Theologies, Empires, Harm, and Their Modern Leftovers

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Introduction

Throughout history, major religious **theologies** and secular **ideologies** have been repeatedly fused with political power to justify imperial expansion, domination, and oppression. From the era of ancient empires through colonial conquests and into the 20th-century totalitarian regimes, rulers have invoked absolutist belief systems to mobilize populations, legitimize wars of conquest, and suppress dissent. The consequences – measured in **conquest, persecution, and cultural upheaval** – often persist long after those empires collapse, leaving *"leftovers"* in the form of modern borders, social hierarchies, legal codes, and inter-group traumas. A core thesis of this report is that the capacity for large-scale harm correlates most with **political scale**, **ideological absolutism**, and **administrative capacity** – not with the specific religion or doctrine in name. In other words, whether the banner is a cross, a crescent, a red star, or a swastika, when a movement gains **unchecked power** and a sense of exclusive divine or ideological mandate, the results have often been devastating.

To understand this pattern, we will examine a range of case studies across both theologies and secular credos, applying a uniform analytical framework. Each case – **Christianity, Islam, the Mongol Empire** (as a non-religious control case), **Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto,** and **Modern Secular Ideologies** (Fascism, Marxism-Leninism, Nationalism, Technocracy) – will be analyzed with equal depth. For each, we cover:

1. **Belief System Overview** – the core ethical and cosmological claims of the religion or ideology;
2. **Imperial or State Adoption** – how it became allied with or captured by state power;
3. **Mechanisms of Expansion** – the means by which it spread (military conquest, administrative policies, economic incentives, missionary or propaganda efforts, etc.);
4. **Harm Profile** – the types of harm perpetrated, evaluated across a consistent set of *harm vectors* (territorial conquest, forced displacement, legal stratification, forced conversion, slavery, sectarian violence, censorship, gender-based violence, cultural erasure, and economic exploitation);
5. **Internal Constraints or Reform Movements** – voices or structures from within that attempted to limit violence or promote ethics, including reformations or resistance;
6. **Collapse or Transformation** – how the empire or regime declined, and how the belief system changed in the aftermath;
7. **Enduring Modern Leftovers** – the lasting legacies in today's world (borders, laws, institutions, or conflicts traceable to that imperial past).

Underpinning our analysis is a four-layer evaluation model that we apply to each case, and a comparative harm matrix of the recurring patterns of violence. We also provide a **master comparative timeline** to contextualize these case studies from ancient times to the present, highlighting how different eras saw different belief-power fusions and their consequences. By

examining such a breadth of cases, we avoid singling out any one tradition as uniquely violent or benign. Indeed, a major finding is the *commonality* of mechanisms: **monopoly on coercive power, absolutist ideology, bureaucratic organization,** and the *dehumanization* of designated "others" are what enable atrocities at scale. Scriptures or manifestos alone do not cause mass violence; it is how leaders wield those texts to mobilize and justify that makes the difference. Conversely, we will also see that many traditions contained seeds of compassion or reform that sometimes mitigated harm (or at least inspired later reckonings against past abuses). The ultimate aim is a nuanced, evidence-based understanding of how both religious and secular belief systems have been harnessed to build empires and inflict harm, and how their legacies still shape our world today – without resorting to apologetics for any faith or blanket blame on any one group.

Analytical Framework: Four Layers and Harm Vectors

1. Four Layers of Evaluation: To systematically compare these disparate cases, we use a four-layer analytical model for how an ideology translates into imperial outcomes:

- **Core Ethical and Cosmological Claims:** What fundamental moral vision or cosmology does the belief system assert? This includes ideas like a universal truth or mission (e.g. the Christian *Great Commission* to evangelize all nations, Islam's concept of a worldwide community under God's law, Marxism's vision of an inevitable classless society). At this layer, we assess how absolutist or exclusive the creed is: for example, does it declare infidels or class enemies who must be overcome, or a manifest destiny for the faithful? These core tenets set the *potential* for intolerance or universal ambition, but by themselves do not cause harm unless harnessed by power.
- **Institutional Architecture:** How is the religion or ideology organized? We examine the structures of authority (church hierarchies, caliphates, priesthoods, party apparatus, etc.) and the development of bureaucracies (inquisition courts, religious police, secret police, propaganda departments). Crucially, strong institutions can enforce orthodoxy and coordinate large-scale action. For instance, the Catholic Church's hierarchy and canon law system gave medieval Christian rulers an administrative grip over society, and the Communist Party's hierarchy in the USSR permeated all social institutions. This layer shows how belief systems gain *organizational power*.
- **State Capture and Empire Function:** At what point does the belief system capture the state (or vice versa) and how does it then function as an ideology of empire? We analyze how an ideology becomes official state policy – e.g. Christianity becoming Rome's state religion under Theodosius in 380 CE, Islam establishing a Caliphate soon after Muhammad's era, Japanese State Shintō in the Meiji Restoration, or a Communist Party seizing control of a country. Once in power, the belief system is used to legitimize rule, mobilize armies, make laws, collect taxes/tribute, and generally to sanctify the empire's agenda. Essentially, this layer examines the political economy of the belief-powered empire: how ideology justifies conquest and administration (e.g. "spreading the true faith" or "liberating the proletariat") and how it helps organize the imperial system (such as dividing subjects by religion or class, or centralizing loyalty around a divine monarch or party leader).
- **Execution Under Power and Technology:** Finally, we consider **how the level of administrative capacity and technology** in each era enabled (or limited) the execution

of mass policies. For example, medieval crusaders or Mongol horsemen could kill tens or hundreds of thousands, but 20th-century regimes with industrial technology and bureaucracy could kill millions (as seen in the Holocaust and Stalin's purges). This layer includes military technologies (steel weapons, gunpowder, modern firearms, bombs, media like radio or social media propaganda) and administrative techniques (censuses and ID systems, railroads for troop and prisoner transport, concentration camps, surveillance). It often explains the *scale* of harm more than the ideology's theology does: e.g. the 20th century's unprecedented genocides were enabled by rail networks and industrialized killing methods, not merely by ideas.

These four layers – **ideology, institution, state power, technology** – together show how an idea can move from scripture or theory into real-world action. A violent line in a holy book or a radical political theory remains inert unless institutions and state actors enforce it, and even fanatical rulers are constrained by what their administrative tools allow. By applying this model to each case, we can better pinpoint *when and how* a belief system crossed from preaching or philosophy into imperial violence.

2. Harm Vector Matrix: We evaluate each case across a consistent set of **harm vectors** – recurring forms of oppression or violence observed in imperial or totalitarian projects. The ten vectors we consider are:

- **Territorial Conquest and Annexation:** Invasion, seizure, and colonization of lands by force. Virtually all empires engage in this, whether justified as *jihad*, *crusade*, *manifest destiny*, *Lebensraum*, or other terms. This involves aggressive wars of expansion.
- **Forced Displacement and Population Transfer:** Mass uprooting of peoples – expulsions, deportations, refugee crises, *Trail of Tears*-type marches, *population exchanges*. Often carried out to cleanse or secure territories (e.g. driving out indigenous inhabitants or moving troublesome minorities).
- **Legal Stratification of Populations:** The creation of formal hierarchies in law – caste systems, second-class subject status (e.g. **dhimmi** laws for non-Muslims under Islamic rule, apartheid regimes, Nazi racial laws). This encompasses any system that codifies superior vs. inferior groups with different rights.
- **Coercive Conversion or Ideological Enforcement:** For religious empires, this means forcing people to adopt the dominant faith (at sword-point or through legal pressure). For secular regimes, it means forcing adherence to the state ideology (loyalty oaths, mandatory party membership, re-education camps, banning alternative beliefs). Essentially, *"convert or die / comply"* policies.
- **Slavery and Forced Labor:** Enslavement or mass coerced labor, including serfdom and human trafficking. Many empires – even while preaching lofty ideals – engaged in enslavement of conquered peoples (from the Atlantic slave trade under Christian colonial powers to gulag labor camps under communists).
- **Sectarian or Ethnic Cleansing:** Deliberate elimination of a targeted group based on religion, ethnicity, or ideology. This ranges from genocide and mass murder (e.g. the Holocaust's extermination of Jews, the Armenian Genocide, Cambodia's killing fields) to pogroms and mass expulsions. It is the extreme outcome of defining an "in-group" vs "demonized out-group."

- **Suppression of Dissent and Free Thought:** Censorship, book burning, imprisonment or execution of critics and heretics, destruction of independent institutions of learning, propaganda monopolies. All absolutist regimes, religious or secular, move to silence opposition and control information.
- **Gender-Based Oppression and Violence:** The institutionalized inequality of women (or other genders/sexualities) and gender-targeted violence. Examples include patriarchal laws (unequal marriage/divorce rights, enforced dress codes, female seclusion), *witch hunts*, mass rapes used as a weapon of war, or forced sterilizations (as seen under some eugenics policies). Many theocratic states enshrined patriarchy, and even secular regimes often manipulated traditional gender norms for control.
- **Cultural Erasure and Identity Suppression:** The destruction or suppression of the language, religion, and heritage of conquered peoples. This includes banning indigenous languages or religions, destroying temples or holy sites (e.g. the destruction of pre-Columbian temples by the Spanish, or of Buddhist monasteries by certain Chinese emperors), forcing assimilation (like residential schools for Native children in Canada). Empire-builders often attempt to remold or erase the identities of those they dominate.
- **Economic Exploitation Justified by Ideology:** Heavy taxation, tribute, resource plunder, or exploitative economic policies framed as morally justified. For instance, colonial powers extracted wealth under the guise of a "civilizing mission"; in Islamist regimes non-Muslims paid extra **jizya** taxes as "infidels"; communist states requisitioned grain causing famine, claiming to build a utopia. The key is the *ideological rationalization* for what is essentially economic plunder.

Not every case hits every vector, but most expansive empires check *most* of these boxes. By using this matrix, we can compare the scope and methods of harm across very different cultures and times in a structured way.

3. Enduring "Leftovers": Finally, we define the *"modern leftovers"* of these historical fusions of belief and power. No empire ends without leaving fragments behind. Some major types of leftovers we will note in each case include:

- **Borders and State Formations:** Imperial conquests often define later national borders. Many modern countries map to former colonies or imperial provinces (for example, the arbitrary borders in the Middle East drawn by European powers after WWI, or the countries of Latin America corresponding to Spanish viceroyalties). Partitioned states (India/Pakistan, Israel/Palestine, etc.) are legacies of imperial deals or withdrawals. These borders sometimes force different groups together or split a culture, seeding conflict.
- **Legal Codes and Institutions:** Laws or government institutions today may descend from the imperial era. For instance, many countries retain legal provisions originally based in religious law or colonial law (such as blasphemy or personal status laws in post-colonial states, or one-party constitutions persisting in "post-communist" regimes). Institutions like state churches, or secret police agencies, can be direct carry-overs or adaptions from the prior regime.
- **Sectarian and Ideological Networks:** Long-lasting organizations or networks formed under the ideology. The Catholic Church is a prime example – it outlasted the European empires that spread it. Similarly, Buddhist sanghas, Islamic madrassas, communist

parties, and nationalist paramilitaries may persist or morph but carry forward influence. Even secular nation-states often inherit bureaucracies and militaries from prior imperial structures.

