

## Securing Security in Education:

### The Role of Public Theology and a Case Study in Global Jihadism

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#### Abstract

The article mounts an argument for public theology as an appropriate if not vital adjunct to contemporary education's addressing of security issues in light of current world events with indisputable religious and arguably quasi-theological foundations. It will briefly expound on the history of thought that has marginalized theology as a public discipline and then move to justify the counter view that the discipline, at least in the form of public theology, has potential to address matters of such public concern in a unique and helpful way. The article will culminate with an exploration of Global Jihadism as a case study that illustrates the usefulness of public theology in understanding it better and so allowing for a response with potential to be more informed and security-assured than is commonly effected.

#### Introduction

Graeme Ward (2000) and David Ford (2011) proffer that theology is an archetypal cross-disciplinary discipline, arguably one needed more than ever in a complex and intricately interconnected world characterized by, among other things, religious tensions, misunderstandings and conflicts. Ward and Ford are, in many ways, echoing the sentiments of John Henry Newman's justification of theology as the centrepiece discipline for a university curriculum. For Newman (1921, 1927), this had nothing to do with theology as a proselytizing mechanism, or what he would describe as "illiberal theology". In contrast, "liberal theology", as he referred to his favoured form, offered a cross-disciplinary balance for other disciplines in its primary concern as a discipline aimed principally and undistractedly at the pursuit of truth. The inference is two-fold: understood this way, theology is not merely a religious tool but one that sheds light on human knowing in general; furthermore, it does not just deal with religious content but moreover has potential to address matters in the public square in a unique way. In that sense, theology is in part a public discipline, or what I refer to here for the sake of emphasis as "public theology". The article will expound on the nature and bounds of public theology, as found in the literature, and then move to explore both the changing circumstances that have opened up space generally for this kind of theological consideration and, specifically, the case study of Global Jihadism as a contemporary phenomenon that requires the kind of analysis that

public theology can offer in order to maximize its understanding and facilitate an optimal response.

### **The History and Grounds of Public Theology**

Newman's concern in the nineteenth century was that the universities generally were turning overly to the pursuit of training across the disciplines and emerging professions; in other words, too many disciplines were being consumed by an "illiberal" expedient, to borrow from his terminology. While accepting the inevitability of an element of this in the modern university, influenced as it was by the revolutions of industry and the rise of the professions, he saw public theology, as re-defined here, as the kind of discipline that could serve as something of a bulwark by its insertion into other disciplines and their degree programs so to serve as a balance against any excessive trend towards training imperatives; for Newman (1927), this kind of theology was the supreme liberal discipline that captured best the essence of the university's distinctive purpose as "... a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected." (p. 472)

Newman was a polymath in the way of the ancient Persians and Greeks (Ker 2009). He was grounded in the philosophies and theologies from their world through to his own contemporary one and all points in between, being as familiar with Origen, Clement and the ancient Persians and medieval Arabs as he was with Newton, Bacon and Locke (Newman 1979). Above all, and in many ways guiding his every scholarly step, however, was Aquinas (1948) of whom he said "... (he) *evinces the most masterly command over the whole subject of theology.*" (Newman 2013, Preface) What Newman found in Aquinas was the integral link between knowing and doing, between the mystical and the practical. In other words, Aquinas's theology was for worldly exploration, rather than being merely about religious content, in the narrowest sense. It was a theology that possessed what Habermas (1972) would describe as *praxis* focus; its end was in practical action for good, for making things better, including, for Aquinas and Newman, in our understanding of God and to what action God is calling us.

Newman treated Aquinas as the virtual Renaissance scholar well before his time, one that Newman himself characterized so well. Aquinas had, rarely for a Christian scholar of his day, learned much from medieval Islamic scholarship, including from the intellectual giant, al-Farabi (1968), for whom God was not the distant reality often assumed in the three Abrahamic faiths but a transcendent reality that was nonetheless necessarily involved in the real world,

both natural and social. Similarly, Aquinas learned from al-Ghazali (1999), the spiritual giant and partial architect of Sufism, whose emphasis was on Islam's theology being essentially a natural one, not requiring an institutional mediator, and its piety a practical one, spelled out perfectly in Islam in the Five Pillars of Faith. Both Farabi and Ghazali played a part in re-directing Aquinas's thinking towards his signature theology, one that blended holiness and practical action in the world as one. In turn, these ideas influenced Newman in his theological posturing, one that in so many ways has provided public theology with its grounding in the wider theological tradition and that, furthermore, has been utilized specifically in informing contemporary scholars in public theology.

