion and violence over time, and in a wide variety of settings.

And finally, Part V, “Future Prospects: Beyond Violence?” offers just a few examples of the ways in which religious actors have attempted to point the way beyond violence in the attempt to imagine new ways of dealing with conflict. Although this Companion’s emphasis has been on the complex relationship between religion and violence, the mirror image — whether we call it peace, or simply nonviolence — has always exercised a great deal of influence over the religious imagination as well. The potential for liberation theology or religiously motivated peacemaking efforts to build bridges between peoples and cultures suggests that, often, those very traditions that have exacerbated violent discord in the past at the same time hold out the potential for overcoming such destructiveness in the future. Indeed, the very scriptures that have often urged individuals on to acts of violence contain equally poignant longings for a world free from such strife. And the history of American religion suggests a strong countetrend to the all-too-frequent association of religion with violence: a nonviolent tradition deeply grounded in the American experience.

Before concluding this Introduction, two final caveats.

First, I have not insisted that the contributors to this volume adopt a uniform definition of religion, and thus readers will note that various chapters use the term in various ways. It is undeniable, of course, that (as the first two chapters in the Companion make abundantly clear) definitional issues are highly charged and important in terms of understanding just what we mean by “religion” and “violence” (let alone the relationship, if any, between them). But each contributor comes to the phenomena under consideration from his or her own particular disciplinary background or professional position, and I have allowed them to define and use terms as they find most useful for the sort of exploration they want to offer.

Second, as mentioned earlier, let me reiterate that no single volume can cover such an enormous terrain comprehensively, and that therefore there will inevitably be topics that readers will wish had been explored in the chapters to follow. As editor of this volume, I am keenly aware that certain topics lack the attention they deserve; and, conversely, that other topics may appear to receive unnecessarily excessive attention. Many contributors, for example, use the case of Islam, or Islamist movements, or terrorism (often associated, fairly or not, with certain strands of Islam) as examples to probe the purported connections between religion and violence. It is true, of course, that the debate about Islam and violence is one that threatens to oversimplify, to denigrate, and to exclude; and it would be a poor reading of the intent of this Companion to contribute to such sentiments. At the same time, if a volume of this sort is to be timely
and relevant, it must direct itself toward the rhetoric that is actually at play in the world around it. Additionally, readers will note that many of the Companion’s chapters take up the issue of “Islam and violence” in order to further complicate or contest broad narratives that link the two in some sort of essential way.

All in all, then, the chapters in this Companion to Religion and Violence take up an enormously complex constellation of phenomena from a diverse and wide-ranging set of disciplinary backgrounds. While certainly not the last word on any of the topics under consideration, the Companion to Religion and Violence aims to provide readers with a broad overview of these vexed issues and a set of conceptual and interpretive tools for approaching the phenomena, and to lay the foundation for further investigations in years to come.

References

PART I
“Religion” and “Violence”: Defining Terms, Defining Relationships

1. Religion and Violence: Coming to Terms with Terms
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2. The Myth of Religious Violence
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One spring morning in 2007, as Virginia Tech University students were setting off to class, fellow student Seung-Hui Cho began a shooting spree that, before turning his gun on himself, claimed 32 lives. Efforts to interpret the massacre, the shooter’s motives, and the trauma’s aftermath were freighted with resonances and attributions that most would call religious. The story is lucidly analyzed by Grace Kao, then a religious studies professor at Virginia Tech, whose poignant account affirms that we cannot gain meaningful understanding of this violence by ignoring the facets that are tinged – if not saturated – with “religion” (Kao, forthcoming).

Numerous pundits presumed Cho’s outbreak was motivated by Islam, in spite of his Christian upbringing and the Christian allusions that littered his manifestos. Similar assumptions were made in 2002 when the public learned that the Washington DC Beltway sniper was a member of the Nation of Islam. Born John Allen Williams, he changed his last name to Muhammad one month after the attacks of September 11, 2001. For many, Cho and Muhammad were perpetrators of “religious violence.” It mattered little that they were both mentally ill. Kao shows, however, that the religious symbols that haunted Cho’s “testimonials” were fragmented within a highly disturbed psyche. Cho’s irrationality undermined – rather than validated – the claim that his violence was religiously motivated or framed. Neither he nor Muhammad bore the markings of American abolitionist John Brown, or Osama bin Laden, or others who make perspicuous religious arguments to justify their perverse violence. The study of religion and violence enables us to scrutinize such expectations about religion’s causal relation to violence.