- **Collective Trauma and Memory:** Groups remember past oppression, and those memories fuel contemporary identity and grievances. Jewish memory of Christian persecution, or Muslim memory of the Crusades and colonialism, or Hindu and Muslim memories of Partition – these historical traumas can drive present-day mistrust or radicalization. Public discourse in many regions is still shaped by reference to centuries-old events (e.g. politicians invoking a "Crusader mentality" or a "Mughal tyranny" to rally supporters).
- **Elite Patronage Networks:** Empires often left behind local elites who had collaborated or benefited. After independence or imperial fall, those elites (or new ones that filled the power vacuum) may continue to dominate. For example, colonial powers frequently ruled through certain ethnic or religious groups who then retained disproportionate power (such as favored Christian minorities in some Middle Eastern French colonies, or high-caste elites in post-British India). In post-communist states, former party officials became the new oligarchs. Such networks can entrench corruption or inequality long after the ideology's demise.
- **Geopolitical Alignments and Conflicts:** Modern international rivalries often trace back to imperial legacies. The Cold War, for instance, left behind proxy conflicts and militarized zones that remain volatile. Many current wars in Africa and Asia have roots in borders or regimes set up by colonialism. Even the **"War on Terror"** in the 21st century can be seen as a leftover of Cold War and imperial interventions that armed certain groups and inflamed ideologies. We'll note cases like the ongoing Sunni–Shia power struggle in the Middle East, which mixes ancient sectarian divide with modern state rivalries (exacerbated by the legacy of the Iranian Revolution and the Saudi-Iran competition).

By examining these leftovers, we underscore that the end of an empire or regime does *not* end its influence. The modern world is profoundly shaped by long-dead empires – sometimes in obvious ways (maps, official languages, global religions) and sometimes in subtle, pernicious ways (stereotypes, unresolved feuds, institutional habits). A key goal of this report is to make those connections clear, as understanding them is vital to addressing contemporary issues without misplacing blame on "innately violent cultures" instead of on historical structures and power imbalances.

Having laid out our approach, we now turn to the case studies. Each case study follows the structure outlined, ensuring a consistent and unbiased comparison. We begin with **Christianity**, not because it is uniquely harmful or important, but because its trajectory from persecuted sect to imperial religion offers a template we'll see echoed (with variations) in other cases.

Christianity: From Persecuted Sect to Imperial *Christendom*

Belief System Overview: *Christianity* originated in the 1st century CE as a small Jewish sect in the Roman Empire, preaching salvation through Jesus Christ. Its foundational ethics emphasize love, charity, and the spiritual equality of all people before God ("there is neither Jew nor

Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" – Galatians 3:28). Early Christians were often *apolitical* or even anti-imperial – the New Testament depicts Jesus saying "My kingdom is not of this world." However, Christianity also carried an *exclusive* truth claim and a universal mission: followers were commanded to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) and believed Jesus was the **sole** path to salvation (John 14:6). This universalism combined with exclusivity meant that, once the religion aligned with state power, it could be used to justify an obligation to *spread the faith everywhere* and to cast other beliefs as false. In the first three centuries, Christians were a persecuted minority under Roman rule, with no worldly power – notable for refusing to worship the emperor as a god, which Romans saw as subversive. Martyrdom stories from this time (e.g. persecution under Emperors Nero or Diocletian) reinforced a self-image of righteous suffering. Paradoxically, the religion's texts also include the Book of Revelation's imagery of cosmic war and a coming Kingdom of God, which later generations would sometimes harness to give crusading zeal a scriptural backing. In short, Christianity's core cosmology is one of *one God, one Savior for all humanity* – a theology of unity and peace on its face, but one that *could* become absolutist when wedded to political ambition (since non-Christians could then be seen as outside the one true faith and even enemies of God).

Imperial Adoption: The turning point came in the 4th century. In 312 CE, Emperor **Constantine** converted (at least nominally) to Christianity, and soon after, the Roman Empire transitioned from persecuting Christians to patronizing them. The Edict of Milan (313 CE) legalized the faith. By 380 CE, under Emperor Theodosius, *Nicene Christianity* was declared the **official state religion** of Rome. This was revolutionary: an empire that had been religiously pluralistic (allowing many gods as long as one worshipped the emperor's genius) now claimed one exclusive religion. The Church hierarchy, which had developed bishops and councils to define orthodoxy, became entwined with the imperial administration. Bishops gained civic authority; heresy became a crime against the state. Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) to help unify Christian doctrine – illustrating the new synergy of imperial power and theological control. Over subsequent decades, laws were enacted closing pagan temples, banning certain ancient religious rites, and privileging the Church. One historian notes that after Theodosius, the empire's motto could be summarized as *"one God, one Emperor, one Empire"*. Thus, **Christendom** was born: the concept of an empire or collection of states united under Christian religion. In the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, the emperor became seen as God's vicegerent on Earth (a **caesaropapist** model). In the West, after Rome's fall, the Church itself (under the Pope) sometimes claimed supremacy even over kings. For example, in 800 CE the Pope crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor, asserting that legitimacy came from the Church. Through the medieval era, the ideal of a unified *Christian commonwealth* persisted, though in practice it was fragmented among many kingdoms. Still, **Christianity functioned as an official ideology of statecraft in Europe**: rulers called themselves *"Most Christian Majesty"* or *"Defender of the Faith,"* and the Church provided administrative services (literate clergy acted as bureaucrats) and moral justification for wars (so long as those wars could be cast as defending or spreading the faith).

Mechanisms of Expansion: Once allied with state power, Christian authorities and monarchs expanded their domain through a combination of **missionary work, political decree, and military force**. In the late Roman Empire and early medieval Europe, *conversion of kings* was a common tactic: for instance, the Frankish king Clovis converted around 496 CE, after which his

whole realm gradually became "Christian." Often, missionaries (like St. Patrick in Ireland or St. Boniface in Germany) prepared the ground, but a king's baptism was pivotal – it meant his subjects were expected to follow. When persuasion failed, however, Christian rulers did not shy from violence. A notorious example is **Charlemagne's Saxon Wars (772–804 CE)**: after decades of battle, Charlemagne defeated the pagan Saxons and then imposed Christianity on them, reportedly beheading 4,500 Saxon prisoners at Verden in 782 for rebelling and refusing baptism. The *Chronicles* say he offered the Saxons the choice of baptism or death. This set a pattern: throughout medieval Europe, the extension of royal domains (e.g. in Scandinavia or Eastern Europe) often coincided with the *eradication of indigenous pagan worship*. The Church sanctified these wars as necessary to save souls (albeit by force).

The **Crusades** represent the apex of overt Christian holy war. Beginning in 1095, the Pope called on knights to reclaim Jerusalem from Muslim control, promising spiritual rewards (indulgences) for those who fought. The First Crusade captured Jerusalem in 1099 amid a bloodbath of its inhabitants (Muslims and Jews were massacred). Crusades were later also directed at heretics in Europe (e.g. the Albigensian Crusade in 1209 against the Cathars in southern France, which one papal legate infamously justified by saying "Kill them all; God will know His own") and against the pagan Slavs and Balts (the **Northern Crusades** led by the Teutonic Knights). These wars fused **religious fervor** with conquest – participants truly believed they were doing God's work by enlarging Christendom, even if it meant mass killing.

In the **Age of Exploration (16th century onward)**, Christian mission and European colonial ambition went hand in hand. Papal bulls like *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Inter Caetera* (1493) explicitly granted Spain and Portugal the right to conquer non-Christian lands and subjugate non-Christian peoples (Ammon, L., 2021). This was the so-called *Doctrine of Discovery*, which provided theological cover for colonialism (Tomchuk, T., 2022). The Spanish conquistadors carried priests with them; before attacking indigenous communities, they would read out *El Requerimiento* (the Requirement), a legalistic declaration in Spanish that the locals must acknowledge the Spanish Crown and accept Christianity or else face war and enslavement. Of course, the Native people usually could not even understand this statement, but the Spaniards used it to claim their aggression was "just." One eyewitness, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, later condemned this practice and the ensuing brutality, noting that conquistadors would wage war and enslave those who "refused the true faith" with complete righteousness in their own minds. Thus, the conversion imperative was used to rationalize extreme violence in the Americas. The English, French, and other Protestant colonizers were somewhat less missionary at first (often more interested in trade and land), but they too often saw indigenous religions as devilish and worked to suppress them, especially in later generations (e.g. the Puritans in New England regarded Native spiritual practices as satanic, and some colonists cited Old Testament wars of Israel to justify exterminating tribes they deemed Canaanites). In Africa and Asia, Christian missionaries typically followed colonization, setting up schools and churches; while some were humane and defended native rights, others reinforced the colonial mindset that European Christian culture was superior and destined to "civilize" others.

In summary, Christianity expanded from a minority faith to a global religion through **state patronage and often state violence**. Key mechanisms included: *missionaries converting elites*, who then imposed the faith on their people; *legal pressures* (outlawing pagan rites, offering tax

breaks for converts, etc.); *education* (church-run schools to inculcate the young); and when deemed necessary, *the sword*. The motto of 19th-century European imperialists was telling: **"Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization"** – implying that spreading the Christian faith was part of a package of bringing European rule and economic exploitation.

Harm Profile: Under *Christendom* and later colonial Christian empires, virtually all the harm vectors were present. We see **territorial conquest** on a massive scale: from the early **Byzantine enforcement** of orthodoxy across the Roman world (closing rival temples) to the **medieval crusaders** capturing lands, to the **global conquests by Catholic and Protestant powers (1500s–1900s)** where Europe, in the name of God and king, subjugated the Americas, Africa, Oceania, and large parts of Asia. Entire civilizations were destroyed or subjugated – for example, the Aztec and Inca Empires fell to Spanish conquerors who believed their victories were ordained by Providence.

Forced displacement occurred in numerous contexts. Within Europe, the religious wars of the Reformation era (16th–17th centuries) caused waves of refugees (e.g. Huguenots expelled from France, Catholics driven out of certain Protestant regions). In the colonial context, indigenous peoples were often driven off their lands; for example, the "*Trail of Tears*" (1830s) saw the removal of the Cherokee and other tribes in the United States by a government steeped in a Christian manifest destiny ideology. The transatlantic slave trade (while primarily economic and racial) was often justified by a twisted narrative that Africans were heathens being given a chance to know Christianity – indeed, enslaved Africans were sometimes force-converted even as they were treated as chattel.

Legal stratification: Christian empires established caste-like systems in many places. In medieval Spain after the Reconquista, **Jews and Muslims** who converted (Moriscos and conversos) were still often suspected and eventually expelled, while those who did not convert lived under discriminatory laws. In European colonies, a person's status often depended on religion and race – for instance, in British India, Christian missionaries pushed for laws ending certain local practices and often had a privileged position; in many colonies only Christians (often of European stock) could hold high office. The *Spanish encomienda* system gave Spanish settlers control over indigenous labor with the pretext of converting and "civilizing" the natives, effectively a feudal slavery justified by religion. In places like French Algeria, **Muslim natives were French subjects, not citizens**, unless they converted to Christianity – a clear legal hierarchy based on faith.

Coercive conversion was frequent. The axiom "Convert or die" is associated with some episodes like Charlemagne's wars or the **Northern Crusades** where pagan Eastern Europeans were given ultimatums. During the Spanish conquest of the Americas, as noted, the *Requerimiento* essentially demanded conversion on pain of war. The Portuguese in Goa (India) and Spanish in the Philippines enforced Catholicism by law, sometimes destroying temples and punishing those who practiced the old religions. The **Inquisition** (both in Europe and the colonies) was an institution dedicated to enforcing orthodoxy – it used torture and execution on those deemed heretics or relapsed converts (e.g. the infamous execution of individuals for *Judaizing* – secretly practicing Judaism – in Spain). Even as late as the 17th century, Catholic

rulers like the Habsburgs in Central Europe or Protestant rulers in places like Scotland cracked down violently on dissenters of the wrong Christian sect.

Slavery and forced labor: Christian scriptures were often interpreted in ways that accommodated slavery rather than condemned it (despite the religion's emphasis on spiritual equality). The transatlantic slave trade was initiated and conducted largely by Christian-ruled nations (Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, Netherlands). Enslaved Africans were often baptized by force; slave owners claimed to be rescuing souls even as they brutalized bodies. Within Europe, while serfdom and slavery had largely died out by the High Middle Ages, new forms of bondage emerged in colonial plantations. Additionally, after the conquest of the Americas, the Spanish forced indigenous people into encomiendas and **Potosí silver mine labor** under horrifying conditions – a system blessed by colonial authorities in the name of church and crown (though some priests like de las Casas objected strenuously on Christian grounds).