Brock Bingaman (2015), for instance, makes connections between Newman and Jurgen Moltmann's (2016) public theology when he sees in Newman 'a recovery of the ancient sense that beliefs ... can be measured in a practical sense by the shaping effect they have on the lives and consciousness of a believing community and its members.' Hence, public theology's main concern is with applying theological analysis and method, or what Habermas (1972) would describe as a 'way of knowing', to the realities of the world, to matters in the public square and facilitate an optimal response to their practical challenges. In similar fashion, Max Stackhouse (2004) describes public theology as one that insists:

...that theology, in dialogue with other fields of thought, carries indispensable resources for forming, ethically ordering and morally guiding the institutions of religion and civil society as well as the ... persons in these various spheres of life. (p. 275)

Public theology is therefore shorthand for "theology in the public square". While profoundly informed by scripture and tradition, it can be contrasted with purely academic theology in proffering that theology is ultimately about achieving certain practical ends, including understanding and action (Paeth 2005; Graham 2013). It also stands against the notion that theology is mainly concerned with internal religious doctrines and institutional justifications but is, rather, essentially directed to the world, its good order, harmony and wellbeing (Moltmann 2016). It has decided synergy with Newman's notion on liberal theology as a lynchpin discipline in the public curriculum.

Public theology also has synergy with Aquinas (1948) and his Muslim mentors, for whom there was no knowing of God to be had without knowing the world that God had created. His

theological efforts were directed towards gaining optimal understanding of the natural and social order in order to know the God who lay behind them. This led him to apply his theological lens to the Cosmos as known at the time, to earthly creation in all its life forms and to the social world in all its differences, religious and otherwise. In this sense, Aquinas is an archetypal public theologian, deeply grounded in scripture and tradition but constantly directing his inspiration and insights to the world in its vastness, complexity and mystery.

Public theology stands effectively as a critique of both secular and institutional religious dispositions in scholarship of the past century or so. The secular disposition has tended to marginalize theology as an anachronistic and inauthentic discipline owing to its alleged monopoly by institutional religion and hence its gravity towards closing rather than opening minds. This disposition typically has contrasted theology as a closed discipline with the sciences as open and probing ones, disciplines that are freed from authoritarianism and disposed only to open exploration. Furthermore, science as a provider of certainty is contrasted with theology as a purveyor of mythology; science is founded on the sure knowledge that emanates from empirical methodology, while theology's content fails every empirical test. Meanwhile, in this contest of ideas, the institutional religious disposition has tended to draw theology into its own internal domain, rendering it as little more than a tool for intra and inter-institutional polemics, so in a sense confirming further the secular notion that theology has little to offer to the modern learner.

Against both the secular and institutional religious dispositions described above, public theology represents a modern-day attempt to recover the ancient tradition of theology as a vigorous participant among the disciplines of knowledge, offering a distinctive way of understanding the world in its natural and social order and as a powerful motivator of human action directed to harmony and wellbeing in this worldly order. From a public theology perspective, we might well say "theology is not for the church; theology is for the world." We might well add "public theology is for good and holistic education".

So we come to a time that, on the one hand, sees the sciences setting renewed limits on their own self-understanding and so opening up space for a revisionist look at the place of theology while, on the other hand, there are dire challenges in the public square, including ones pertaining to security, that seem to call for the kind of appraisal that public theology might be in a position to offer. Taking each of these in turn below.

