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At the end of 1997, former executive editor of the *New York Times*, A.M. Rosenthal confessed "Early this year I realized that in decades of reporting, writing or assigning stories on human rights, I rarely touched on one of the most important. Political human rights, legal, civil and press rights, emphatically often, but the right to worship where and how God or conscience made, almost never." While Rosenthal has changed dramatically on this score, the pattern he describes pervades our culture.

One main cause of our ignorance is what I call "secular myopia," by which I mean "an introverted, parochial inability even to see, much less understand, the role of religion in human life." This myopia is widespread amongst "the chattering classes" and is particularly prevalent amongst journalists and political commentators and analysts.

As Edward Luttwak has written: "Policy makers, diplomats, journalists, and scholars who are ready to over-interpret economic causality, who are apt to dissect social differentiations ever more finely, and who will minutely categorize political affiliations, are still in the habit of disregarding the role of religion in explaining politics and even in reporting their concrete modalities." (*The Missing Dimension of Religion*)

SPEAKERS AND PANELLISTS' PRESENTATIONS

REDEFINING RELIGION

The following presentations were made by various speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of Canadian Jewish Congress.

Religion is also ignored even in day to day description. When in 1997 Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad railed against speculators with the words "we are Muslims, and the Jews are not happy to see the Muslims progress..." the *Los Angeles Times* described him as "race-obsessed." Perhaps the *Times* took it's cue from descriptions of the former Yugoslavia wherein "Bosnian Muslims" and war between Orthodox Catholics and Muslims is routinely described as "ethnic." We now use the term "ethnic cleansing" to describe attacks on Muslims.

Religion as Irrationality

Our press coverage and political analysis has an introverted focus on a type of Enlightenment culture, as though this constituted the common opinion of humankind, or the common opinion of reasonable mankind, or at least the common opinion of Americans. Consequently, movements overseas are assimilated to Enlightenment categories. Hence, Islamic or Hindu militants are described as "right-wing," whatever that might mean. But most such activists have detailed proposals for economic controls of a kind usually thought of as "left-wing." And what is a "right-wing" or "left-wing" view of plans to build a Hindu temple on the site of the Babri mosque or a Jewish Third Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem? Neither of these schemes has anything to do with categories of left and right; their meaning can only be grasped by understanding their religious context. And this is doubly urgent since either of these