Sectarian violence: Europe saw waves of it – the **Crusades** included massacres of Jews (the Rhineland massacres of 1096 were pogroms by crusading mobs); the **Albigensian Crusade** basically genocided the Cathar heretics; the Reformation period brought mutual atrocities (e.g. the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, when thousands of French Protestant Huguenots were killed by Catholics). The **Spanish Inquisition** and expulsion of Jews in 1492 and of Moriscos (Muslims who had ostensibly converted) in 1609 are often labeled acts of ethnic or religious cleansing – about 300,000 Moriscos were expelled, essentially because they were suspected of being crypto-Muslims. In the colonial sphere, Christian versus non-Christian violence was rampant: from the **destruction of indigenous populations** in the Americas (some by disease, but also many by deliberate killing and enslavement) to later conflicts like the Herero genocide of 1904 in German Southwest Africa, perpetrated by a colonial army steeped in notions of racial and Christian superiority.

Suppression of dissent: Christian authorities censored and punished heterodox ideas for centuries. The Church's Index of Forbidden Books and various secular laws criminalizing blasphemy or heresy stifled intellectual freedom. For example, scientist Giordano Bruno was burned in 1600 for heresy; Galileo was forced to recant heliocentrism (1633) as it was deemed against scripture. In Puritan New England, dissenters like Quakers were expelled or hanged (Mary Dyer was executed in 1660 in Boston for defying a ban on Quakers). The Inquisitions famously burned thousands accused of sorcery or heresy. Educational institutions were under Church oversight; secular or non-Christian schools were often not allowed in many countries until modern times. Overall, the unity of church and state in Christendom meant **limited tolerance for divergent views** – a stark suppression of freedom of thought and religion by today's standards.

Gender-based oppression: While Christianity taught spiritual equality of men and women (Galatians 3:28 again, "neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ"), in practice Christian states enforced patriarchy. Women could not hold authority in the Church (no female clergy in Catholic/Orthodox tradition), and secular laws in Christian Europe were deeply patriarchal (coverture laws, etc.). The Church often endorsed these, teaching that women should be obedient and confined to domestic roles. The **witch hunts** (~15th–17th centuries) in Europe, conducted by both church and secular courts, overwhelmingly targeted women (tens of

thousands executed) and can be seen as gendered religious violence fueled by superstition and misogyny. Colonial Christian authorities also sometimes imposed European gender norms on other cultures – for instance, banning polygamy but also enforcing their own modesty codes and marital laws. On the extreme end, *sexual violence* accompanied many Christian conquests – e.g. the rape of indigenous women by conquistadors was common, though not religiously sanctioned, it was part of the broader dehumanization of conquered peoples whom the colonizers saw as "heathens" and thus outside the moral community.

Cultural erasure: Christian empires frequently tried to erase or absorb indigenous cultures. In **Late Antiquity**, Christian emperors destroyed pagan temples and libraries (the famous Library of Alexandria's final destruction is often attributed to this era, and philosophers like Hypatia were killed by Christian mobs). In medieval Northern and Eastern Europe, as pagan tribes converted, their sacred groves and idols were cut down – often by missionaries who saw them as demon-infested. In the Americas, the Spanish and Portuguese demolished native temples, built churches atop sacred sites (e.g. the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City sits atop the ruins of the Aztec Templo Mayor). They outlawed indigenous religions and languages; native codices were burned as "works of the devil." Later, in the 19th–20th centuries, countries like the USA, Canada, and Australia (with Christian majorities and often explicitly Christian rationales) ran **boarding schools** to force-assimilate Indigenous children, suppressing their languages and spiritual practices – a process now recognized as cultural genocide. Even within Europe, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation saw destruction of art and culture (Protestant iconoclasm smashing Catholic statues, and vice versa re-imposing art and ritual to overwrite local folk practices). Thus, cultural repression was a constant side-effect of Christianization campaigns.

Economic exploitation: While not unique to Christian powers, it was often cloaked in religious rhetoric. Spanish conquerors extracted vast wealth (silver, gold) from the New World, justifying it as part of a divine plan to spread Catholicism – for instance, a portion of colonial revenues (the *royal fifth*) went to funding churches and the propagation of the faith, blending economic greed with piety. The **Atlantic slave plantations** generated huge profits for Christian Europe, again rationalized by a mix of religious and racial arguments that Africans were destined to servitude (some even cited the Biblical "Curse of Ham" as justification for Black slavery). In Europe, serfs and peasants toiled under a system justified by a Christian social order (the Great Chain of Being) that presented the nobility's right to tax and labor as God-given. The Catholic Church itself accumulated enormous land and wealth (by some estimates, the Church was the largest landowner in medieval Europe), collected tithes (a mandatory 10% tax on produce), and often did so at the expense of peasantry – this was a factor in later anti-clerical movements. In the colonial context, Christian missionaries sometimes provided *ideological cover* for exploitation: they would encourage "industry and obedience" among converts, which conveniently aligned with colonial labor needs. An example: in the Congo Free State (late 1800s), Christian missionaries were present even as King Leopold II's regime was mutilating and enslaving people for rubber production; some missionaries exposed the atrocities, but others remained silent or focused only on saving souls while economic exploitation raged around them.

In aggregate, Christian empires inflicted great harms, **but it is crucial to note these were not uncontested by Christians themselves**. Christianity's ethical teachings also *inspired internal critiques*, which we turn to now.

Internal Constraints and Reform Movements: Christianity, being a diverse and internally self-critical tradition, generated numerous movements that sought to moderate imperial violence or challenge injustices. For example, the very existence of Christian monastic orders and saints who preached peace (St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century renounced violence and even attempted dialogue with the Sultan during the Fifth Crusade) provided an *internal check* on the ideology of holy war. The **Protestant Reformation** (16th century) initially led to more conflict, but in the long run, it pluralized Christianity, breaking the monopoly of a single church-state complex in Europe. No one sect could as easily dominate all of society thereafter, which eventually forced agreements like the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that introduced the idea of state sovereignty irrespective of religion – effectively, a first step toward secular governance. Within the Catholic Church, reformist voices like Bartolomé de las Casas (mentioned earlier) vehemently opposed the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, invoking Christian ethics to argue for native rights. His efforts contributed to the passage of the New Laws of 1542 in Spain, which (theoretically) outlawed the enslavement of natives – though enforcement was weak, it was a moral victory born from Christian conscience. Another example: in the 18th–19th centuries, the **Abolitionist movement** against the slave trade and slavery was driven significantly by Christian activists (Quakers, evangelical Protestants like William Wilberforce) who argued that slavery was a sin in light of true Christian brotherhood. They mobilized scripture (e.g. the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") to demand an end to the trade. This led to Britain outlawing the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in 1833, and similar movements elsewhere.

Within theology, there were also doctrinal developments that constrained violence: the **Just War theory**, originating with St. Augustine and later Thomas Aquinas, tried to set rules for when war is morally permissible (e.g. for defense, with right authority, and with proportional means) – while not exactly pacifist, it aimed to limit wanton aggression. In practice it was often ignored, but it provided a language for critics of brutal wars to point out violations of Christian teaching. There were also pacifist sects like the **Anabaptists** in the 16th century who rejected state violence entirely (many of them were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants for this radical stance). The **Catholic Las Casas vs. Sepúlveda debate** in 1550 in Spain is a notable moment: Las Casas argued that converting Native Americans by force or exploiting them was un-Christian, while Sepúlveda argued some races were naturally servile – the fact this debate occurred in front of the Spanish court showed an internal moral struggle within Christendom about empire. Over time, Enlightenment ideas (some of which were absorbed by churchmen) also led churches to moderate – by the 20th century, most Christian denominations officially embraced human rights and religious freedom, a far cry from their stances in 1500.

Thus, Christianity's legacy is ambivalent: the *same faith* that was used to justify crusades and colonialism also produced stalwart opponents of those evils. For every conquistador brandishing a cross and sword, there was a priest like de las Casas condemning the massacre. For every Christian emperor ordering conversions by decree, there were Christian martyrs who died for the principle of faith being free from coercion. These internal tensions did sometimes **mitigate harm** or eventually lead to reforms – for instance, Christian abolitionists succeeded in ending slavery in large parts of the world, and many credit Christian ethics (though arguably interpreted in a new way) for the rise of the modern humanitarian ethos.

Collapse or Transformation: The idea of a unified Christian *empire*, or **Christendom**, effectively began to collapse with the fragmentation of religious unity in the Reformation (16th century) and the rise of the modern secular nation-state system (17th century). The **Thirty Years' War** (1618–1648) ravaged Europe in part over religious allegiance, but it ended in the Peace of Westphalia which established that rulers could choose their realm's religion and that states would not interfere in each other's religious affairs. This was the birth of a kind of *religious tolerance via exhaustion*. By 1700, the notion of *Christendom* as one political entity was gone – Europe was a patchwork of Protestant and Catholic states. The **Enlightenment** further secularized governance in many places; by the late 18th century, the United States created a constitution without an established church (a radical step influenced by Enlightenment and dissenting Protestant ideas), and the French Revolution (1789) went even further, attacking the Catholic Church's privileges and promoting secular rationalism (even a cult of reason). The 19th century saw formal **disestablishment** of churches in many Western countries (e.g. Spain, Latin American nations after independence, etc.), meaning church and state were officially separated.

The European **colonial empires** remained, however, until the mid-20th century, often still draped in Christian justifications (e.g. Britain's self-image as bringing "civilization" including Christianity to Africa/Asia). These overseas empires collapsed after World War II, as independence movements (many led by Western-educated elites who invoked ideals of self-determination) forced decolonization. By the 1960s, almost all explicitly Christian colonial rule was gone. In some cases, *settler states* with Christian majorities remained (like the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa) but these had evolved new national identities even as they struggled with the legacy of what they did to indigenous peoples. Notably, **the Papal States** (where the Pope ruled territory in Italy) ended in 1870 when Italy unified – a symbolic end to the Pope's direct temporal power. And in 1905, France enacted laïcité, a strict secularism, further showing how the heartland of Christendom had turned toward secular governance.

In the **modern era**, Christianity transformed largely into a global *civil society* force rather than a governmental one. Most nations today (even those with Christian majorities) have secular constitutions or only symbolic state churches. For example, *England* has an established church (Anglicanism) but the state is democratic and pluralistic in practice; *Nordic countries* similar; *Italy* and others have no state religion at all now. The last vestige of a Christian theocratic state might be Vatican City, but that is a tiny enclave with purely spiritual influence. Christianity *persisted and grew* as a religion worldwide (especially in the Global South, like sub-Saharan Africa, where it's very vibrant), but generally *detached from direct state rule*.

Enduring Leftovers: The centuries of Christian hegemony left profound marks on today's world:

- **Borders and States:** European colonialism under Christian powers created many of the world's political boundaries. For instance, the nations of Latin America map closely onto former Spanish and Portuguese colonies, and their languages (Spanish, Portuguese) and dominant religion (Christianity) reflect that heritage. In Africa and the Middle East, the borders drawn by Christian European empires (Britain, France, etc.) after World War I and during the Scramble for Africa often grouped disparate ethnic/religious communities

into single states or split coherent groups across borders, fueling post-colonial conflicts. The very existence of countries like *Canada, USA, Australia, South Africa* etc., as settler states, is a leftover of Christian European expansion (with ongoing issues involving the indigenous populations subjugated under that expansion). The creation of the **State of Israel** also has indirect roots in Christendom: European anti-Semitism (culminating in the Holocaust) led to sympathy for a Jewish homeland, and some British officials (like in the 1917 Balfour Declaration) were influenced by their own Christian Zionist ideas when facilitating Jewish migration to Palestine. This has had a lasting impact: the Israel-Palestine conflict can be seen as a leftover of both European Christian persecution of Jews and of British Christian-imperial meddling.

