Bettina Koch, *Patterns Legitimizing Political Violence in Transcultural Perspectives: Islamic and Christian Traditions and Legacies*, De Gruyter, 2015, viii + 253 pp., $140.00 US (hbk), ISBN 9781614513940.

It appears that the world finds itself at a moment in history when various forms of religion, and various political and military movements inspired by, appealing to or legitimated by religion, appear to challenge the hegemonic discourse the West has proliferated throughout the globe. This challenge constitutes a threat to the liberal democratic ideals of tolerance, individualism, and constitutional government. Fundamentalisms of different religious sects-—Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu—combined with the emergence and growth of populist movements of both the left and the right, suggest that the established conception of the world and its embodiment in socio-political institutions, are undergoing a crisis of authority and legitimacy. The origin of this discourse may be traced back to the belief in the further unfolding of the ideals embodied in the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment, events that provided the intellectual and philosophical content of the English, the American, and the French Revolutions—the three great upheavals that ushered in the modern world. The spread of reason and science would lead to the social, political, and economic betterment of humanity. It seems that reason, as both Giambattista Vico and the Frankfurt School thinkers have noted in their different ways, has turned on itself, has like an acid eaten itself, such that it can no longer act as the fount of meaning and legitimacy.

Bettina Koch's excellent book, therefore, is both opportune and welcome. It provides an historical and theoretical context to contemporary religiously inspired political movements that promote violence and rebellion. It further offers the intelligent reader an insight into the pre-modern origins of political religions, while at the same time brings the inquiry forward and compares them to their contemporary descendants.

The book is ambitious in its range and in its depth. It covers a wide geographical area as well as a great span of historical time. The analysis and argument are structured around two corresponding and parallel polarities. The first is a theoretical and historical comparison of Western and Catholic Christianity and Islam from their origins down to the Middle Ages. The second is a comparative analysis of modern versions of Middle Eastern Islam and Latin American Catholicism. In a richly textured, historically detailed, and theoretically sophisticated narrative, Koch uncovers the religious, political and socio-economic determinants of political violence as well as the moral and theological justifications that legitimate its use. These polarities together are encapsulated into four chapters, and each

chapter is subdivided into sections, and these in turn are further subdivided, all of which provide an in-depth and concrete analysis of the relations obtaining among conflict, violence, and religious sources of legitimacy.

Conflict is endemic to political life. Indeed, it has been argued by thinkers as different as Aristotle, Augustine, Machiavelli, Madison, Tocqueville, Marx, and contemporary political scientists that the end of conflict signals the end of political life. On the other hand, conflict that leads to political violence, whether instigated by the pre-existing ruling regime, or initiated by an anti-system or a revolutionary group, indicates systemic legitimation problems where the ruling elites no longer possess the authority to generate the necessary permanent consent of significant portions of the population. Christian and Islamic thought, precisely because it privileges divine and natural law over civil and temporal laws, looks askance at conflict, and recognizes its validity only when perceived violations of God's laws and precepts render the existing socio-political order unjust, despotic, or irreligious. At the same time, in an age where the prevailing intellectual discourse is dominated by theology, and where religion is the language through which social reality and political issues are perceived and expressed, conflicts generated by socio-economic and political injustice and oppression necessarily acquire a religious dimension. In effect, the struggle for power at all societal and cultural levels is manifested through religious and theological prisms.

Koch does a fine job in analyzing the structure, the language as well as the philosophical and theological substance of these prisms. Throughout the work she disentangles the political from the theological, the social from the religious and identifies the ways in which the various strands contributing to the conflicts and power struggles interact with one another.

