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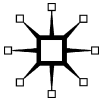


PILGRIMAGE, POLITICS, AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

RELIGIOUS SEMANTICS FOR
WORLD POLITICS

Mariano Barbato

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For Fritz and Melanie

VINCENT *So if you're quitting the life, what'll you do?*

JULES *That's what I've been sitting here contemplating. First, I'm gonna deliver this case to Marsellus. Then, basically, I'm gonna walk the earth.*

VINCENT *What do you mean, walk the earth?*

JULES *You know, like Caine in "KUNG FU." Just walk from town to town, meet people, get in adventures.*

VINCENT *How long do you intend to walk the earth?*

JULES *Until God puts me where he wants me to be.*

VINCENT *What if he never does?*

JULES *If it takes forever, I'll wait forever.*

VINCENT *So you decided to be a bum?*

JULES *I'll just be Jules, Vincent—no more, no less.*

VINCENT *No Jules, you're gonna be like those pieces of shit out there who beg for change. They walk around like a bunch of fuckin' zombies, they sleep in garbage bins, they eat what I throw away, and dogs piss on 'em. They got a word for 'em, they're called bums. And without a job, residence, or legal tender, that's what you're gonna be—a fuckin' bum!*

JULES *Look my friend, this is just where me and you differ— . . . If you find my answers frightening, Vincent, you should cease askin' scary questions.*

Quentin Tarantino, Pulp Fiction



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PROLOGUE: IMAGINE

John Lennon is certainly one of the popular icons of the modern and globalized twentieth century. One of Lennon's most vibrant songs can count as a secular hymn for a new attitude towards life: *Imagine*. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked the song number three of "The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time." *Imagine* is a song about a world without religion, patriotism, and private property, and a world full of peace and joy where all the people are "sharing all the world" and "living for today." The lyrics imply that without heaven and hell, and thus without religion, there would no longer be a cause to kill and die for. Religion is like nationalism and private property an obstacle to human peace. The imagination of such a peaceful and harmonious world without religion is supported with a direct call to join the growing crowd of irreligious faithful. "You may say that I'm a dreamer / But I'm not the only one."

Over 30 years after the song was recorded, the notion is still alive and kicking that religious faithful and their believes are, in contrast to secular dreamers and their this-worldly peace wish, part of the problem rather than part of the solutions to the questions and quarrels of mankind. This attitude is widespread in academia and certainly not underrepresented in the discipline of International Relations or political science. If we assume that Voltaire was one of the forerunners of John Lennon's imagination, the idea that getting rid of religion means solving key problems has been in the world since three hundred years. It will probably stay. However, it looks like religion is not fading away either. Secularization theory, the idea that modernization will do away with religion, is more or less obsolete. Sociological reasons for the survival of religions are their capacities to construct meaning for life, to enable belonging to a community and thus the functioning of society, and last but not least to offer a fallback position for coming to terms with material insecurity. For materialists it is necessary to tackle at least the last problem. The idea of growth is in charge of this. However, materialists—Liberals and Marxists alike—were not able to bring prosperity for all. The Marxist failed disastrously and the liberal idea of growth might reach its technological limits in our

life time. Religion will remain as a human practice, if for no other reason than the fact that insecurity is here to stay.

The pressures of globalization are usually discussed mainly in terms of material insecurity, the fate of the welfare state, and of the likely winners and losers of globalization. However, far beyond these economic concerns globalization challenges the very foundations of our political communities, nations, states, even civilizations, and thus erodes our modern and premodern idea of self and of agency inside nations and in international relations. The current age of transformation calls our conceptual map of politics and international relations into question. It is time to imagine a new concept for coming to terms with the changing reality. In contrast to Lennon, this book argues in line with the broad debate of postsecular thinkers from Talal Asad, Rajeev Bhargava, and William Connolly to Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Joseph Weiler that religions are a great source of wisdom to understand self, agency, and community in our changing world and how to elaborate conceptual ideas for a better human future. Maybe it is time even for secular dreamers to imagine that there is heaven—and hell also. A heavenly utopia could provide reasons, not for violence, but to share with each other the world as common heritage and to construct ties of joint agency in which our selves and our communities are transformed, not eradicated. “Living for today” must come to an end by preparing for the future. A critique that is a very idealistic project could be rebuffed with John Lennon himself: “You may say I am a dreamer but I am not the only one.” The religious version of cosmopolitanism might be much stronger on the ground than its elitist secular version.

This book is an exercise in conceptual thinking on the religious semantics of the pilgrim and pilgrimage. The idea of pilgrimage and the self-conception as pilgrim and pilgrim communities can be spanned from the physical Hajj to Mecca to the psychological inner, lifelong journey of the self in Puritanism. It spans a cultural heritage from Israel’s pilgrimage to the first Temple on Mount Zion to the Pilgrim Fathers on the Mayflower in 1620 to the greatest mass event of human history, the Hindu pilgrimage for Kumbh Mela in 2007 in Allahabad, where estimated 70 million pilgrims gathered. Pilgrimage was there before the idea of tourism was born; it had its ups and downs but never faded away. Indeed, as the technological means became available for mass tourism, pilgrimage formed a crucial part of it: “Protestants went on trains to the seaside, Catholics

to light a candle in a holy place.”²¹ Today, old routes and places are rediscovered. It is no wonder that the pilgrimage industries flourish, breaking one record after the other. But pilgrimage is not only a religious activity. Lennon’s memorial in New York Central Park as well as Lenin’s Mausoleum in Moscow attract visitors who pay tribute by their visit to these secular shrines.

The basic idea of pilgrimage is departing from home to gain new wisdom, motivation, and support for the self, the community, and joint agency within the context into which the narrative of the pilgrimage is integrated. The various traditions, shrines, routes, and places deliver a rich heritage of different stories. My claim is not that these stories all share a meaningful common ground or that they all have the potential to contribute to a common future of mankind. However, I believe that all traditions of pilgrimage have a certain “family resemblance,” to use Wittgenstein’s term, which does not provide a foundational definition but enables a conversation between these traditions and their narratives. Narratives from one shrine might thus have something to say to the adherents of another tradition without melting the two traditions into one or fostering the domination of one by the other. The idea of pilgrimage is widespread, but it is also colorful and heterogeneous. The meaning of pilgrimage is a “contested concept,” to use Connolly’s term. Inside this family resemblance of a contested term I engage with one tradition—Catholicism—to tell stories about pilgrims, pilgrim’s routes, and shrines that I believe can foster the cosmopolitan debate of the self in a global age of transformation, an emerging global community, and joint political agency of mankind. With more than one billion faithful, Catholicism has more adherents than any other denomination of a world religion and a vibrant tradition of pilgrimage with shrines all over the world. With this focus the book provides a Catholic contribution to International Relations. My aim is to engage with this tradition in a way in which faithful of other religions and the widespread religious unmusical agnostics in International Relations scholarship can fathom the idea of pilgrimage as a source for a conceptual imagination of world politics.

The spirit of pilgrimage is not seen in a causal relation to globalization as Max Weber famously claimed for the Protestant spirit and capitalism. My model has rather been Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. Hobbes offered with the *Leviathan* a metaphor taken from the religious semantics of the Bible to illustrate the new concept of the

“modern state.” Also his idea of contractualism was based on the biblical covenant of God and its people. My pilgrim is like the Leviathan a metaphor taken from religious semantics and the task is also the same: offering a new root metaphor for global politics as Thomas Hobbes offered one for the politics of the modern state.



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MARIANO BARBATO
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