- **Legal Codes:** Many legal systems still carry traces of Christian moral norms. For example, laws against blasphemy or profanity in some countries originate from colonial penal codes (Pakistan's notorious blasphemy law partly comes from the British Indian law aimed at keeping religious harmony, which in a Christian-colonial context meant no insults to religion). Laws regulating marriage, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, etc., in many nations were initially based on Christian doctrine – some have been reformed, others remain contentious. For instance, colonial-era anti-sodomy laws imposed by the British in places like India and much of Africa (reflecting Victorian Christian morals) have only recently begun to be repealed in some countries, while others still enforce them. The idea of Sunday as a day of rest is encoded in labor regulations widely (the weekend concept owes a lot to the Christian Sabbath principle). On the other hand, Western legal principles like *human rights* and *international law* were influenced by Christian natural law concepts and later secularized – for example, the notion of universal human dignity has roots in Christian theology (though it took secular and pluralistic form in the UN Declaration).

- **Institutions:** The **Churches** themselves remain global institutions. The Catholic Church is still a major player with over a billion adherents and a diplomatic presence (the Vatican). It no longer directly governs vast lands, but it operates schools, hospitals, charities worldwide. Many top universities (Harvard, Yale, Oxford, etc.) began as Christian institutions and retain some traditions from that origin. Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe are tightly linked to national identity (e.g. Russian Orthodox Church's influence in Russia's national ideology today). Protestant denominations also wield soft power (for instance, the global evangelical movement, sometimes based in the U.S., influences social politics in African countries by exporting certain values, such as anti-LGBT campaigns – a cultural neocolonial echo of missionary days). Additionally, organizations like the **World Council of Churches** or various Christian NGOs play roles in diplomacy and humanitarian work, a benign leftover of the missionary network. Conversely, *sectarian divisions* that originated in Reformation disputes linger in places like Northern Ireland (Catholic vs. Protestant communal identities led to conflict into the late 20th century).

- **Trauma and Memory:** Interfaith relations today bear scars from the Christendom era. Jewish communities remember centuries of Christian persecution – the shadow of the Holocaust (even though perpetrated by a formally secular Nazi regime) is often linked to the precedents of church-sponsored anti-Semitism (e.g. centuries of pogroms, the teaching of deicide, etc.). This history drives ongoing efforts by churches to reconcile (many churches in recent decades have formally apologized for past antisemitism and

now teach respect for Judaism). In the Middle East, the **Crusades** remain a potent historical grievance in Arab and Muslim discourse – extremist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS frequently referred to Western powers as "Crusaders," tapping into a 900-year-old collective memory of Christian aggression. Indigenous peoples in the Americas and Australia carry the trauma of conquest and forced conversion; the recent revelations of abuses in Canadian residential schools (run by churches) have led to calls for Papal apologies and are a live issue in reconciliation processes. These traumas affect trust: for example, Christian missionary activity today is sometimes viewed with suspicion by communities that recall it as part of cultural destruction in the past.

- **Elites and Power Structures:** In several post-colonial societies, those groups who aligned early with Christian missionaries ended up advantaged. In parts of Africa, coastal or southern groups that had mission schools (and thus Western education) produced the first post-independence elites (e.g. in Nigeria, the largely Christian south vs. the Muslim north had disparities in education which still cause tension). In Latin America, the Catholic Church long allied with conservative elites and was a major landowner; only in the late 20th century did many Latin countries break that grip. Yet even now, debates over laws (divorce, contraception, etc.) in places like the Philippines or Poland show the lingering clout of the Church on policy. The *legacy of colonial favoritism* also left minorities in awkward spots: for instance, Christian minorities in the Middle East (like Maronites in Lebanon) had been favored by French colonial rule; after decolonization, resentments over that sometimes fueled conflict (the Lebanese Civil War in part). Another interesting leftover: **Western dominance** in global affairs can partially be traced to the wealth and systems accrued during the centuries of Christendom's expansion. Some argue that even secular Western values (like universal human rights) carry a *"post-Christian"* imprint – a secularized form of Christian moral universalism.

- **Geopolitical Alignments:** During the Cold War, rhetoric on the Western side sometimes invoked a quasi-religious framing (e.g. President Reagan calling the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and casting America as a "city on a hill" – a biblical reference). This bled into policy: anti-communism was fused with defending "Christian civilization" to justify support for certain regimes. For example, apartheid South Africa saw itself as a bulwark of Christian Western values against atheistic communism – and Western powers tacitly tolerated it for a time. In Latin America in the 1980s, there was effectively a **proxy war within Christianity**: left-wing priests promoting Liberation Theology vs. right-wing evangelical-backed dictators – showing how internal Christian debates about justice vs. order had geopolitical ramifications. Today, the influence of Christian evangelical politics from the U.S. into Africa (on issues like gay rights or abortion) is a softer but still significant leftover of the era when Christianity carried a mandate to shape societies abroad.

In sum, the age of explicitly Christian empire-building is over; Christianity has largely transformed from an imperial authority into a global religion among many, often advocating peace and charity. But the modern world cannot be understood without recognizing how deeply the **Christian imperial era** shaped it – from the languages we speak, to the nations we live in, to the fault lines that still breed conflict. As one historian put it, *"The drums of Christendom echoed for centuries, and their beat is still heard faintly in the distance of our modern marches."* The lesson, however, is not that Christianity as a faith is uniquely guilty – for we will see similar

patterns in other cases – but that when any belief, even one preaching love, was married to unrestrained power, it tended to produce harmful outcomes, moderated only when that power was checked or that belief turned toward its own higher principles of justice.

Islam: Caliphate and *Jihad* in the Service of Empire

Belief System Overview: *Islam* is a monotheistic religion founded by the Prophet **Muhammad** in 7th-century Arabia (traditionally starting in 610 CE with Muhammad's first revelations, and formally with the Hijra in 622 CE marking the Islamic calendar's Year 1). Its core theological claim is absolute **monotheism** (*tawhid*) – "there is no god but God (Allah), and Muhammad is His messenger." Ethically, Islam emphasizes justice, charity (with mandatory alms, *zakat*), community solidarity (*ummah*), and submission to God's will. It shares roots with Judaism and Christianity, revering figures like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as prophets. Importantly, from its inception Islam was both a **religion and a political-social order**: Muhammad, in Medina, acted as prophet, lawgiver, and head of state simultaneously. Thus Islam does not originally draw a sharp line between sacred and secular authority – the Qur'an and Muhammad's example (Sunnah) provide guidance not only for personal piety but also for governance, law, and warfare. A key concept often associated with Islam's expansion is **jihad**, which literally means "struggle." In Islamic thought, jihad has multiple forms, including personal spiritual striving. But historically, it also encompassed armed struggle in defense or expansion of the Muslim realm (*jihad fi sabilillah*, fighting in the path of God). The Qur'an contains verses that early Muslim leaders interpreted as sanctioning war against polytheists and aggression against those who opposed the Muslim community (e.g. Qur'an 9:5, sometimes called the "sword verse," instructs to fight and slay idolaters who break treaties, while 2:190-193 permits fighting against those who fight the Muslims, until "religion is for God"). Islamic teachings also, however, set rules for warfare (e.g. prohibitions on killing noncombatants are found in Hadiths) and offered protections for "People of the Book" (Jews, Christians, and later extended to Zoroastrians and others via analogy) who lived under Muslim rule in exchange for a special tax (*jizya*). The **cosmology** of Islam envisions the eventual triumph of God's guidance for humanity – not necessarily converting everyone, but that the world should ideally be under just Islamic governance or at least that Muslims should have the freedom to practice. In essence, Islam from the start had a **political project**: Muhammad established a *state in Medina* and within a decade expanded it to encompass most of Arabia. Thus, unlike early Christianity which grew under an existing empire, early Islam *created* its own empire. This formative experience means that classical Islam integrates religion and statecraft in a way that later made the idea of a *Caliphate* (a unified leadership of the Muslim community) a potent one.

Imperial/State Adoption: Islam fused with state power at the moment of its birth. Muhammad's immediate successors, the **Caliphs** (literally "successors" or *khalifa*), were both spiritual and political leaders of the rapidly expanding Muslim community. The first four caliphs (the *Rashidun*, or "Rightly Guided," 632–661 CE) and then the **Umayyad dynasty** (661–750) and **Abbasid dynasty** (750–1258) built Islamic empires that stretched across the Middle East, North Africa, and into Europe (Spain) and Asia (Persia, Central Asia) within a century of Muhammad. This expansion was *astonishingly rapid*: by 750, the Islamic Caliphate was one of the largest empires in history at that point, achieved within about 120 years of Islam's founding. How did they do this? Partly, the Byzantine and Persian empires they confronted were exhausted from

fighting each other and from plagues; partly, Arab armies were highly motivated and mobile. Ideologically, the early caliphs framed their conquests as **bringing truth and just rule** – they did not necessarily force conversion (in fact, for a long time Muslims were a ruling minority, and conversion was gradual), but they did demand political submission and the payment of **jizya** by non-Muslims as a sign of that submission.

The structure of the Islamic state was such that **religious law (Sharia)** became state law in most areas of life. The Caliph was ideally both a temporal ruler and the leader of the faithful who upheld Islamic law. The **ulama** (scholars) developed jurisprudence and often served as judges (*qadis*) and administrators. This created an integrated **institutional architecture**: a bureaucracy that was at once civil and religious, administering taxes, justice, and public works in the name of God. For example, early in the Abbasid era, the Caliph al-Mansur established *qadi* courts throughout the empire, standardizing Islamic justice. *Shura* (consultation) was a principle, but in reality caliphs became monarchs. Nonetheless, unlike in Christendom where there were separate church and state hierarchies that could clash (Pope vs Emperor), in Islam the ideal was **unity of religious and political leadership** – though in practice, strong-willed scholars sometimes clashed with caliphs over what Sharia required. A telling institutional feature: the institution of the **Dhimmis** – protected non-Muslim communities (Jews, Christians, etc.) who could live under Muslim rule with internal autonomy but as second-class subjects – was codified early. This provided a model for multi-religious empire: **tolerance with hierarchy**. Non-Muslims paid extra taxes and had social restrictions (couldn't proselytize Muslims, often had to wear distinctive clothing in some periods, etc.), but they were not usually killed or expelled en masse as long as they accepted Muslim supremacy and paid the jizya. This system was relatively flexible and helped the Islamic empires rule over diverse populations.

The early Islamic empire (the Caliphate) functioned as both a **theocracy and a pragmatic empire**. For example, the Umayyad Caliphate made Arabic the administrative language and minted Islamic coins (replacing Byzantine/Persian iconography with Qur'anic verses) to assert a new identity. But it also continued many Byzantine and Persian governing practices, merely **Islamizing** them. The empire collected *zakāt* (charity tax) from Muslims and *jizya* and *kharaj* (land tax) from non-Muslims, creating a fiscal incentive structure: interestingly, some early governors discouraged mass conversion of conquered peoples because that would reduce tax revenue (since converts no longer paid jizya) (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B., 2023). Over time, though, more of the population did convert to Islam (for spiritual, social, or economic reasons), and the empire became more uniformly Muslim in core regions.