The introductory chapter provides a theoretical discussion of the points where legitimacy, religion and violence intersect. Since it relies on a transcultural analysis of this intersection, there is a methodological discussion of the conceptual problems presented by trans-historical and transcultural comparisons of ideas, movements, and developments. While noting the linguistic, cultural and ethno-national issues attendant upon these analogies, it argues authoritatively and persuasively that the use of different languages and different concepts "is beneficial in a way that can rarely be achieved if one remains within the original language tradition" (7). At the same time, it recognizes the "differences between Western liberal discourses and discourses in which religion is considered *the* or *a* main source of legitimacy" (8). But it also makes a strong argument that the explicit assertion of rights (as in the Western modern tradition) is nevertheless comparable to an implicit assertion of moral rights as expressed through the numerous peasant rebellions throughout the Middle Ages. Though an Ibn Khaldun or a William of Pagula is "bound to their religious-cultural experience," and their "normativity has different roots in religion and custom" (11), nevertheless the "underlying problem" these writers address is similar to that addressed by modern Western liberal thinkers: "when does legitimate rule become illegitimate rule" (12)?

Islam and Christianity proclaim a monotheistic conception of the world which sets down moral, ethical, and religious tenets designed to lead the community of believers to peace, justice, and salvation. These tenets, while predominantly religious, nevertheless have political and socio-economic consequences. Inevitably in both religions the sacred and the profane, the religious and the political, are inextricably intertwined. Both insist on the sovereignty of divine law, from which issue the moral and natural laws. These laws and tenets are the criteria by which to determine the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of any given political and secular order in any given time and space.

Chapter 2, "Medieval Foundations," discusses Christian and Islamic notions regarding violence and its legitimation. As Koch demonstrates in a discussion highlighted by theoretical nuance and historical sensitivity, inter-sectarian conflict as well as intra-sectarian strife are endemic to the two monotheisms. The very nature of their belief and normative systems generates opposition, conflict, and suspicion between one religion and the other. In addition, Koch also shows that each religion, given its emphasis on belief, faith, and ideological consistency, was inherently unstable from its vey beginning. After Islam's victory it soon began to split into various factions. So too with Christianity—except that sectarian conflicts emerge in Christianity even before the conquest of power. Violence was a normal weapon against ideological opponents, especially after the Roman Empire became officially Christian when the power of the state became available. It is significant, as Koch points out (28), that Constantine's policy of religious toleration did not extend to Christian heretics. Internal opponents were deemed more dangerous than external enemies (a belief intensely held by Lenin and his Bolsheviks). Unlike different creeds and beliefs, heresies and apostasies challenge the ideological integrity and "truth" of the religion and so threaten to undermine its moral/theological foundations.

Due to limited space, I cannot fully do justice to Koch's multi-layered, historically sedimented exposition. She delves into complex questions regarding orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the Crusades against the external enemies, and those against internal religious dissenters such as the Cathars. Violence is justified through theological arguments (such as those of Giles of Rome) that assert the primacy of sacred (that is the Papacy's) over temporal power. At the same time, there is an extended discussion of religious justification of violence against the Church (such as William of Ockham's) and violence against the secular power (John of Salisbuy and William of Pagula).

The analysis of violence legitimation in pre-modern Islamic traditions is equally cogent and informative. It covers both the Sunni and Shiʻite traditions. Central to the discussion is the concept and practice of *jihad*. The discussion makes clear that it is a highly complex and highly contested concept, and that therefore there have developed plural discourses of *jihad*. In the process the author demonstrates a wide and deep knowledge of pre-modern Islamic thought: Malik Ibn Anas, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Jama'a, Ibn Khaldun, for example, though differing on the meaning of *jihad*, yet all agree that both "defensive and offensive warfare," and persecution of religious dissenters and rebels are religiously sanctioned (80). Religious dissent easily translates into political opposition and rebellion. Writers as different as Nizam al-Mulk and Ibn Taymiyya explicitly makes the connection and offers religious arguments legitimizing violence against apostasy and sectarian opponents. Whether arguments are made to support religious and/or secular authority, or to undermine and de-legitimate established authority, Koch shows that there is a close and intimate relation between religious/moral thinking and social/economic conflicts and grievances. Disputes over property, feudal dues, and labor are the dominant issues in both Islamic and Christian areas. Moreover, even where conflicts are originally sparked by perceived economic and political oppression in pre-modern Islamic traditions (as well as Christian) these generally are imbued with a religious dimension, and either faction in the conflict appeals to the authority provided by sacred and religious texts.