## A New Space for Theology?

Far from the apparently assured stability of the “laws” that governed the sciences with which Newman had to contend, scientists now speak freely of the chaotic state of many earlier scientific assumptions (Kalatnikov and Kamenshchik 2004). Against earlier notions about the assured empirical measurability of the universe, astrophysics now routinely refers to the near impossibility of measuring a world expanding rapidly into what might conceivably be infinity (Schmidt 2004; Bhathal 2012; Templeton 2016). It is not uncommon, especially among contemporary cosmologists, to find a far greater tolerance of the interface between scientific and religious understandings, including those pertaining to Indigenous beliefs, and indeed how the latter often prepared the way for the former in science’s formative stages (Cox 2015; Lovat 2018). Schrijver and Schrijver (2015) outline the latest findings about the human body’s connections to the life cycles of the earth, planets and stars, an understanding much closer to Indigenous beliefs than those that have obtained for much of the past century or so. Similarly, newfound knowledge about the DNA that humans have in common with all living things, including plant life (Williams, 2015), confirms many of the beliefs of the ancients, over and against much of the human supremacism thesis that has accompanied an element of evolutionary science since the discoveries of Darwin.

Other scientists, including neuropsychologists, freely employ the language of “spiritual intelligence” (Beauregard and O’Leary 2007; Beauregard and Paquette 2008; Emmons 2000, 2003; Sternberg 2004; Zohar and Marshall 2001), “moral intelligence” (Bulkeley 2005) and even “mystical consciousness” (Mayer 2000) in referring to renewed insights into the workings of the brain. At the same time, philosophers addressing modern scientific insights show renewed interest in concepts to be found in the natural theology of Aquinas, not for its God-believing assumptions but for its method that is proffered by some to be potentially more consistent with and useful to the needs of modern science than the methods even of Newton or Descartes (Oliver 2005).

Meanwhile, the political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben (2011; Dickinson 2011), labels European civilization as a theological economy underpinned by a theology of governance, suggesting that Europe’s ongoing challenge is that it has lost the language and literacy to understand its own theological foundations. In similar fashion, the neo-Marxist social

theorist, Habermas (2002), has moved in later writings to a more accommodating appreciation of the role that religion and theology can play as distinctive ways of knowing (Adams 2006). He is careful to distinguish between these as academic pursuits and anything that churches or formal religious bodies might like to claim as their own. At the base of Habermas's work, lies not a concern about the content of theology but an abiding interest in it as a potential way of knowing. In the end, his focus on theology is that it might well offer distinctive insights and understanding about ourselves and our world that we might not come to through other disciplines. As a practical example of the Habermasian thesis, Christopher Andrew (2017), official historian to MI5, suggests that many of the mistakes that Western security and intelligence have made in the Middle East are owing to a lack of theologically-informed intelligence, especially about Islam. The inference is that we missed the Arab Spring, the birth of ISIS and the Gulf Crisis, as instances, and then engaged in uninformed and miscalculated strategies in dealing with them, partly because we did not understand the theological matrices and fractures of Islam and how these play out both in relations between different sects of Islam and between Islam and the rest of the world. This brings us to the second consideration.

### **Global Security Challenges**

Professor Andrew's concern addresses directly the relevance of a certain kind of theological insight in dealing with global and local security issues, one more germane to education and its priorities than to security agencies as such. While there is a myriad of security issues deserving of attention, Andrew's (2017) postulations are especially pertinent to contemporary concerns around Global Jihadism, Islamist-related Terrorism generally, including Muslim Youth Radicalization, and the ways we understand and deal with these challenges as a society. Hence, to the societal debates around these issues.

At one end, let's call it the "alt-right", we find extremism confronting extremism, a largely poorly informed and/or fearfully inspired tendency to blame all of Islam and all Muslims whenever there is a perpetration of terrorism and that the only solution is for the country that has been terrorized to "ban", "send home" and/or somehow suppress the entire tradition and all its followers. Western countries have been beset by this form of extremism, especially since 9/11, and it has become a ready and often effective theme for populist media and politicians, gaining significant traction in the wider community (Murphy et al. 2015). Arguably, this points in part to poor education about Islam and, if so, to an educational issue that could fairly

easily be addressed with enhanced prioritizing of courses in religion and theology, especially public theology as defined herein, at school and post-school formal levels and through media and community-based, informal education.