But that is hardly the whole story, for various forms of religion were intimately bound up in the efforts to find meaning in the Virginia Tech killings. A few religious groups prophesied that Cho’s actions were divine retribution for America’s sins. More representatively, the community and nation collectively expressed sorrow through the consolation of various religious traditions and prominent modes of public religion. At the convocation ceremony a few weeks after the shooting, religion was on full display:
from Qur’anic and biblical invocations to religious musings by public officials to an impromptu recitation of the Lord’s Prayer led by members of the audience. This episode reveals how multifaceted and contested the role of religion can be, particularly as associated with incidents of violence.

A spate of recent scholarly works seek to probe various intersections of religion and violence (Appleby 2000; Juergensmeyer 2003; Lincoln 2006; Selengut 2003). This is hardly a novelty of life in the twenty-first century, though. The meanings we pack into the categories “religion” and “violence” are as important to understanding human history and the human condition as they are to understanding American society in a post-9/11 world. Interestingly, at the same time, other scholars are questioning whether such categories offer useful insight at all. Thus, one conceptual prerequisite for a Companion to Religion and Violence entails a defense of the terms on which it relies. As an overture to the chapters that follow—by way of coming to terms with the key terms of debate—I take up the conceptual, ethical, and practical stakes of thinking carefully about religion and violence. Specifically, I argue that critically assessing the meaning of violence—a much neglected concern in recent religion scholarship—is at least as significant as defining religion.

The Category Formerly Known as Religion?

This volume emerges at a time when use of the “R-word” is more contested than ever. Religion turns out to be a rather peculiar term, fraught with paradox. It is at once pregnant with meaning yet, for some scholars, increasingly vague and meaningless. Elements in the media suggest that religion is everywhere around us, while scholars of religion deny that religion is anything but a social construction. For a phenomenon with such an unsubstantiated basis, religion remains a powerful concept. As we shall see, much ambiguity surrounding “religion” is tied to root concerns about power and violence.

Debates over the definition of religion go back to early antiquity. Cicero linked religion to reading (legere). The term relegere entailed either rereading or reading carefully or treating thoughtfully “all things pertaining to the gods.” Lactantius and other Christians who disputed this etymology instead invoked religare, meaning to bind together (i.e., as a ligament binds or connects). Augustine, too, adopted this account, having flirted with the idea that religion involved “recovering” (religere). But in all these cases, the common “re-” prefix underscores the divine reference point, whether recovering God, binding oneself back to God, rebinding oneself to others through deities, or reading again matters involving the divine. Christian theologians and scholars of religion both have perceived a deep split between Christian and non-Christian notions of religion. Augustine, for example, contrasted the “true religion” of Christianity with the “civil theology” of Rome. But in other cases, for example when Calvin invokes Cicero to describe the sensus divinatus in human beings, one can appreciate that religion is found in various forms among diverse peoples and cultures.

For traditionalist scholars of religion, some variation of the following account often serves as an adequate working definition in the trade: Religion entails the practices,
rituals, beliefs, discourses, myths, symbols, creeds, experiences, traditions, and institutions by which individuals and communities conceive, revere, assign meaning to, and order their lives around some account of ultimate reality generally understood in relation to God, gods, or a transcendent dimension deemed sacred or holy. More succinctly, Scott Appleby defines religion as "the human response to a reality perceived as sacred" (2000: 8). Bruce Lincoln introduces “maximalist” and “minimalist” qualifiers that distinguish, respectively, between forms of religion that are more explicit and those that are implicit or veiled by secular premises. What maximalist religion and minimalist religion share in common—what makes both religious—are the divine reference points to which various communities’ discourses, practices, identities and institutions are oriented (Lincoln 2006: 5–8).

One preliminary concern with the category of religion involves what we might call the membership problem. Which traditions, discourses, and belief systems belong to this club called religion? Some scholars debate whether the terms of membership are sufficiently broad to include Confucianism and certain forms of Buddhism. Many worry that religion has been defined too exclusively so as to privilege Christianity, monothestic traditions, or belief-based systems (King 1999). But we also can err by liberalizing the admittance requirements too much. For, as William Cavanaugh puzzles in chapter 2, what insight is gained when virtually anything—Marxism, nationalism, or one’s undying love and loyalty for the Chicago Cubs—can be a religion? Though one may bind oneself to others in each of these examples, the etymological discussion above suggests that religion is about more than binding to any old thing.