Chapter 3 explores religion and violence in twentieth century Christianity and Islam. The chapter first notes that in the contemporary world the use of perceived legitimate violence is not restricted to domestic settings, but is rather intimately linked to the geopolitical and *Realpolitik* interests of competing foreign hegemonic powers.

The chapter begins with an analysis of "revolution and counter-revolution" in Latin America and the role that different Christian perspectives have played throughout the century's tumultuous history. The Medellin Conference of 1968 is seen as a significant point of departure for investigating religious justifications for "counter-violence"—i.e., violence directed against the established religious and secular powers (119). The conference called for a solution to "immediate social problems from a religious perspective." It also attacked the "violence of oppression and exploitation" (118) perpetrated by the established state institutions and their supporters, and simultaneously legitimized violence used to overthrow the oppression of the ruling elites. Koch's informed discussion revolves around ideas enunciated by the ideology of Liberation Theology. An amalgam, or synthesis, of Marxist notions of class struggle and Catholic social doctrine, Liberation Theology calls for a struggle against the "oppressive structures" of the "dominant class" (119-120). Though Hélder Câmara preached non-violence, others such as Camilo Torres Restrepo emphasized violent struggle, and formulated religious arguments for the ideological justification of violence against the "dominant minority" and its state (121). On the other hand, others, like José Comblin (who sees Marxism as incompatible with Christianity) take a position between the first two, and advocates violence as a last resort, when peaceful methods have been exhausted (a position not dissimilar to John Locke's). Comblin interestingly goes back to a Christianity before it acquires secular power, in that his theological position is based on the unity of the church and the people. On the other hand, a thinker like Ignacio Ellacuría uses early Christianity to argue for the power-political relevance of a discourse of salvation, that is, Christianity's soteriological message must be realized in this world.

In opposition to the interpretation of Christianity as revolutionary and counter-hegemonic conception of the world, Koch discusses thinkers and theologians who develop religious justifications for counter-revolution (143). Conservatives such as Alfonso López Trujillo and Roger Vekemans, criticize Liberation Theology's portrait of Christ's political role. They maintain that the Catholic Church's religious mission is supra-historical and trans-historical, and therefore fundamentally apolitical. Koch notes that the call for neutrality in politics, though sustainable theologically and theoretically, in practice legitimates and supports the established order.

Yet Christianity from its inception has had to contend with a perennial and irreconcilable contradiction between two interpretations or images of the Christ figure: one "who renders to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's," and who says "my kingdom is not of this world," and the other who preaches a gospel of the poor and who violently turns out from the Temple the money lenders and changers. The theological and religious contradiction extends throughout Christian, especially Church, history—from Augustine's trans-historical opposition between the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*, to the investiture conflicts of the Middle Ages, to the struggle for power between Pope and Emperor and more generally between Church and State.

Until the coming of the Protestant Reformation, Christianity in the West understood itself as a cosmopolitan and universal religion. In this respect it had much in common with pre-modern Islam, which also saw itself as multi-ethnic and trans-national. The Reformation, in addition to doctrinal reforms, was a revolt against the international institutions of the Catholic Church, with its pretensions to a universal and cosmopolitan *res publica Christiana*. This revolt splintered Christianity and in the process nationalized it. Such a splintering diminished the power of the Church, and became one of the major factors for the emergence and growth of the modern nation-state. The fragmentation into national religions weakened the competing and differing churches and thereby increased the power of the state

vis-à-vis the church and accelerated the processes of secularization and modernization. Islam and the Muslim community have not undergone similar cultural, political, and religious transformations. The national political movements of the various Muslim countries, to the extent that they remained strictly political, and to the extent that they closely and strictly followed a Western model, could not plant their roots down to the everyday life experience of the ordinary Muslim on the street, who remained firmly attached to traditional religious beliefs. As such religious and political Islam in the latter part of the twentieth century is characterized by a cosmopolitan and internationalist perspective, in which attempts are made to graft revised versions of modern cultural and intellectual ideas coming from the West onto a religion and a conception of the world that are still permeated with universalist pretensions.

