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Frost's "A History of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim Perspectives on War and Peace" - Book Review

Jiseok Jung
Hanshin University, Korea

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FROST, J. William, *A History of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim Perspectives on War and Peace*. Volume 1, *The Bible to 1914* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), pp. xii + 520, ISBN 0-7734-6561-8, Hardback, \$139.95, £84.95.

This book deals with the influence of religions on peace and war in the world. A peace historian, Professor Frost explores the five major religions' ideas of peace and war, the influence of Greek and Roman ideas of war on Western thought and the development of beliefs about war and peace in Euro-American traditions from the middle ages to the early twentieth century. He analyses various reasons why religion is involved in war and in doing so suggests a way in which religions can contribute to peace.

During the nuclear crises of the 1960s, Professor Roland H. Bainton wrote *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* in which he dealt with Western Christian history from the perspectives of peace and war. His book provided historical sources for a critical reflection on just war theory as an ethical imperative in the nuclear age. Professor Frost expands Bainton's historical survey much further in today's context. While Bainton's work reflected upon the nuclear crisis, Frost recognises the spiritual and moral problem of religions instigating war and violence. The terrorism of September 11 and the retaliation wars of America were both religiously supported

and maintained. Other wars and conflicts in the post-cold war era, such as ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe, massacres in African countries, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Sri Lankan civil war and many others have been entangled with religions. Frost's book provides a historical reflection on the interaction between religion and war.

Does religion have a pro-war inclination *per se*, or does it become involved in war as a political means? Frost analyses the Scriptures as original sources of religious faith and practice, and finds that there is an affinity between religion and war. The Hebrew Scriptures, which are shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, teach that Yahweh is God of war, and in doing so foster religion's positiveness towards war. These three religions each have a belief in 'holy war'. This is why the three religions become frequently involved in war, and why their countries fight each other ceaselessly. However, religions are not war-makers. Rather war must be seen within the interrelationship between politics and religion, which is a main factor in explaining religion's involvement in war. Frost's historical research shows how concepts of politics and religion are entwined with each other when it comes to wars. Political powers use religion to justify wars; conversely, religious powers use political power in order to maintain material and religious interests such as properties, self-defense and religious expansion. Christianity maintains a separation from politics while Islam supports a merger of politics and religion. Although the two religions take different stances in relation to politics, their historical appearance in wars is not seen much differently. Nevertheless, Christianity seems to be more flexible than Islam in attitudes to politics. Frost's book demonstrates that it is through their close connection to politics that religions become involved in war.

On the other hand religions can contribute to peace-making through peaceful influence on politics. This is one of the main points which Frost underlines in this book. Frost provides an example from Buddhism, telling of a time that a Buddhist king abandoned a policy of war because he was influenced by Buddhist ideals of nonviolence. A peacemaking role for religion is feasible and imperative in today's world in which war and violence claiming to be based on religious belief are exploding. According to Frost, religions have the possibility both of justifying war and of working for peace. He discusses the just war theory in which religions provide moral rules to restrain and prevent war. Although Christian just war theorists have emphasized the moral principles of the just war theory, Frost discovers in Euro-American history that just war theory has actually been mainly used to justify war.

Peace is a complex notion. Its achievement often needs war and violence which are contrary to a concept of peace in general. Peace on earth is inevitably incomplete and relative. True and lasting peace can be only achieved in heaven. The religious contribution to peace is in seeking for peace on earth constantly in the light of the true and lasting peace. Frost's book shows that political and religious ideas of peace have diversely flourished in this vision of peace. In his discussion of the development of just war theory and pacifism in the Euro-American traditions, he argues that proponents of the just war theory would claim that they are seeking peace from a realistic perspective that recognises the necessity of war in the world. What Frost is concerned about is how religions can contribute to peace in the world. While

Christian just war theory claims to restrain or prevent war, or to reduce the brutality of war, Frost argues that just war theory has, in fact, mainly functioned to justify wars and it has therefore lost its validity as a Christian ideal of peace. Nonetheless, contemporary Christian ethicists try to strengthen Christian peace-making work through stressing the moral principles of just war theory and it was by using the just war theory that American Bishops, Protestant leaders of America and the Archbishop of Canterbury were able to oppose their governments' military campaign against Iraq. Frost's critical reflection on just war theory seems to be aimed at recovering the peace-making role of religions.

Religion and war are both fundamental factors in determining human behaviour and consciousness. Frost's book, by dealing with the interaction between religion, war, peace and politics, provides a fluent and valuable resource for religious persons, peace scholars and researchers and historians.

Jiseok Jung
Director, Korea Christian Peace Institute
Hanshin University, Korea