Some may conclude that there simply is no such thing as religion. Perhaps, then, we should no longer talk about religion as such, instead naming only specific traditions or groups—“things” belonging to the category formerly called religion. Of course, this approach has its own problems. How does one define Christianity in a way that is accurate and meaningful? Is it tenable to lump together practices, beliefs, discourses, experiences, and institutions as diverse as those of the early apostles, Egyptian Copts, medieval Crusaders, Calvinist Huguenots, contemporary Methodists and Mormons, old order Amish, modern-day fundamentalists, Korean Baptists, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, African-American Pentecostals, and countless other denominations? Indeed, in terms of certain practices and discourses, some of these groups may have more in common with members of other faith traditions than they do with one another. We might not know that, though, unless there was a broader category that invited such a comparison. Categories serve vital purposes. We think through them and the meanings we assign to them. Creatively applied, categories help us to organize human thought and experience. Misapplied, they engender conceptual mis-organization and prejudice.

There is an egalitarian way out of the category conundrum: One who claims a category or title gets to use it. Similarly, those who seek refuge outside this umbrella should be heard (e.g., “We practitioners of ‘X’ do not consider ourselves adherents of religion”). The crucial stipulation is that one who claims, assigns, or denies a category (e.g., religious, Christian,) must offer reasons, which, in turn, will be assayed by scholars, citizens, and other coreligionists. Religious categories about the sacred or transcendent can be useful, but they are neither sacred nor profane themselves and should not be treated as such. A category becomes defunct when it is no longer useful, and one sure
way to hasten its demise is to insist upon fixed borders instead of more flexible contours that admit to contestation and negotiation.

So, if there is a spirited debate about whether Confucianism is a religion, then so be it. Does this mean that belief in anything can qualify as a religion? And if not a member of the religion club, then to what club do other beliefs belong? For what it is worth, no matter the suprarational hope sustaining the faith and allegiance of Cubs fans, I would not call it religious. Nor do I deem Marxism a religion. Given its founder’s view that religion is the “opiate of the masses,” that seems a stretch (though many Christians have been influenced by Marx). Political theorists usually classify Marxism as a political ideology. Here it is important to recall that comparisons across categories also can be useful, particularly when religious and political beliefs and affinities enjoy important similarities, including their understandings of power or support for or opposition to violence. Certainly, what is often called civil religion could straddle different religious and political categories. Wars waged for explicitly political (and putatively secular) reasons, often are filled with religious symbols and meanings, as recent scholars have shown (Ebel 2010; Stout 2006). Preserving a broad and fluid notion of religion will help the reader connect and reflect upon the diverse essays of this volume.

There is, though, another more potent objection that some critics of “religion” – religious studies scholars especially – have lodged. As Jonathan Z. Smith avers, “Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization” (1982: xi). For some scholars, the discovery or “invention” of religion is tied intimately to the history of European expansion and colonialism and to the religious studies discipline that emerged in tandem (Asad 1993; Cavanaugh 2009; Masuzawa 2005). Failure to recognize how religion is socially constructed allows essentialists to portray religion as universal across human communities in time and space and to impose such a framework upon “Others.” Such essentialism reinforces expectations of whatever it is people believe religion’s “true nature” to be: in secular societies, “good religion” is private, nonviolent, and subject to reason; “bad religion” is public, violent, and irrational.

In the post–September 11 world, constructions of religion can be easy to form, dangerous to hold, and difficult to break down. Consider the dramatic cover on the November 3, 2007 issue of The Economist, which included a special report devoted to “the new wars of religion.” A hand descends from grey clouds, index finger extended, suggesting a menacing – presumably monotheistic – deity delivering orders to his (not her) followers below. The image represents religion’s explosive potential, for clasped within the heavenly grip is a hand grenade, pin still in place. The image of the divine hand and grenade emblematically depicts religion as a tangible object or “thing” with a highly discernible violent essence. The viewer gets the sense that this essence has changed little over time, as portrayed by the modern grenade clutched by a hand seemingly lifted right from Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam (ca. 1511). This image illustrates the kind of essence against which the category critics of religion warn, while simultaneously reinforcing the views of new atheists and ardent secularists who contend that religion is inherently violent (Harris 2000; Hitchens 2007).

Even scholars who merely claim that religion’s ties to violence must be understood can reinforce constructions of religious violence found in popular culture no matter
how sophisticated their academic treatments. There are, to be sure, simultaneous countervailing claims. The idea that “true” religion is peaceful and nonviolent has been affirmed by many apologists, including George W. Bush in the days after September 11, 2001, and Barack Obama in his Nobel Peace Prize address. (One struggles to find comparable magazine covers that reinforce this essentialist view of religion.) More importantly, any single representation risks displacing the many other complex, multivalent pieces made up of innumerable actors, movements, texts, discourses, and institutions—and which, together, form no overarching montage or composite of “authentic religion.”