It is in this political, cultural, and religious context that Islam and violence in the modern world are to be understood. The second part of the second chapter discusses Islam and violence in the twentieth century (158). Before delving into the modern Islamic discourses that legitimate violence, it first makes the important observation that both Sunni and Shi'i theorists and militants assume that in the Muslim word apostasy is especially dangerous (the existing Muslim states are considered apostate) and its cure is violent rebellion. It first covers the Sunni writers such as al-Afghani, Hasan Albanna, Sayyid Qtutb and 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, and moves to the Shi'i Khomeini, Murtuza Mutahari and Ali Shari'ati.

Especially important is Al-Afghani in the late nineteenth century who sets the stage for subsequent intellectual efforts to legitimate religious violence. He rejects the traditional Sunni doctrine of obedience, and uses untraditional arguments in order to reframe and reinterpret religion. He emphasizes the role of reason, philosophy, and modern science so as to rejuvenate the Muslim world in its confrontation with European expansionism. He distinguishes between enlightened and despotic government. He sees the latter, in the manner of Augustine, as equivalent to highway robbery. The criteria are classical and traditional: tyranny is defined by violations of property and forced labor.

Hasan al-Banna is seen as the founder of contemporary Islamism, and the positions taken by subsequent Islamists such as Qutb, Maududi, and Khomeini are more systematic expositions of a conception of the world first seen in al-Banna. His ideas are formulated in opposition to Western material culture and to Western colonialism. As such, the Islamist discourse on violence is a ferocious and unremitting assault on the social, economic, and political injustices committed by the West and by the Muslim regimes seen as under the West's influence or control. The attack is all encompassing and absolute: it is simultaneously religious, cultural, political, and socio-economic. Its underlying and constant theme is Muslim liberation, both from the foreign West and from the oppressive domestic Muslim regimes. Koch does fine work in linking together, and integrating, the Western ideas of Marx, Sartre, Guevara, Fanon and others, with the religious, cultural, and political concerns of thinkers and activists such as Khomeini, Shari'ati on the Shi'i side, and Qutb and al-Banna on the Sunni. Thus the problems modernity poses to the Muslim community sparked the moral/intellectual and political movements that call for not merely the autonomy of the Muslim world, but also for its resurgence and regaining of its once dominant position in the long ago past.

Finally, the concluding chapter not only resumes and summarizes the volume's overarching arguments, but also presents an incisive theoretical elaboration of the reciprocal relations that obtain among the book's central ideas on obligations, rights, and the legitimation of violence. Though the discourses the book analyzes are expressed in religious and theological language, religion is not necessarily and mainly the underlying cause of

conflict. Religious ethical and moral ideas are deployed to attack socio-economic, political, and moral injustices. There is no necessary connection between religion and violence; yet a religious interpretation of a conflict may alter its character and its import.

The underlying theme is that perennial abuse of power, socio-economic injustices, and hegemonic and neo-colonial domination are the major grievances that spark rebellion and resistance which are legitimated by means of religious and theological discourses. Latin America and the Muslim world experience the West's modernization, secularization, and economic development through the prism of the oppressive "other" intent upon extending its power throughout the world. Resistance is therefore both internal and external: against the coopted domestic elites, and against the West directly. As long as injustice endures, Koch concludes, social and economic conflict will be inextricably linked to religion, and political violence and resistance will continue to be legitimated and justified through theological and religious discourses.

In sum, the book offers an impressive demonstration of historical inquiry as well as theoretical and textual analysis. It deftly weaves ideas and concepts from a wide range of thinkers, who work in different parts of the world and time periods, into a seamless historical and theoretical synthesis. Thoroughly grounded in the primary texts and in the secondary literature, it is trenchant and insightful in its interpretative readings, and exhibits a broad and profound grasp of the political, theological, and moral thought of Christian and Islamic thinkers. All this amounts to a work that is a substantial and significant addition to the body of literature on the relation between religion, politics and violence.

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