Mechanisms of Expansion: The expansion of Islam and its empires historically involved a mix of **military conquest**, **diplomacy and treaties**, **administrative integration**, and **missionary efforts** (*da'wah*). Key mechanisms included:

- **Military Conquest (Futūḥāt):** The Rashidun and Umayyad caliphs launched campaigns that swiftly took Syria, Palestine, Egypt from the Byzantines, and Mesopotamia and Persia from the Sassanids. These were classic conquests: battles were fought (Yarmuk 636, Qadisiyah 636, Nihavand 642, etc.), cities were besieged. When cities or tribes resisted, they could be harshly punished – for example, histories note that when some Persian garrisons that had surrendered later rebelled, Umayyad forces re-took cities and

executed many (though it varied; Khalid ibn al-Walid, a great general, was known both for bold attacks and for pragmatic truces). However, in many cases the Muslims offered relatively generous terms if opponents surrendered: they would agree to spare lives and property in exchange for payment of taxes and political loyalty (these were recorded in **treaties**, like the Pact of Umar with Jerusalem's Christians, which granted religious freedom in exchange for jizya and certain public restrictions). The Arabs' prowess in *light cavalry warfare*, their unity under a religious banner, and the exhaustion of opponents allowed them to win astonishing victories. Notably, in 711 an army led by Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed into Spain and within a few years the Visigothic kingdom fell, establishing Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain). Conquest was often quite **brutal** in immediate effect – for instance, the capture of **Ctesiphon** (Persia's capital) yielded rich plunder, and some cities that resisted were sacked. Yet unlike some later Mongol-style conquests, the early Muslims did not aim to annihilate populations; they aimed to incorporate them as taxpayers. **Mass slaughter** was not a policy except in specific strategic cases. The concept of jihad gave warriors a strong incentive (spiritual reward) and a framework to justify war, but it also imposed *some* discipline: e.g. Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, reportedly gave guidelines to his army not to kill women, children, or monks and not to destroy crops unnecessarily – reflecting early Islamic ethics of war.

- **Administrative Accommodation:** After conquering, Muslims often ruled **indirectly** at first. They set up new garrison cities (like **Basra and Kufa** in Iraq, **Fustat** in Egypt) where Arab-Muslim settlers lived, somewhat apart from the local population. They frequently retained local bureaucrats to keep tax collection and administration running – for instance, Coptic Christians in Egypt continued to handle village-level administration for the new Muslim rulers, using the existing apparatus and simply diverting taxes to the Caliph instead of the Byzantine Emperor. This *pragmatic approach* meant that there was not immediate pressure to convert or change daily life for peasants; many probably barely noticed a change beyond paying taxes to new collectors (and likely less taxes overall, since Byzantine and Sassanid exactions had been heavy). The Muslims did gradually introduce **Arabic** as the language of administration (Abd al-Malik around 700 CE did this), which had the effect of *Arabizing* many regions over time (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B., 2023). Conversion to Islam was often socially advantageous: Muslims did not pay the jizya poll tax and had access to power networks. So over generations, a lot of locals converted for practical reasons as much as spiritual conviction (the attraction of the faith itself was surely a factor too) (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B., 2023). The empire's tolerance of Jews and Christians (relative to what these groups experienced under some preceding regimes) in fact made it easier for them to accept Muslim rule – e.g. many Syrian Monophysite Christians were persecuted by Orthodox Byzantine rule, so they were not entirely unhappy when the more indifferent Muslim rulers took over, as long as they could worship in peace for a tax.

- **Economic and Social Incentives:** The early Islamic polity created incentives for conversion and loyalty. *Muslims formed an elite class* – only they could serve in the army (initially) or highest offices. The Arab-Muslim ruling class received stipends from the state treasury (*diwan*), something non-Muslim subjects did not get (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B., 2023). Over time, non-Arab converts (Mawali) demanded equal stipends, one of the social tensions of the Umayyad era that helped bring the Abbasids (who were more inclusive of non-Arabs) to power. The jizya and **kharaj** (land tax on non-Muslim

owned land) were significant burdens; naturally many subjects found converting (and often also assimilating to Arab culture) beneficial to their status and wallet (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B., 2023). It's important to note the difference from, say, medieval Christendom: whereas in Christian realms religion was often enforced by law on subjects, in Islamic realms the approach was "you can keep your religion, but you'll be a bit worse off." This probably reduced the chance of rebellion by religious minorities because they weren't faced with forced conversion, just second-class status.

- **Missionary and Cultural Propagation:** Beyond the initial conquests, Islam spread in more peaceful ways too. Sufi missionaries, merchants, and scholars carried the faith to places never conquered by Muslim armies, such as **Indonesia** and much of sub-Saharan Africa. Within the empire, the caliphs patronized impressive civilization that attracted people to Islam. The **Abbasid period** in Baghdad saw translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic, flourishing of sciences, literature (like the *Thousand and One Nights* tales) – Islamic civilization became a *cosmopolitan high culture*. Non-Muslims participated in this culture (there were notable Jewish and Christian scholars in Baghdad), but conversion was a path into full belonging to this golden society. So there was a "cultural conquest": Arabic language and Islamic customs slowly permeated – e.g. in Persia, eventually Persian culture itself blended and produced a distinct Persian-Islamic tradition (the Iranian people adopted Islam but also preserved Persian language, showing a degree of continuity even as religion changed). In some frontier areas, Islamic expansion was *via migration*: Arab traders settled in East African coastal towns and intermarried, forming Muslim communities that led to the rise of Swahili culture; similar merchant diasporas in India and Southeast Asia introduced Islam gradually.

Harm Profile: Historically, Islamic empires produced immense cultural and scientific flourishing, but they also inflicted significant violence and oppression, especially during their expansions and in maintaining control. Applying our harm vectors:

- **Territorial Conquest:** The record of conquest is expansive. The early Caliphate conquered roughly from Spain and Morocco in the west to the Indus Valley in the east – a realm larger than Rome at its height. Later, **Turkic and Mongol converts** expanded Islam further: e.g. **Tamerlane** (Timur) in the 14th century conquered Persia, Central Asia, parts of India with such brutality that he rivaled the Mongols – building pyramids of skulls of those he killed, explicitly invoking being a *ghazi* (warrior of the faith) against both infidels and even other Muslims he deemed heretical. The **Ottoman Empire** (c.1300–1922) took Constantinople in 1453 and expanded into southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa – often justifying wars as *jihad* against Christian powers (though power and wealth were equally at stake). In South Asia, **Muslim invasions** between the 12th and 16th centuries established sultanates and the Mughal Empire in a predominantly Hindu land, involving numerous wars. For instance, the chronicles of Mahmood of Ghazni (11th c.) boast of temple destructions and defeats of Hindu kings, celebrated as spreading Islam's dominion. These conquests often entailed massacres of resisting forces or civilians – for example, during the conquest of Sindh (711) by Muhammad bin Qasim, sources say several thousand war prisoners were executed and many women and children enslaved, which was framed as normal practice in jihad (though modern historians debate the scale). The net effect is tens of millions likely died

over centuries in these wars. One must caution that not all these wars were purely religiously motivated – often it was standard imperial expansion where religion provided a pretext or rallying cry. But the ideology of jihad made it easier to rally troops and gave conquests a veneer of divine mission.

- **Forced Displacement:** In the early conquests, some populations fled or were deported. For example, the Zoroastrian elite of Persia in part fled to India (forming the Parsi community) rather than live under Muslim rule, as Islam gradually became dominant in Iran. The Islamic conquests did not typically involve systematic mass expulsions akin to later Spanish expulsion of Jews/Muslims, with one big exception: **Andalusia (Reconquista)** – when *Christian* powers reconquered Spain from Muslims by 1492, they expelled or forced the conversion of the Muslim population (and later even those who had converted, the Moriscos, were expelled in 1609). That's a harm inflicted *on* Muslims by Christians, but it was a direct outcome of the prior Islamic presence. Within the Muslim empires, one example of displacement is the practice of **population transfers by the Ottomans**, who sometimes relocated rebellious tribes (e.g. moving Turkmen tribes from Anatolia to the Balkans or vice versa to break their power – an example is the forced migration of Yazidi or Assyrian communities internally). In India, during Tipu Sultan's late 18th c. jihad in South India, some communities like the Coorgis and Mangalorean Catholics were reportedly deported or oppressed (though Tipu's actions were as much anti-colonial vs the British). However, large-scale *exile of peoples* was not the most common tactic for Islamic rulers – they often preferred to rule over non-Muslims in place (for the tax revenue).
- **Legal Stratification:** This was a hallmark: the **dhimmi system** explicitly made non-Muslims a legally inferior class. They paid **jizya** (a per capita tax) and often **kharaj** (higher land taxes). They could not hold certain offices (e.g. no dhimmi could be a ruler or military commander over Muslims, though exceptions existed in practice sometimes). They were typically not allowed to bear arms or serve in the regular army (again, with exceptions like some Christian units in later Ottoman armies, but only after reforms). They faced social restrictions like distinctive clothing in some eras, or not riding horses, or keeping their houses lower than Muslim houses, etc. The severity of these rules varied greatly by time and place – at times they were loosely enforced. But codifications like the **Pact of Umar** outline classic dhimmi restrictions (e.g. no new churches, no ringing loud bells, no proselytizing, etc.). While this was less harsh than the outright *inquisitorial persecution* found in some Christian lands, it institutionalized a long-term second-class status for millions. In India under some Muslim rulers (e.g. Sultanate of Delhi, or later Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb), **Sharia-based codes** discriminated against Hindus (Aurangzeb re-imposed jizya on Hindus in 17th c. which his predecessors had lifted, and preferred Muslims for high office). These legal hierarchies seeded resentment that in some cases lasts – e.g. modern Hindutva ideologues in India often hark back to "Muslim rule" as having kept Hindus subjugated, fueling current religious nationalism.
- **Coercive Conversion:** Compared to some other cases, Islam historically is often noted for *not* forcing conversion en masse – the Quran (2:256) famously says "There is no compulsion in religion." And indeed, the Caliphate did not systematically force the Peoples of the Book to convert; it was more profitable to keep them paying jizya (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B., 2023). However, there have been **episodes of forced conversion or pressure**. Under the **Almohad dynasty** in the 12th century in North Africa and Spain, a

very puritanical sect, both Jews and Christians were forced to convert or flee – many fled to more tolerant regions. In Persia, the Safavid Shahs (16th–17th c.) imposed Shia Islam as the state religion and persecuted Sunnis, with forced conversions especially of Sunnis in Iran. In India, cases like the 14th-century Delhi Sultanate under Sikandar Butshikan in Kashmir: he earned the title "idol-breaker" for destroying Hindu temples and reportedly forcing many Kashmiris to convert to Islam under pain of death or exile. In the **Ottoman Empire**, conversion was generally voluntary, but one notorious practice was the *devşirme*, or "child levy": the Ottomans periodically took boys from Christian Balkan families, converted them to Islam and trained them for state service (many became elite Janissary soldiers or administrators). While this wasn't exactly "convert or die," it was certainly coercive for those families and fundamentally a human rights violation today (though some of those boys rose to very high positions and the practice ironically tied Balkan Christian communities to the empire in a weird way). Forced conversion of *pagans* was more straightforward: for example, when Muslims encountered animist Turks or Mongols, they sometimes compelled them or at least their leaders to accept Islam as part of alliance or conquest (though many Turkic tribes embraced Islam themselves by preference over time). In modern times, extremist groups like ISIS have engaged in forced conversions (e.g. of Yazidis under threat of death or slavery), but those are non-state actors (though they briefly ran a "state"). Historically, mainstream Islamic states more often used *gradual incentives and penalties* to convert rather than immediate violence.

- **Slavery and Human Trafficking:** Slavery was widespread in Islamic civilization. The Qur'an regulates slavery (e.g. encouraging freeing slaves as a virtuous act, but it does not ban it), and Islamic law allowed enslaving non-Muslims in war. The **Arab slave trade** predated Islam and continued after – millions of Africans and others were taken in the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades over centuries. One big difference: in Islamic law, enslaving *People of the Book* who were citizens was generally not allowed (they are dhimmi instead), but capturing non-Muslims in jihad on frontiers or buying slaves from abroad was legit. So, for example, many African slaves in the Middle East were from animist or distant societies. The **Mamluk** system even used slaves as soldiers – e.g. Turkish or Circassian slaves were converted and trained to form the ruling military caste in Egypt. Some slaves achieved high status (Mamluk sultans *were* ex-slave soldiers). But the conditions for most slaves could be harsh: eunuchs for harems, concubines (sexual slavery was part of the system, with female slaves), and plantation labor in some cases (like the Zanj slaves in Iraq who toiled in salt marshes – they even revolted in the 9th century, a brutal rebellion). So, while European Christian empires are infamous for Atlantic chattel slavery, the Muslim world had its own extensive slave systems, justified by religious law that distinguished believer from unbeliever (and sometimes ethnicity, as black Africans were heavily victimized in certain periods). Additionally, prisoner of war slavery was common – defeated cities could see a portion of population enslaved (e.g. when the Umayyads took Sindh, many war captives were sent back west as slaves). In India, some Muslim wars yielded so many captives that slave markets overflowed. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (11th c) for instance reportedly took hundreds of thousands of slaves during his raids in India over the years – though numbers in chronicles are likely exaggerated. Nonetheless, enslavement and trafficking were a **significant mode of exploitation** under Islamic rule, as in most pre-modern empires.