Scholars who are critics of the category of religion often worry that conceiving religion in essentialist terms ignores not only that religion is just a social construction but also risks overlooking the ill purposes to which such categories and constructions are put. Specifically, when religion’s complicity with violence becomes essentialized, “the secular” is assumed to be an agent of peace. Specifically, the nation-state’s grounding in secular reason is used to justify and legitimate its violence against the illegitimate violence of irrational religion. But even as the artifices of religion and secular are deconstructed, new categories emerge and, with them, new essentialisms. Taming our instincts to categorize and essentialize turns out to be no easy task—even for strong critics of categories. Ironically, it is the effort to deconstruct categories such as religion and religious violence that eventually manifests the limitations of such deconstructive methodologies.

**Religious and Secular Violence**

Bruce Lincoln’s comparative study of religion examines not simply different religious traditions and their relations to violence but the different forms those religions can take. Discussing commonalities in the videos of Osama bin Laden and national addresses of George W. Bush following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Lincoln distinguishes between maximalist accounts that make use of explicitly religious tropes and discourses (such as those bin Laden deploys) and minimalist accounts that appeal to secular assumptions about religion, the state, and violence. For Lincoln, what is distinctive about Bush’s minimalism is the way in which his words, spoken as a secular political official, belied his own hidden but religiously maximalist commitments. According to Lincoln, President Bush “double-coded” his rhetoric with religious references that would fall on the deaf ears of those with secular orientations but would ring through sonorously to certain Christian audiences. “The conversion of secular political speech into religious discourse invests otherwise merely human events with transcendent significance,” Lincoln affirms. “By the end, America’s adversaries have been redefined as enemies of God, and current events have been constituted as confirmation of Scripture” (2006: 32). The upshot of Lincoln’s analysis is made clear in his pluralized choice of title, *Holy Terrors*.

One can debate Lincoln’s exegesis of bin Laden’s and Bush’s words and whether they amount to comparable defenses of terror. But even if one departs from his conclusions (as I do), his methodology, nonetheless, proffers a form of critical inquiry about religion
that extends to the state’s use of coercive force and secular efforts to defend it. What is intriguing about Lincoln’s approach is the way religion serves as both a common analytic denominator as well as a comprehensive category. Lincoln’s minimalist-maximalist distinction preserves a focus on distinctive features of critical religious inquiry, reminding readers of the transcendent backdrops on which various actors – and the communities they seek to reach and bind together – rely.

Critics who are skeptical about “religious violence,” however, train their sights more directly onto the secular. They question the excessive attention applied to religious violence at the expense of secular violence, which leads to the false essentialization of religion as violence-prone and the secular as peaceful. Simple recollection of the horrors committed under Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot’s reigns would confirm this point. Overcorrecting, though, invites new forms of essentialism that undercut conceptual coherence about what we label “violence” and that overlook important empirical realities. Consider, for example, Janet Jakobsen’s claim, “The secular is not less violent than the religious; in fact, it is more so” (2004: 53). Jakobsen does not arrive at this conclusion hastily, noting that religious actors readily appeal to their traditions to justify violence. She also observes how religion and the secular bleed together: “religion and secularism are intertwined, and they are intertwined specifically at the point of legitimating violence. The violence of the modern state, including that of the U.S. government in particular, is religious as well as secular” (2004: 65). It is difficult to disentangle the blurred interpenetrations of religion and secularism, sufficiently at least to arrive at the conclusion that the secular is more violent than religion. Jakobsen, nonetheless, observes: “there is plenty of evidence to show that the [secular] modern state is the origin of, rather than the solution to, most of the contemporary world’s violence” (2004: 63). As evidence, she compares the tally of destruction and loss of life between religiously inspired terrorist acts and secular governments’ efforts to counter terrorists. She bypasses discussions of motive, intentionality, and moral limits, noting simply that because the violence purveyed by the secular state ostensibly is put to the cause of peace, “‘our’ [US] violence literally becomes less violent” (2004: 61). Jakobsen thus shifts the preponderant negative valence from religion to the secular. The categories retain currency; their responsibility for violence simply needs reconfiguring. By homing in on government’s unique capacity for destruction, she essentializes another category – the secular state – even as she criticizes secular governments that essentialize religion’s violent propensities.¹

Debates about religion’s definition, propensity for violence, and relationship to the secular converge and come to a head in William Cavanaugh’s revealing work The Myth of Religious Violence (and his essay in this Companion). Cavanaugh goes to great length to deconstruct the reigning categories. “The point is not simply that secular violence should be given equal attention to religious violence. The point is that the very distinction between secular and religious violence is unhelpful, misleading, and mystifying” (2009: 8–9). Why? Because the distinction between religion and secular is artificial and was “established through violence, not by argument” (2009: 7).

Religion has a history, and what counts as religion and what does not in any given context depends on different configurations of power and authority. ...