At the other end, let's call it the "alt-left", we find a more nuanced but perhaps equally uninformed response that takes the form of denying that Jihadism, terrorism and Muslim radicalization have anything to do with Islam, indeed with religion at all (Zanetti 2014; Hayward 2015). No doubt, much of this "political correctness" is well-intentioned, wishing to spare the major portion of the Muslim population from blame and vilification from the likes of the "alt-right", as described above. Nonetheless, one suspects there might well be another, perhaps more subtle but equally blinding informational and educational issue at play. In this case, it may well be germane to the discussion above about the dominance of a certain kind of scientific/ social scientific set of assumptions and the concomitant de-prioritizing of religion and theology that ensued.

In a word, especially among the intellectual classes, there is a dominant belief that religion is at best a private matter, and theology of any kind therefore of no relevance to matters in the public square. Generations have been trained to consider medical, psychological, sociological and other scientific and social scientific factors and motivators for human action but not religious ones, except where they might intersect with these more "credible factors", such as in the case of religious paranoia or the like. Therefore, that an otherwise normal young man or woman could be motivated by religious beliefs and/or certain forms of scriptural theology to engage in acts of terrorism is an unfamiliar and somewhat mystifying notion, a phenomenon for which their education has simply not prepared them. Religion is the phenomenon they have been trained to believe to be at best a private matter, not a serious issue for public consideration, conversation, debate or indeed motivation of human action in and of itself. As such, it would be not only politically incorrect to "blame" Islam for the aberrations of the likes of the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) but, moreover, the very idea that religion, indeed Islamic theology, is in fact part of what needs to be understood if such aberrations are ever to be managed would run counter to all the assumptions of their education and training (Rane et al. 2010; Nawaz 2016a). Nawaz (2016b) is adamant that the notion that Global Jihadism has "nothing to do with Islam" effectively betrays the majority of Muslims: 'If Islamism has "nothing to do with Islam", there is nothing to discuss within Islamic communities. In this way, we surrender the debate to extremists, who meanwhile discuss Islam with impunity.'

Contrary to the view that Jihadism has nothing to do with Islam, Abu al-Baghdadi's infamous speech at the mosque in Mosul in 2014, the veritable launch of the ISIS scourge by this self-styled Caliph of Islamic State, offers a case study that illustrates how deeply embedded in such discourse is Islamic theology. To the allied security forces, the speech was a mystery, though not to Iranian security that seemed to possess the theologically-informed intelligence that the West lacked (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015). The ISIS fighters had previously been considered part of the coalition fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, a venture wholly supported by Western allied forces; in that sense, these fighters had been considered to be "on our side". So why they were turning on many of the fellow Muslims who had also been fighting against Assad, as well as denouncing and attacking the Western forces that had been assisting them, had Western analysts mystified. Furthermore, the text of Baghdadi's sermon was hard to unravel, with some denouncing it as "gibberish" and others even questioning whether it was truly Baghdadi, granted he was a scholarly man (JTTM 2016). Eventually, it became clear that Baghdadi was drawing on a deep historical theological tradition in Islam inspired especially by the Abbasid caliphate that had sparked an 8<sup>th</sup> century revolution in Islam, directed heavily against Shi'ism and other allegedly "infidel" forms of Islam (al-Tabari 1985; Kennedy 2004; Mishra 2016). Furthermore, it was claimed that Baghdadi's own inspirational figure was Abu as-Saffah, the first Abbasid Caliph, otherwise known as "the Butcher" for the blood spilled in the Abbasid establishment, much of it Shi'ite blood (Moussawi 1995), making it understandable that Iran, as a predominantly Shi'ite state, would be alert to the nature of the speech and the theologically-inspired ideology sitting behind it. According to legend, as-Saffah had given a speech in the same Mosul mosque in launching the Abbasid Caliphate, although the site was more likely to have been Kufa (Kennedy 2004).

Against this background, Baghdadi's Mosul sermon was replete with historical theological significance and only able to be analysed successfully through the lens of this kind of intelligence, amply demonstrating the wisdom of Andrew's (2017) reference to such intelligence above. Furthermore, Baghdadi's recourse to theology was not merely of a general nature but specifically to the core of the Islamic theological tradition through generous reference to the Qur'an. He proffered to be making reference to it, complete with chapter and verse, albeit skewed and misplaced on many occasions, 126 times throughout a roughly 40 minute sermon. For instance, he purported to cite Sura 4, verse 74, when he said:

We fight in obedience to Allah and as a means of coming closer to Him. We fight because He – the Glorified – commanded us to fight ... promising us one of two good ends (death or victory) ... he who fights in the cause of Allah and is killed or achieves victory – We will bestow upon him a great reward (Baghdadi 2014).