- **Sectarian or Ideological Violence:** Islam has its own internal sectarian divides, chiefly **Sunni vs Shia**. The history of Islamic empires includes many conflicts along this line. The early Caliphate itself experienced first a civil war (the First Fitna) and then the traumatic martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala (680 CE), which crystallized the Sunni-Shia split. Subsequent Sunni caliphates often persecuted Shia minorities at times (the term *zindiq* – heretic – was used broadly). Conversely, the **Safavid Empire** in Persia (16th c.) was Shi'a and persecuted Sunnis and Sufis at times (Shah Ismail and successors enforced conversion to Shi'ism in Iran with some bloodshed of Sunnis who resisted). There were also episodes like the **Albigensian Crusade** in Europe (that's Christian on Christian), but in the Muslim world an analog could be the **Ottoman-Safavid Wars** in which Ottoman Sunnis and Persian Shias used sectarian propaganda and committed massacres (e.g. the Ottomans under Selim I massacred Alevis/Anatolian Shias suspecting them of loyalty to the Safavids around 1512). Additionally, Muslims periodically committed violence against minority sects like the **Ismailis** (e.g. Saladin's forces in the 12th c. suppressed the Assassins) or heterodox groups like Yazidis (viewed as infidels – even in the 19th and 20th centuries, Yazidis in Ottoman areas were attacked for not being "People of the Book"). Non-Muslim communities also sometimes faced slaughter: one infamous case is the **Armenian Genocide** of 1915 by the Ottoman regime – although motivated by a mix of nationalistic paranoia and wartime exigency, it had a religious aspect in that a Christian minority was targeted and destroyed (1.5 million killed) by a Muslim-led state. There were also **pogroms** in smaller scale: for example, in the 8th century, Umayyad authorities in what is now Iraq executed or exiled many **Zoroastrian priests** and burned their temples, contributing to the decline of Zoroastrianism. Another example: in 1258 when the (non-Muslim) Mongols sacked Baghdad, some of their Turkic and Persian Muslim allies allegedly used the opportunity to kill members of rival Muslim sects – it's reported that the predominantly **Sunni** population of Baghdad saw some targeting of Shia (since some Mongol commanders had Nestorian Christian wives who pushed for elimination of *Muslim* rivals, a complex bit of sectarian revenge overlapping with the invasion). In summary, while the scale of religious genocide under Islamic rule was perhaps less systematic than, say, the Spanish Inquisition or the Holocaust, there have been significant massacres and "cleansings" tied to maintaining either Islamic orthodoxy or political dominance.
- **Suppression of Dissent:** Islamic empires, like others, cracked down on internal dissent. Apostasy (a Muslim leaving Islam) has traditionally been a capital offense in classical Sharia – meaning freedom of religion was one-sided (non-Muslims could stay as they were or convert to Islam, but a born Muslim or convert leaving Islam was seen as treasonous to the community). Cases of execution for apostasy or heresy dot the history: for instance, renowned philosopher **Al-Hallaj** was executed in Baghdad in 922 for mystical teachings considered heretical (saying "I am the Truth," implying unity with God). The **Mihna** (Inquisition) under Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun in the 9th century enforced a specific theological doctrine (the created nature of the Qur'an) and persecuted scholars like Ahmad ibn Hanbal who refused to conform – showing the state imposing dogma by coercion. Many later regimes had official censors and religious police. The Ottoman Empire had a **Sheikh ul-Islam** who could issue fatwas against authors or officials deemed un-Islamic; one famous Ottoman Sultan, **Selim III**, was dethroned partly because conservative clerics issued rulings that his Westernizing reforms were

against Islam. In Safavid Iran, Sufi orders and Sunni practices were banned, with secret police ensuring adherence to Twelver Shiism. Book banning happened too – e.g. certain philosophical works were suppressed if seen as contradicting Islam (Averroes' works were banned in Almohad Spain toward the end of his life). And just as Christian lands had blasphemy laws, so did Muslim lands: speaking ill of the Prophet or Islam often meant death – this persists in some countries even today (e.g. *Pakistan's blasphemy law*, a colonial inheritance but maintained vigorously). Educationally, the madrasa system allowed vibrant learning but within a religious framework – unorthodox teachings could get one in trouble. One can compare: while Europe's Enlightenment eventually broke the monopoly of church on knowledge, many Muslim regions did not secularize education until much later, leaving a legacy of conflict between conservative ulema and modern intellectuals (e.g. the late Ottoman and Qajar-era intellectuals who were sometimes imprisoned or exiled for "subversive" Western-inspired ideas).

- **Gender-based Inequality and Violence:** Islamic law in its classical form explicitly makes distinctions by gender – women have fewer rights in marriage, inheritance (typically half the share of males), and must obey male guardians. In many pre-modern Muslim societies, women were sequestered (purdah) among the upper classes, and had limited public roles. This by itself is structural violence. There was also the matter of **concubinage** – female slaves used as sexual slaves were common (which is gender-based exploitation legitimized by the system). In some Muslim dynasties, mass **harems** meant women (often war captives) kept essentially imprisoned for the ruler's pleasure. Punishments like **stoning for adultery** (prescribed by some interpretations of Sharia for women and men, but often applied more to women caught in illicit relations) were another form of gendered violence. That said, one can find examples of powerful Muslim women (e.g. Sultan Razia of Delhi in 13th c., or Nur Jahan who ruled de facto in Jahangir's stead in Mughal India, or the many influential mothers of Ottoman sultans in the "Sultanate of Women" period), so the picture is complex. But generally, the empire's needs often trumped women's rights: e.g. the **Devshirme** took young boys, but occasionally also took girls for palace service. The practice of **female infanticide** in some Arabian tribes was reportedly curtailed by Islam (as per Islamic tradition), which is a positive. Still, in later centuries, some Muslim societies practiced **honor killings** (not state-sanctioned but socially tolerated acts where male relatives kill women suspected of immorality). In modern times, regimes like the Taliban in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia's mutaween (religious police) exemplify how an Islamic state can enforce gender oppression (banning women's education, mobility, dress freedom), which is a continuation of certain historical attitudes.

- **Cultural and Religious Erasure:** Islamic conquests sometimes involved destruction of others' holy sites and imposition of Islamic culture. A classic early example: the **conversion of the Zoroastrian fire temples** in Persia into mosques, and the gradual loss of Zoroastrianism (which now survives only in small pockets and the diaspora). The conquest of **India** saw episodes of temple destruction – multiple sources, even court chronicles of Muslim sultans (like those of the Delhi Sultanate), brag of smashing famous Hindu idols (e.g. the Somnath Temple was sacked by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1020s). These acts were both pious (eliminating "idolatry") and political (demoralizing the subject population) (Elhassan, K., 2017). Many mosques in North India were built with stones of demolished temples. However, it wasn't unrelenting: often new Muslim rulers

would patronize some local arts and integrate (e.g. Mughal architecture fused Persian and Indian elements, and Akbar even tried to incorporate Hindu practices in court). In the **Ottoman Balkans**, some churches were converted into mosques (notably Hagia Sophia in Constantinople), and in some cases local languages written in Arabic script replaced old scripts (e.g. the replacement of Greek in some administration). But plenty of local culture endured under the umbrella if it wasn't seen as religiously threatening. Still, **Arabic language spread** widely and in many places replaced local languages (North Africa's Latin dialects gave way to Arabic entirely; many Berber languages were marginalized; Coptic in Egypt died out except as liturgical language). The Islamization of Central Asia and parts of India also meant the fade of Buddhist and Hindu institutions in those regions over time – for example, Islam virtually displaced **Buddhism in what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan, and much of Central Asia**, not always by outright violence (trade and Sufi missionaries were key), but certainly the destruction of the colossal **Buddhas of Bamiyan** by the Taliban in 2001 reminds that earlier iconoclasm likely accompanied initial spread (indeed, 8th–10th century Muslim incursions into Afghanistan likely led Buddhist monasteries to be abandoned or destroyed, as happened in the Indian Gangetic plains with the Turkic invasions around 1200, when the great Buddhist university of Nalanda was sacked and burned by invaders). The **Mongol Ilkhanate** initially was not Muslim and in 1258 they destroyed Baghdad's libraries and mosques, but interestingly later they converted to Islam and then destroyed some **Churches** during a backlash against Christians (who had been favored under Mongol rule). So swings of fortune could cause cultural repression on various sides.

- **Economic Exploitation:** The early Muslim empires certainly extracted wealth from conquered lands. The Caliphate instituted relatively efficient taxation, often lighter than Byzantine/Persian predecessors at first, but as needs grew, taxes could be burdensome. Non-Muslims paid **extra taxes** purely due to religion, which is by definition exploitative use of ideology for revenue. The jizya in some contexts was heavy – chroniclers say some poor dhimmis converted just to escape its weight (which, from an empire's perspective, was counterproductive financially, hence not always enforced too harshly) (Smith, C., & Parkinson, B, 2023). There was also a **feudal-like iqta' system** where officers were granted land revenues in the Abbasid and later periods, which sometimes led to peasants being squeezed. In India, the Delhi Sultans and Mughals took large land revenues (often over 50% of produce), justified in part as upholding Islamic governance that everything belongs to God/caliph and people just hold it. Under Aurangzeb, economic discrimination against Hindus included higher customs duties on Hindu merchants versus Muslim merchants. The **Arab slave trade** also had a profit motive masked in part by the idea of spreading Islam – e.g. slave raiding in Africa was justified as bringing Islam to pagans but was obviously driven by profit (an 18th-century chronicler might phrase it as "to gather the harvest of souls and also the harvest of gold"). The **Ottoman Empire** in its decline became economically exploitative in other ways: heavy taxation especially on Christian provinces that were seen as potentially disloyal (for instance, during war times, some mostly Christian regions like Lebanon were heavily levied to support the war effort). Overall, while Islamic law encouraged fair trade and condemned cheating, in practice subject populations, especially if of another faith, often bore economic burdens to support the ruling class and its military campaigns.

In synthesizing the harm profile: under Islamic rule, **coercion was real but often conditional** – there was a path for "protection" if you submitted (dhimmi status) which spared you from forcible conversion or execution, unlike more absolutist systems that demanded one faith or ideology. This meant multi-religious societies could persist for centuries (e.g. Muslim Spain, Ottoman Empire) albeit with inequalities. But when the combination of *unchecked power and zealous ideology* hit, episodes like **forced conversions or massacres** did occur. In many ways, the pattern isn't far from Christendom's: when Islam was expansionist and confident, it could be pragmatic (because it didn't feel threatened by minority presence); when it was insecure or fanatical rulers took charge, the claws came out (e.g. Almohads, or Timur's ghazi campaigns).

Internal Constraints or Reforms: Islamic civilization had its own moderating forces. The **Qur'an and Hadith** contain many injunctions about justice, mercy, and the rights of others (including People of the Book). These provided grounds for scholars to argue against excesses. For example, the concept of **"hisba"** in Islam is about promoting good and preventing wrong – it was often used to check corrupt officials. The institution of the **ulama** (scholars) at times acted as a balance to caliphal power: if a ruler was seen as violating Sharia egregiously, he risked losing legitimacy in the eyes of the public (e.g. Caliph Al-Mutawakkil in 9th c. had to back off some oppressive measures because of pushback from jurists). There was also a strong tradition of **scholarly autonomy** – many ulama, funded by *waqf* endowments, were not direct state employees, so they could speak somewhat freely. Cases like **Ibn Hanbal's stand during the Mihna** – he was tortured for refusing the state's imposed doctrine, but eventually he won public sympathy and the policy was reversed – illustrate how public opinion and piety could restrain ideological tyranny.

