RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE, CONFLICT AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF BOUNDARIES

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The facts of religious resurgence, increased religious diversity and increasing religious conflict raise issues about the nature, construction and negotiation of the boundaries between and within religions groups. Some of the religious diversity literature has taken a multicultural celebration of diversity approach, avoiding issues of conflict largely in-keeping with the assumptions of 20th Century ecumenism and policies of optimistic multiculturalism. They seem to assume that multicultural policies will prevent conflict or even competition. On the other hand, there is a large literature that argues that religious conflict is inevitable and will be overwhelming (Huntington 1993). Persistent and increasing religious conflict taking a variety of forms and occurring in a range of intensities, along with evidence of the role of religion in peacebuilding (Appleby 2000) compels a more realistic assessment of interreligious relations and a renewed exploration of the nature and transformation of religious boundaries. It is also necessary to be mindful of the changing social, cultural and political contexts of the transformation of religious boundaries as the consequences of the end of the Cold War and the transition of some societies from modernity to what is described by some as post- or high-modernity.

RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE

The evidence for the resurgence of religion is by now overwhelming and need not be debated (Thomas, 2005; Berger, 1999; Martin, 2005; Bouma, 2002; 2006). While particularly evident in Africa and Latin America, evidence of resurgence also pours in from Asia and even Australia—where the secular press has been doubling the coverage of religious issues annually since 2001. The fact that Europe appears to be an outlier in its continued extreme form of secularity has been discussed (Davie, 2002; Martin, 2005). Resurgence can be detected not only among Christian and Muslim groups but also Buddhist, Hindu,
Sikh and others (Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2003), to say nothing of a burgeoning array of Spiritualities (Bouma, 2006) and within Christianity the Mega-church phenomenon (Connell, 2005; Chavez, 2005).

This wave of religious resurgence has several causes. Some people are reacting against the failure of otiose secularized, liberal and formally organized forms of religion to meet their religious needs. This is a familiar pattern in the history of religions. The early 19th century witnessed such a reaction against The Church of England in the Oxford Movement and the rise of evangelicals, as well as revolts against the state churches of Europe, for example the afscheiding in the Netherlands. At the same time many new religious groups and movements emerged, for example the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Disciples of Christ, The Brethren and the Churches of Christ. Religious resurgence and innovation also occurred in other parts of the world for example; in Iran this period witnessed the rise of the Baha’is.

A second source of religious resurgence is found in continued failures in justice, the inability to achieve a fair distribution of goods and services, including food and health. Some people react against the failure of the secularist humanist paradigm to deliver peace and prosperity with justice, and to provide satisfactory explanations for evil, inequality and pain.

Meanwhile migration moves people, and with them religions and religious ideas, around the globe. Some migrants use religious organizations to assist them in settling (Bouma, 1994). Migrants also tend to be more religious than those they leave behind, and more traditionally religious. Migration has dramatically increased religious diversity of many societies and as a result has increased interreligious contact. Much of this migration has been voluntary, but some has involved less voluntary forms of population resettlement bringing religious groups into conflict over land tenure and use, as in the case of the Maluku (Stern, 2003: 70–74).

The forms of this religious resurgence or revitalization found in each of the Abrahamic faiths and in others include increased intensity of commitment, increased salience of religious identity, the rise of puritanical extremes (Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2003; Antoun, 2001; Porter, 2006) and a return to political engagement to apply faith whether by establishing Shariah Law in newly Muslim majority countries like Malaysia, promoting the teaching of ‘Creation Science’ in the USA, or condemning particular patterns of sexuality (Bates, 2004). Resurgence often brings conflict between the more liberal and more conservative or