In fact, a reputable translation of the verse reads as follows: ‘Let those who wish to sell the life of this world for the Hereafter fight in the Path of Allah; and who so fights in the Path of Allah and is killed or attains victory, We shall bestow upon him a great reward’ (Saffazadeh 2009, pp. 152-153). This is not in fact the call to slaughter innocents that Baghdadi infers; far from it! Understood in its context, it is a call to defend innocents who were themselves being subjugated by the enemies of Islam (Ali 2002, p. 217). Moreover, any call to Jihad has to be understood against the persistent contrasting to be found in the Qur’an between the Path of Allah and the Path of Satan, a contrasting only two verses away (Sura 4:76). It is the Path of Satan to be waging war against innocents, while it is the Path of Allah to be fighting for what is good, including the internal struggle of the faithful Muslim, a veritable fight with oneself in conforming to Allah’s ways. The true Jihad is an internal war that renders external conflict as potentially an inherent distraction and threat (Lewis 1991; Bonner 2008; Esposito 2014). To engage wilfully in the slaughter of innocents, as Baghdadi’s followers did, could only be interpreted by the most informed commentaries as a fundamental rejection of Islam, a veritable turning away from Allah.

Furthermore, in suggesting he is citing Sura 60, verse 2, Baghdadi says:

O Muslims, return to the Book of your Lord ... in order to learn the reality of this war and this Jewish-Crusader- (Shi’a) coalition led by America and planned by the Jews ... those who disbelieve and want you to disbelieve. (Baghdadi 2014)

Setting aside the strange coalition imputed between the Shi’a (principally Iran), the Jews (essentially Israel) and America (an imputation again only able to unravelled through reference to the historical theological tradition), Sura 60:2 actually reads as follows: ‘If they gain any chance against you, they will treat you with hostility and will stretch out their hands and their tongues against you; and they are eager to turn you to disbelief’ (Saffazadeh 2009, p. 1043), which clearly could be referring to any situation and, one can be certain, is not referring to America, yet unknown for at least seven centuries at the time of writing.

In a word, Baghdadi tailored very carefully his sermon to appear as though the message was coming directly from Allah and the Islamic tradition when, in fact, evidence would suggest it was coming from him and his own partisan agenda, one deeply rooted in Islamic theological history, albeit spurred on by contemporary events. Granted Baghdadi is indisputably a scholar, one can be certain he knew exactly what he was doing, including relying, in terms of his audience, on skills of analysis and understanding of the Qur'an and the tradition that were significantly inferior to those that he himself possessed. In this sense, his motives can be interpreted as disingenuous and the entire argument mounted that this kind of Jihadism actually has nothing to do with Islam per se, Islam being rendered merely a pawn in the quest of an angry and dislocated individual and/or cause. Hence, the position of the "alt-left" as proffered above. Nonetheless, I would argue that this misses the point. Baghdadi knew well that the kind of scriptural theology, albeit skewed in many ways, that he spruiked would serve as the prime motivator for the actions he wished to impel. He knew his audience, including its level of theological prowess or lack thereof, and he knew it was the citing of the Qur'an, as the ultimate theological authority, that would stir the will and violent behaviour of its members. Possessing a measure of theologically-informed intelligence, as Andrew (2017) suggested, is therefore an essential element in understanding and responding to this kind of Jihadism.

In another example, the Kouachi brothers, the Charlie Hebdo assailants, vowed to die as martyrs (Vidon and Stanglin 2015). According to reports of those who were being held hostage at the time, they claimed that the whole attack had been an act of "vengeance for the Prophet", they spared one of the hostages who agreed to read the Qur'an and they prayerfully recited the first chapter of the Qur'an before heading out to certain death (BBC 2015). Thereby, again, it seems undeniable that a version of Islamic theology and faith was playing some part in their actions. Similarly, note the "redaction scandal" when Omar Mateem's 911 call just prior to the 2017 Orlando attack was amended to delete the words 'I pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; may God protect him [in Arabic], on behalf of the Islamic State' (Durden 2016), this being done apparently to create some perceived distance between the act and its Islamist motivation.