Another internal dynamic: **Sufi orders** (mystical brotherhoods) often preached tolerance and compassion, and many were anti-authoritarian or at least separate from state control. In times when rulers were harsh, Sufi shaykhs might provide refuge for common people and criticize injustices obliquely through poetry and teaching. For instance, the poems of Sa'di or Rumi include barbs at kings' cruelty, framing them within Islamic ethics. In some cases, Sufi-led revolts or movements arose against oppressive governments (the **Sanusi** in colonial North Africa, or the **Naqshbandi** sheikhs who sometimes opposed corrupt local governors in Central Asia).

Sectarian pluralism also acted as a check: no single institution monopolized Islam the way the Papacy sometimes tried in Christianity. Competing schools of law (Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali for Sunnis; Ja'fari for Shia, etc.) meant a ruler could not easily enforce an interpretation if a sizeable group of scholars disagreed. This diversity meant that at various times, persecuted groups could find safe zones – e.g. **Ismaili Shias** persecuted by Sunnis in one place might find refuge under another Shia dynasty (like the Fatimids in Egypt) and vice versa.

From within Islamic tradition came also philosophies of governance: writers like **Al-Farabi** or **Nizam al-Mulk** penned advice on just rulership aligning with Islamic virtue – they effectively counseled moderation and ethical conduct, which some rulers heeded. The **Ottoman Kanun** (secular law codes by sultans like Suleyman the Lawgiver) often integrated fairness principles to supplement Sharia, showing a pragmatic approach to governance where strict religious rulings were softened by customary law for the sake of the public interest.

Moving to modern reforms: In the 19th–20th centuries, many Muslim intellectuals pushed to reform or reinterpret Islamic law to be compatible with human rights and equality (e.g. **abolishing slavery**, which the Ottoman Empire did by late 19th c. partly under Western pressure but also local reformers; or promoting **women's education**, which reformers like Egypt's Qasim Amin argued for using Islamic arguments that early Islam improved women's status). These reform movements helped dismantle some of the formal inequalities – e.g. **Ottoman Tanzimat reforms** in 1856 officially abolished the dhimmi inferior status, making all subjects equal under law (though social differences remained). Many majority-Muslim countries today have constitutions that, at least on paper, guarantee religious freedom and equal citizenship regardless of faith (a huge break from the pre-modern norm) – this can be seen as the result of internal adaptation and external influence merging.

Collapse or Transformation: The political unity of Islam under a single caliphate effectively ended in the mid-13th century when the **Mongols destroyed Baghdad (1258)**. After that, no single caliph held universal authority (the Ottomans claimed the caliphate later, but by then the Muslim world was divided among several great empires – Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal – and many minor sultanates). In the modern era, especially by the early 20th century, *most majority-Muslim regions fell under European colonial rule*, which meant the end (temporarily) of indigenous Islamic governance in those lands. For example, by 1920, the Ottoman Empire collapsed (after WWI), and the formal **Caliphate was abolished in 1924** by the new secular Turkish Republic. This was a watershed: for the first time in 1300 years, no widely recognized caliph existed. Many Muslim intellectuals at the time actually celebrated this as a chance to modernize and separate religion from the corruption of monarchy (others, of course, lamented it deeply).

Under colonial rule, Sharia law was often restricted to personal status issues (marriage, inheritance) while Europeans imposed their legal codes on criminal and commercial matters. This marginalization of Sharia in public life led to a kind of eclipse of traditional Islamic governance. Post-WWII, as states gained independence, many adopted secular-nationalist governments (e.g. Nasser's Egypt, Atatürk's Turkey earlier, the Shah's Iran pre-1979, Baathist Iraq and Syria). Some of these tried to actively suppress Islamic political expression (e.g. Turkey banned the fez and Sufi orders; the Shah of Iran sidelined the clergy). However, by the late 20th century there was a **resurgence of politicized Islam** – most dramatically the **Iranian Revolution of 1979**, which established a Shi'a theocracy in Iran. Also the rise of movements like the *Muslim Brotherhood* (founded 1928 in Egypt) sought to reassert Islamic values in governance (though via modern political organization). The collapse or transformation thus is ongoing: Islam did not disappear as a social force, but its role shifted from being *the basis of empire* to often being *the banner of opposition or alternative* to Westernized states.

In many places today, we see a contest: secular laws vs. calls to implement more Sharia. Some countries like *Pakistan* or *Sudan* oscillated on this. The *Ottoman millet* legacy (managing diversity by communal autonomy) gave way to nation-states that often struggled with identity (e.g. an officially secular law but majority Muslim population often wanting more recognition of Islam). By and large, the direct governance by caliphs is gone – what remains are nation-states that might call themselves *Islamic Republics* (Pakistan, Iran, Mauritania, etc.) or have Islam as state religion, but these are modern constructs using a mix of Sharia and modern law.

In summary, the unified *Dar al-Islam* of medieval imagination fractured into modern units; yet Islam as a religion globalized further (today, ~1.8 billion Muslims, more diverse than ever). The *caliphate idea* persists in some ideological corners (e.g. ISIS's short-lived self-declared caliphate in 2014-19 sought to *undo* the centuries of fragmentation in a very brutal way). For most Muslims, though, the faith has transformed into a personal and community identity that may or may not align with the state – quite analogous to Christianity's transformation after the end of *Christendom*.

Enduring Leftovers: The legacy of the Islamic empires is extensive:

- **Borders and States:** The spread of Islam created the cultural-geographic concept of the **"Muslim world"** – many modern countries from Morocco to Indonesia have Muslim majorities because of those conquests and missions long ago. The **Middle East's map** today partly reflects post-WWI deals by European powers, but within that, the *cultural landscape* (which areas are mainly Muslim vs Christian etc.) goes back to the Caliphate. For example, the existence of countries like *Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia* etc. stems from colonial borders, but the fact that they are overwhelmingly Muslim is the leftover of being in the heart of historic caliphates. The **partition of India (1947)** into India and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) is a direct leftover of Islam's long presence in South Asia – the inability of Muslim and Hindu elites to agree on a unified nation led to partition, creating a Muslim-majority Pakistan. That partition's violence and the enduring Kashmir conflict are thus indirectly traceable to the medieval Muslim conquests and Mughal rule that gave India such a large Muslim population and legacy of separate identity. In Africa, the Sudan split between a Muslim north and Christian/animist south (South Sudan, new in 2011) reflects the old Sahelian reach of Islam. Even in the Balkans: the reason Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo have significant Muslim populations today is Ottoman rule – and conflicts in the 90s Balkans wars had a religious tinge due to that leftover (Serbian nationalists targeting Bosniak Muslims in a genocide at Srebrenica 1995, for instance) (HMDT, 2025).
- **Law and Institutions:** Many countries in the Muslim world retain elements of Sharia in their legal system (especially in family law). For example, **Egypt**'s constitution says Sharia is a principal source of legislation, and indeed its family law is Islamic (allowing polygamy for men, unequal inheritance, etc.). **Saudi Arabia** straight up uses classical Sharia courts for most matters. Pakistan has Islamic provisions (its infamous blasphemy law mentioned earlier). Even **secular Turkey**, after decades of strict secularism, has seen a return of public Islam (under Erdoğan). The legacy of **Ottoman millet** can be seen in places like Lebanon where political offices are still allocated by religious community – a leftover way to manage diversity that persists, albeit contentiously. The **Islamic educational system** (madrasas) still thrives and produces many religious scholars, sometimes paralleling or even competing with state school systems – e.g. in Pakistan and Nigeria, madrasa networks influence millions, sometimes contributing to radicalization if they follow extreme doctrines (this is a leftover of traditional education not fully integrated into modern state). The **concept of a transnational Ummah** (community of believers) is also an institutional leftover: organizations like the *Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)*, essentially a UN of Muslim-majority countries, exist to voice collective interests, partly an artifact of shared identity from the Caliphate era.

- **Sectarian Division:** The Sunni-Shia split from the 7th century is a leftover that profoundly affects modern geopolitics: the rivalry of **Sunni Saudi Arabia vs. Shia Iran** is sometimes described as a modern proxy war akin to a "Cold War" in the Middle East, fueling conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, etc.. Groups like Hezbollah (Shia) vs. ISIS (Sunni) have sectarian ideology at core, all rooted in that ancient divide. In South Asia, sectarian tensions between Sunnis and minority Shias (and also Ahmadiyyas, who are considered heretical by orthodox) result in sporadic violence. This sectarian consciousness is clearly a leftover of historical theological disputes that empires sometimes stoked or at least managed.
- **Cultural and Demographic:** The Islamization of places left enduring cultural blends – e.g. **Swahili culture** on the East African coast is a leftover of Arab traders' influence (language is Bantu but written in Arabic script historically, with many loanwords). The **Persianate culture** in South and Central Asia (use of Persian language in poetry and court, etc.) is a leftover of Islamic empires that adopted Persian as lingua franca (Mughal, Timurid, etc.). Millions of people bear the names, dress, and customs influenced by the Islamic golden age. Even beyond majority-Muslim countries, regions of China (Xinjiang with the Uyghurs), Russia (Volga Tatars, Caucasus), India (170 million Muslims), Ethiopia (1/3 Muslim) all have Islamic identity imprints due to historical expansions.

There is also a genetic legacy quite literally: studies suggest that, for instance, a significant portion of people in Iran or Spain might have Middle Eastern genetic input from Arab or Berber migrations in the conquest period (similar to how Latin America's population shows Iberian/indigenous mix due to Spanish colonization – a parallel dynamic).

- **Memory and Grievance:** As noted, *Crusades* vs. *Jihad* remain part of rhetoric. After 9/11, US President Bush's offhand use of the word "crusade" caused outcry in the Muslim world because that memory is raw. Conversely, jihadist propaganda often casts the West as *Crusaders*, tapping into lingering resentment of the medieval Crusades and later colonialism (bin Laden called the Americans "crusader-Zionists"). The narrative of *Muslim humiliation* since the colonial carve-up is very much alive – ISIS propaganda talked about erasing the "Sykes-Picot" borders drawn by Europeans and reversing "100 years of humiliation" since the end of the caliphate. Also, within Muslim societies, there are memories like **Partition's trauma** (the Hindu-Muslim massacres of 1947) which continue to fuel nationalism and distrust in the Indian subcontinent.

On the flip side, many positive leftovers: **global trade networks** originally fostered under Islamic caliphates laid groundwork for today's interconnectivity (the idea of a single currency and relatively free movement from Spain to China in the 8th-13th c. was realized under Islamic rule, a precursor to globalization). Words in English like "algebra," "alchemy," "algorithm" are linguistic leftovers from Arabic, reminding of scientific contributions.

- **Islam as Identity beyond Empire:** Perhaps the biggest leftover is that Islam remains a unifying identity that crosses national borders. This can manifest constructively (global charity efforts, pilgrimages bringing diverse peoples together in Mecca, etc.) or destructively (transnational terror networks). But either way, the sense of *Ummah* forged when the early caliphs built their empire is still a political factor; e.g. pan-Islamic

sentiments influence countries' foreign policies (Saudi Arabia funding mosques abroad to spread its interpretation, or Pakistan feeling obligation toward causes like Palestine, etc.).

In conclusion for Islam: its entanglement with empire produced a civilization of great achievement and relative pluralism at times, but also episodes of conquest and coercion not unlike other world powers. In modern times, the breakup of Islamic empires underlies many current issues (from Middle Eastern conflict lines to debates over secularism vs. theocracy). As with Christianity, the core religious teachings can be interpreted towards peace or war – and historically it was the *structure of power* that often determined which interpretation prevailed at a given time.

