

# James W. Jones, *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Jones, James W. *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

*Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* explores the topic of violence and terrorism through the lenses of religion and clinical psychology. In fact, the author, James W. Jones, is rather uniquely positioned to embark on writing such a book, being a clinical psychologist with expertise in the psychology of religion. One of the main contributions of this work is precisely that it fills a fairly substantial gap between the psychological studies of religion, interpersonal and intergroup violence, and terrorism.

The discussion of *jihadism* in comparative perspective (chapter 2) is truly a standout, in that it addresses many of the themes that are widely discussed in the broader terrorism literature (i.e., humiliation, shame, guilt, demonization, dehumanization, moral disengagement, scapegoating, authoritarianism, etc.) and reinterprets them through the framework of a clinical psychology of religion. Further, this analysis takes a critical look at *how* religious concepts like sanctification and purification become intertwined with violence, destruction, and death. For example, Jones provides some thematic analyses of key texts, such as Qutb's *Milestones* as well as the *Left Behind* series that is analyzed in the context of American Apocalyptic Christianity. Some of the themes discussed in substantial detail that are especially unique to this work include the importance and function of ritual, the sacred, the importance and expression of purification, the power and meaning of conversion experiences, changes in identity as a result of religious conversion, as well as the heightened intensity of experiences that are linked to expressions of religious faith and devotion.

Jones provides well-developed examples of religiously motivated violence throughout the book, with careful attention to the *meaning* of the acts of violence that are described. For instance, a chapter focusing on *Aum Shinrikyo* considers how the group transformed over time, moving progressively toward an increasingly apocalyptic vision and use of more potent and destructive weapons, which culminated in the 1995 sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system. While *Aum Shinrikyo* has received a substantial degree of analysis elsewhere (e.g., Lifton, 2000), Jones provides a fresh perspective that reframes the analysis of *Aum* within this religious/psychological framework.

For those readers without an extensive background in psychology, Jones discusses some of the key and formative studies in the discipline that have been applied in the context of intergroup violence (e.g., Milgram's classic studies on obedience, Zimbardo's classic 'prison experiment' studies) and describes them in a level of detail that draws out the key methods and findings, while making them accessible to a broad audience. In addition, throughout the book, Jones links his observations and analyses to current theory and research, including some of the more modern studies of intergroup violence and terrorism (e.g., Moghaddam and Marsella, 2004; Waller, 2002), which provides a fairly succinct summary of the key literature. Taken together, these elements make *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth* a unique and valuable contribution to the broader terrorism literature.

However, there are several aspects of the book that may provoke some controversy. Specifically, Jones provides a critical analysis of Pape's (2005) widely cited data on the motivations for suicide attacks. In essence, Jones re-examines the factors that have been considered especially relevant in the context of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), and through careful example and analysis, Jones finds that there are some salient features of the LTTE that strongly suggest significant religious themes, in addition to the ethnonationalist elements that form the basis of Pape's conclusions about the factors that are the prime motivators for suicide terrorism.

Perhaps the most conceptually and practically related works are Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God* and Jessica Stern's *Terror in the Name of God*. In *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth*, Jones has crafted a complimentary work that is more clearly tailored to facilitate a broader understanding of the meaning of religion in the context of violence and terrorism as it primarily focuses on the individual level of analysis, while touching upon other levels of analysis that are more centrally covered elsewhere (such as group, societal, etc.). Finally, the book is organized in a way that makes it readable in a cover-to-cover manner, but selected chapters could also be used to teach classes within a semester course. Precisely because it fills a unique place in the field, this book is a great resource for those who are seeking to develop a more nuanced understanding of the role of religion, not only in the context of terrorism — as the title clearly suggests — but also in the context of other forms of intergroup violence that have religious elements.

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Misra, Amalendu. *Politics of Civil Wars: Conflict, Intervention, and Resolution*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

In *Politics of Civil Wars*, Amalendu Misra undertakes an ambitious project: to explain the initiation, process, escalation, termination, and recurrence of civil wars. His explanation revolves around nationalism and the process of nation-building. The first chapter reviews previous theories of civil war, taking the now-conventional view that neither greed nor grievance is sufficient to explain the phenomenon. This part of the work shows mastery of the literature, both quantitative and qualitative, although discussion of quantitative studies becomes much less comprehensive after the first chapter. It concludes with a warning that poor, autocratic states with “massive regional imbalances” and corrupt leaders are most likely to fall victim to civil wars. The next chapter argues that civil wars mark a failure of the process of nationalism and hence are a natural feature of evolving societies. Misra implies that civil war is simply inevitable as new nation-states mature:

Creating a successful nation . . . always extracts immense amounts of suffering and sacrifice from the citizenry of that state. Eventually, in a few rare occasions, a handful of polities ever manage to realise this undertaking. However, those that do nonetheless go through bloody periods of extreme levels of violence and conflict. (p. 43)

The third chapter deals with the expansion of violence. Oddly, this chapter appears to be only tangentially related to civil war as such, ignoring limited civil wars and focusing almost exclusively on genocides. Indeed, the logic of the chapter suggests that violence always begets violence, making escalation to the deliberate massacre and then genocide of civilians all but inevitable — it is difficult for Misra to explain why most civil wars do not become genocidal in character.

The next two chapters assess the effects of international intervention on civil wars. Misra concludes that these interventions are often problematic but may sometimes be helpful when they are multilateral, combine diplomacy with threats of force, and are undertaken early in the conflict process. Misra links intervention to the process of nationalism and argues that nation-building is extremely difficult and costly.

The final three chapters deal with postwar society. First, Misra seeks to identify which factors contribute to the emergence of postwar democracy and power-sharing. He warns that the pathways of reconciliation can generate new revolts and racist ideologies. Second, Misra assesses the choice between “punish, pardon, or amnesia” as postwar reconciliation measures and advocates truth-seeking and limited retribution. Finally, Misra suggests