In yet another example, Farhad Jabar, a 15 year-old boy responsible for killing a police employee in Sydney in October, 2015, and subsequently killed in turn by the police, was found to have been radicalized, along with his sister Shadi who had escaped the day before to become

an ISIS bride in Syria (Ralston, Benny-Morrison and Olding 2015). Later investigations revealed the influence of Jihadist recruiters, both face-to-face and via social media. Among the former was Talal Alemeddine, subsequently jailed for supplying the gun to Jabar (AAP 2018). Figures implicated in social media recruitment, directly or indirectly, included renowned Jihadists, Mohammad al-Barayei, Abu Khaled al-Cambodi and Abu al-Suri, the ISIS “social media star”, whose multiple social media recruitment discourses include the following:

We Muslims are God’s chosen people who are meant to rule the earth but ... if things continue as they are, the Ummah’s religious and cultural identities – and possibly its very being – are under the threat of extinction. This is because the Crusader-American-Zionist-West wants to occupy and subjugate us and our apostate Arab and Islamic governments are their accomplices. The Ummah must wake up and join the Jihadist vanguard elite to defend itself and reclaim its God-given right to rule the earth. Let no-one say ‘there is nothing we can do about it, we can only accept our fate’; the prophecies have destined us for greatness. (Zackie 2013, p.15)

Similar connections are to be found in the case of Tamim Khaja, an 18 year old arrested in May, 2016, for plotting terror attacks around Sydney (Olding 2016). Khaja had attended a good high school in an affluent part of Sydney, with a background that did not fit many of the normal assumptions made about the motives behind radicalization of this kind. Nonetheless, there were early signs of radicalized potential, so he was placed into one of the Australian Government sponsored “de-radicalization programs” during the later years of high school. The de-radicalization venture resides within a broader “Countering Violent Extremism” initiative as part of a “Living Safe Together Grants Programme” (Australian Government 2013). Its viability and effectiveness are questioned in both academic circles and the popular press (Le Grand 2015; Akbarzadeh 2013; Lovat 2017). The main focus is on identifying “youth at risk” in order to intervene with a program built principally around counselling. Personnel include mainly psychologists, social workers and general school counsellors, with religious leaders occasionally drawn in.

Akbarzadeh (2013), for one, has been critical of the program because the assumptions around motivation tend to be limited to those that might apply more generally to youth disaffection and alienation. His argument is relevant to the point being made in this article that, in general terms, the issue is not seen as a religious one, least of all one that might draw on theologically-informed intelligence, even when postings and discourse generally would seem

to be patently religiously-inspired, such as seen in the al-Suri discourse above. It is generally considered better that intervention be non-disruptive to classroom learning, so prohibiting any attempt to deal with the issue through religious education. The pattern is for the targeted youth to be withdrawn from the normal classroom curriculum in order to receive one-on-one counselling and/or occasional religious instruction, in the latter case from someone like a “trusted” Imam. While trusted by the authorities, the Imam might well not be trusted by the youth; he might even represent a disposition in Islam that is in the youth’s sights, so in a sense exacerbating the problem. In a word, theologically-informed intelligence seems more often than not to be absent in the assumptions behind and effecting of the program. Some Muslim communities have become so disenchanted with the Government program that they have taken to running their own informal and unfunded initiatives in an attempt to address the problem more formidably (Dingle 2015).

At Khaja’s trial in 2017, Justice Des Fagan presided. In spite of undergoing an apparently successful de-radicalization process at school, Khaja had nonetheless tried to leave the country soon afterwards in order to join the fight with ISIS in Syria. He was stopped and had his passport confiscated. It was then that he turned to his deadly local plan. After many months and mounting evidence, he finally pleaded guilty. In summing up the case for the defence, Khaja’s counsel pleaded that his sentence should be lightened, granted that he had admitted guilt and, furthermore, had agreed to undertake a further de-radicalization program. Fagan pointed out strenuously that he had already been through such a program and that it had clearly achieved nothing, suggesting it was doubtful that another one would achieve any more. He put it to the counsel and others present that Khaja was driven principally by “religious zeal”, rather than by the motivators normally assumed to underpin radicalization. What to do about that was the pressing issue for all involved (AAP 2017). Again, the incident is effectively another dimension of the issue identified by Andrew (2017), namely one that concerns, at least in part, theologically-informed intelligence and its bearing on security.

Lisa Worthington’s (2016) work around the discursive space offered by the internet for Muslims of all persuasions to create a “re-imagined Ummah” and Remy Low’s (2016) notion of ISIS pedagogy’s aims towards “making up the Ummah” are relevant to the argument being made here. In the cases represented by the Baghdadi and Suri discourses above, ones that have been instrumental in fuelling Jihadist violence at global levels in recent times, the

imaginary Ummah they create is a malevolent one bent on destruction of anything that stands in the way of establishing the “Islamic State”. This so-called promised Caliphate is an imaginary construct built entirely around a theologically interpreted “history” (Lovat and Moghadam 2017). Without understanding the theology sitting behind it, one is blinded in attempting to deal with these issues, including in being able to identify the misconstructions and alleged dupe of imagination that underpins much of the Jihadist strategy.

Admittedly, Jihadist discourse of this kind might appeal to young Muslims who are struggling with psychological and socially-related issues but, as suggested by the cases noted above, it has a wider appeal to many who would seem not to be victims of such circumstances and, instead, to simply be religiously motivated. This, it seems, was Justice Fagan’s point, a phenomenon that Andrew (2017) suggests bespeaks a certain blind spot in the conceptual apparatus of our intelligence infrastructure, and which, also as he suggests, could be addressed through theological insights. Here is another more sophisticated and comprehensive role for public theology of the type outlined above, in this case one that would extend beyond the normal bounds of formal and informal education to be included more generally in the training of intelligence and security personnel, and specifically in preparing personnel to deal with the de-radicalization process.

### **Public Theology in Islamic Space**

Gibril Haddad (2012), Jonathan Brown (2014), Mohammad al-Yaqoubi (2015), Shabbir Akhtar (2018) and Ed Husain (2018) represent a small sample of the many scholars whose work is aimed, at least in part, at greater understanding of Islam midst a time when Global Jihadism is becoming its most recognizable face. While different in themselves, written from the inside and outside, as it were, they have in common a deep appreciation of Islamic theology and history. Haddad’s work encompasses digging deeply into the theological tradition to see how, even from earliest times, misconstructions, mistranslations and unhelpful re-imagining of the sources was common (cf. al-Qari 2013). In similar fashion, Brown’s work has focussed in part on exploring forgeries and assorted interpretations that occurred in the establishment period of Islam and how they continue to play out today. Meanwhile, Yaqoubi, who comes from a long line of Muslim scholars, has been particularly active in opposing and exposing the theological fallacies in prominent Jihadists, including especially Baghdadi. Akhtar employs a critical exploration of core Christian sources, principally St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, as a way of illustrating the potential points of

connection between his and the Christian faith, pointing out well along the way the inherent iniquities in the perspectives of the violence-prone Jihadists that have been a presence in Islam from its earliest days. In its own way, it is a work of public theology, albeit one deeply rooted in the inspirational scriptures. Meanwhile Husain's work offers a painstaking analysis of Islamic theology, past and present, and how it is playing out both benevolently and malevolently in the current era. Works from scholars such as these can only serve to confirm what "theologically-informed intelligence" might look like and how remarkably short-sighted are attempts to deal with Jihadism in the absence of this form of public theology.

An especially important Muslim scholar who has brought a rigorous form of public theology to bear in exposing the aberrations of the Jihadists is Mohamed Talbi (1967, 1995, 2002, 2011, 2015; Talbi & Jarczyk 2002), who died in 2017 at the age of 95. Talbi specialized in Qur'anic interpretation and critical scriptural scholarship around other inspirational sources of Islam to show how unfounded and skewed are the claims of the Jihadists, especially when they construct their "re-imagined", violence-prone Ummah as representing a return to Islam's origins. The importance of Talbi's scholarship is especially in the fact that he draws on the same sources and alleged theologies as employed by the Jihadists but uses them to proffer a position that is fundamentally opposed to their own. In direct contrast with the Jihadist disposition towards exclusivism and violence towards any who oppose their discourse, Talbi (1995) projects his own view of Islam as, when properly understood, an ideal contender for leadership in inclusive interfaith dialogue:

... we can think of the whole of mankind as a brotherly 'community of communities' – or God's Family as the Hadith states – in which everyone has the right to be different, to be accepted, and fully respected in his chosen differences. (p. 61)

Ronald Nettle (1999) interprets Talbi's utilization of the tradition in the following way:

The Qur'an, as basis and foundation of the whole structure, is Talbi's ultimate source. He sees in his theory of pluralism a "modern" idea from the depths of revelation. Despite his obvious debt to modern thought, Talbi's point of departure is from within the sacred text and its early historical context. (p. 106)

Hence, for Talbi, the original Ummah was a place given to and promoting of pluralism and tolerance, not at all like the Ummah imagined by Baghdadi and the Jihadists. Such a liberating Islamic theology is clearly of huge importance in the quest to address and finally

pacify Jihadism. Amidst his methodological procedures are what Talbi referred to as a “vectoral method” of reading the Quran (al-Dakkak 2012). The vectoral method is one of reading for the *maqasid*, the essential message that lies behind the narrative. In Talbi’s (2015) own words:

(The reader) ...must pay attention to the intended meanings of the Holy Book and the aims of Shari’a, rather than their literal presentation. The reader must utilize their God-given right to interpret the text in order to plumb the depth of the meanings therein. (p. 23)

In contrast with the Jihadist interpretation, Talbi (1995) shows how the same sacred sources, when read vectorally, offer a completely obverse message:

The dialogue with all people of all kinds of faiths and ideologies is from now and onwards strictly and irreversibly unavoidable . . . . Human fulfillment is in community and relationship. And this is written in the Qur’an . . . If this can be admitted . . . we can think of the whole of humankind as a “community of communities”—or God’s Family as the Qur’an and Hadith state—in which everyone has the right to be different, to be accepted, and fully respected in their chosen differences. To respect others in their chosen and assumed differences—not just to tolerate them on point of pain—is finally to respect God’s Will. (pp. 56-69)

Talbi saw in the Islamic inspirational narrative an inherent inclusiveness and therefore proffers that Islam should be a world leader of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, in complete opposition to the image promoted by the Jihadists. He employed a form of public theology, similar to Aquinas in the sense that it was rooted deeply in the tradition yet speaks to contemporary events, to matters in the public square. He utilized this theology to illustrate that, on balance, Islam represented one of the great reforming movements of the medieval world, building societies where peoples of all faiths, including especially Jews, Christians and minority Muslims, could live safely and thrive together for the common good. His understanding of the history highlighted the instances where a Muslim empire was protecting its non-Muslim subjects and the intellectual circles were engaging in scholarship with different religious creeds and cross-pollinating with their beliefs in theological conversations (Lovat and Crotty 2015). He proposed that it is an important, indeed urgent, need to educate youth, especially vulnerable Muslim youth, about these realities in order to challenge both the tabloid stereotype about Islam and the radical Islamist’s calls to Jihadism as a “Holy War”.

Islamic scholarship of Talbi's species is at the forefront of challenging the relative ease with which Jihadist discourse has become the Islamic stereotype, something that Talbi saw as betraying profound ignorance, including theological ignorance, about Islam. For him, this ignorance is currently robbing the world of one of the forces, namely Islam, that could assist most effectively in dealing with twenty-first century challenges.

## Conclusion

The article has mounted an argument for public theology as an appropriate if not vital adjunct to contemporary education in light of current world events concerned with security, events with indisputable religious and arguably quasi-theological foundations. It has expounded on the history of thought that has marginalized theology as a public discipline and then moved to justify the counter view that the discipline, at least in the form of public theology, has potential to address matters of public concern, most especially security issues, in a unique and helpful way. The article then explored Global Jihadism as a case study that illustrated the usefulness of public theology in understanding it better and so allowing for a more informed response than is commonly effected.

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