(We see in both Christian and Islamic cases that scripture alone doesn't explain the full story – context and power do. Next, we will examine a non-religious empire to further illustrate that even without a "holy book," similar patterns of conquest and harm can emerge when an ideology of domination takes hold.)

The Mongol Empire: World Conquest Under the "Eternal Blue Sky"

Belief System Overview: The *Mongol Empire* (13th–14th centuries) presents a control case of an imperial power **without a codified theology** like the major religions. The Mongols followed a shamanistic tradition centered on **Tengri** – the Eternal Blue Sky – and various nature spirits, but their empire-building was not driven by a proselytizing religion. Instead, their guiding "ideology" was a belief in their own **destiny to conquer the world** under the mandate of Heaven (Tengri). Genghis Khan (Chinggis Khan), whose title means "Universal Ruler," fostered a quasi-religious aura around his leadership: he was seen as Heaven's chosen to unite the world. The Mongols highly valued **obedience, loyalty, and martial prowess** – encapsulated later in their law code, the *Yassa*. This code, though not a spiritual scripture, functioned as a strict ethical and legal framework emphasizing discipline within the Mongol ranks and mercilessness to outsiders. So, while not a religion, one can say the Mongol ethos was an **absolutist warrior creed**: all the world should submit to the Khan's authority or face annihilation. The Mongols also held a shamanistic belief that the spirits or Heaven favored them when they were strong – victory in war was taken as a sign of divine favor. In effect, **conquest itself was sacralized** in their culture; they toasted "to the Eternal Sky" before campaigns, and legends say Genghis Khan prayed on a mountain to Tengri before key battles. The lack of a missionary impulse meant they didn't care what religion subjects were, *unless* it impeded loyalty or tribute – but they had no ideological restraint on violence. In fact, fear and terror were consciously used as tools (exaggerating their own brutality to induce cities to surrender without fight). Thus, the Mongol "belief system" can be summarized as a belief in **their Heaven-sanctioned supremacy and an apocalyptic vision of world conquest**.

Institutional Architecture: The Mongols did not build elaborate bureaucratic institutions initially; their "institution" was essentially the **army and the tribal organization**. Genghis Khan famously reorganized the army into units of tens, hundreds, thousands (the decimal system) cutting across tribal lines, to break old loyalties and create a meritocratic structure where

promotion was based on loyalty and skill rather than noble birth. This new social order – where any capable warrior could rise and aristocrats could be humbled – became a backbone of Mongol governance. The Yassa (law code) was also a sort of institution: it was orally proclaimed and enforced ruthlessly, covering everything from military discipline to property rights within the empire. One key rule was absolute obedience to the Khan and severe punishment for disobedience or betrayal (e.g. any general who disobeyed orders could be executed, no matter how high-ranking). The Mongols did convene **kurultai** – grand councils of chiefs – for major decisions like electing a new Great Khan. While theoretically these were a check (consensus-based leadership selection), in practice the family of Genghis dominated, though succession struggles happened (civil wars among grandsons did erupt later).

They did incorporate some governance techniques from conquered peoples: for example, in China and Persia they utilized local bureaucrats (like employing Chinese advisors in administering Northern China or utilizing Persian viziers in Iran). But at their core, Mongol administration remained minimalistic – they often *outsourced tax collection* to local merchants or officials, or simply demanded tribute and left local rulers in place if they submitted (this was common in Russia under the "Golden Horde" – Russian princes were vassals who paid tribute but ran local affairs).

One significant institution the Mongols created was the **Yam** – a relay postal system across the empire with stations and messengers enabling rapid communication. This knit the vast domains together administratively and is sometimes hailed as an early communications network facilitating trade and governance. They also set up census-taking in parts of their empire to assess tribute (e.g. in China and Persia). Another policy: they **exempted religious clergy of all faiths from taxes** empire-wide – a pragmatic move to keep priests of various religions loyal (Buddhist monks, Muslim imams, Christian priests all were freed from taxation by Mongol decree). This ironically made them appear as religiously tolerant, though arguably it was to placate all gods, hedging bets spiritually as well as currying favor with populations.

Crucially, as an institution, the Mongols used **psychological warfare** almost systematically – spreading fearsome reputation (like letting a few survivors flee to tell of the destruction of the last city) so the next city might surrender without a fight. One could say *terror itself was institutionalized* as a Mongol strategy.

They lacked a central religious authority or dogmatic council (unlike say a Caliph or Pope) – Genghis Khan's authority was personal and law-based, not priestly. This meant their empire was more decentralized once initial conquests were over – it quickly fractured into khanates partly because there wasn't a unifying ideology beyond loyalty to the family and the momentum of conquest. Yet the Mongols did adapt: in China, Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty, adopting many trappings of a Chinese emperor (confucian-style ministries) but keeping Mongols atop; in Persia, the Ilkhans eventually adopted Islam, blending into local structures. Early on, though, the Mongol institution was straightforward: **the mobile camp** was the government, and the Khan's decrees were law.

State Capture and Empire Function: The Mongols went from stateless nomadic tribes to having *a state of their own making*. Genghis Khan essentially **forged a new state** by uniting

Mongol and Turkic tribes by 1206 (when he was proclaimed Great Khan). The purpose of this state was almost singular: **war and expansion**. The Mongol Empire's functioned as a war machine that extracted resources from conquered areas to fuel further expansion. When they captured a sedentary state, they either co-opted its administrative apparatus or destroyed it if it resisted and replaced it with minimal occupation forces. They demanded **tribute and obedience** from those allowed to survive. Many cities in Central Asia and Khorasan that resisted were utterly annihilated (examples: **Nishapur, Herat, Baghdad** – Baghdad's sacking in 1258 ended the Abbasid caliphate, and the Mongols killed tens of thousands, rolled the last caliph in a rug and trampled him – because shedding royal blood was taboo – and effectively decapitated Islamic governance). Those who submitted peacefully were often spared relatively: for instance, cities that opened gates and provided provisions would be forced to pay heavy tribute and give conscripts but not destroyed. Thus, the empire functioned on a carrot-or-stick approach: **fear to prompt surrender, tolerance if surrendered**. They even allowed local rulers to continue (especially on the far western edges, some Russian princes and Georgian kings kept their thrones under Mongol overlordship, paying tribute).

Administratively, the Mongols were innovative in warfare: they learned **siege warfare** techniques from Chinese and Persian engineers they captured, deploying the first widespread use of gunpowder weapons in the West. They also adapted: e.g. in Persia, when faced with irrigation canal systems they didn't understand, sometimes they just destroyed them to cripple agricultural bases of resistance (the destruction around the **Aral Sea region and in Iraq's canal systems** was so severe that some lands turned to desert and never fully recovered). This shows the downside of a regime with a pure conquest function: little interest in long-term development of lands (other than securing trade routes). Indeed, Mongol rule tended to cause a **sharp population decrease** in many regions – estimates vary, but China's population might have declined by tens of millions during the 13th c. invasions, and Iran's by maybe 50% due to war and famine combined.

The Mongol empire was also built on extracting wealth: each conquered region provided troops and taxes for the next campaign. For example, after subjugating the Turkic tribes and Northern China (Jin dynasty), the Mongols recruited Chinese siege engineers and infantry to then attack the Middle East. They treated the sedentary populations as essentially **economic resources** – labor and craftsmen were often **rounded up and deported** to wherever needed (famously, Genghis relocated many artisans from Central Asia to Karakorum or Mongolia). If a city resisted, skilled artisans and youths might be spared (enslaved) while the rest were slaughtered. This kind of sorting was systematic.

When the Mongols encountered systems they found useful, they kept them. For instance, in China Kublai Khan retained much of the government structure but placed Mongols and trusted foreigners (like Marco Polo) at the top, barring ethnic Chinese from high positions. In the Golden Horde (Russia), they simply took tribute through local intermediaries. This pragmatic flexibility helped them rule a vast empire with relatively few Mongols (perhaps 1 million Mongols trying to rule 100 million+ subjects).

One could say the Mongols ran an empire **via fear and tribute**: people paid and obeyed to avoid destruction. And it worked for a time – the Pax Mongolica in mid-13th to mid-14th century

allowed trade (the Silk Road thrived under their unified control). But once conquests ceased, the glue holding the khanates together weakened, and the empire fragmented along family lines into four main khanates by late 13th century (each adopting aspects of local culture – e.g. the Ilkhanate became Muslim, the Yuan dynasty became partly sinicized, etc.).

Harm Profile: The **Mongol conquests were cataclysmic** in terms of immediate death and destruction. All harm vectors apply except possibly "forced conversion," since the Mongols didn't care what you believed as long as you submitted (they were relatively **religiously tolerant** in a cynical way – religious freedom as long as taxes were paid). Instead of conversion, they enforced political allegiance utterly.

- **Territorial Conquest:** They built the largest contiguous land empire ever – from Korea to Hungary. In doing so, they destroyed entire states: the **Khwarezmian Empire** in Persia/Central Asia was obliterated by Genghis' invasion around 1220; the **Jin Dynasty** in North China fell by 1234; the **Abbasid Caliphate** fell in 1258; they overran Kievan **Rus'** (1237–40) and much of Eastern Europe (defeating Polish and Hungarian armies in 1241). Their conquests often included unprecedented deep penetrations – no steppe army had reached the Adriatic shores before, but Mongol scouts did. The effect was a reshaping of Eurasian power – ancient cities like **Merv, Samarkand, Bokhara** were leveled or depopulated. Some historians estimate the Mongols may have reduced the world population by **10%** or more (though very rough). One scholarly estimate is ~40 million deaths caused by the Mongol expansion, which was roughly 10% of the world population then – leading some to label it history's deadliest genocide by proportion. They also gained the dubious credit of causing so much farmland to return to forest (from depopulation) that it may have sequestered carbon and caused a bit of global cooling (a modern study by Pongratz et al. suggests Mongol conquests of the 1200s lead to significant reforestation in Asia).
- **Forced Displacement:** The Mongols routinely **deported** labor. As mentioned, artisans and engineers captured in one land were moved to another to serve the Mongols. Entire populations were sometimes transplanted: for instance, after crushing resistance in central Asia, Genghis relocated a large number of **Tajik and Uighur administrators** to Mongolia to help him govern there (since Mongols themselves were not literate or experienced in administration). Under Kublai, many Chinese artisans were sent to work in Karakorum (Mongolia) or in new construction in the capital **Khanbaliq** (Beijing). The **"scorched earth"** approach also displaced survivors: e.g. when the Mongols attacked the **Cumans** (a nomadic people in Eastern Europe), they scattered, and a large group of Cumans ended up fleeing into Hungary for protection (only to face the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241 that killed many of them anyway) (Espada, A. G, 2024). In Middle East, survivors of the Hulagu's sack of Baghdad fled to places like Egypt (which under the Mamluks became a refuge and center of Islamic revival partly fueled by refugees). Also, the Mongols sometimes deliberately used **human shields** or drove refugees ahead of them to disrupt enemy cities, causing panic and movement of peoples.
- **Legal Stratification:** The Mongols didn't create a nuanced class system by religion as the caliphates did; rather, they themselves were the master caste. There was effectively an **ethnic hierarchy**: Mongols (and later Mongolized Turkic allies) at top; then maybe foreign experts (some favored folks like Uyghurs and Nestorian Christians who helped

them early were given status); and the bulk of sedentary conquered people at bottom. In **China**, the Yuan Dynasty explicitly had a four-class system: 1) Mongols, 2) "Semuren" (colored-eye people, meaning Central Asians, Persians, Europeans – basically any allies from the west), 3) North Chinese (who had come under Mongol rule earlier, many of them Jurchen or Khitan or Chinese who surrendered early), and 4) Southern Chinese (who resisted longest and were last conquered) at the bottom. This affected job quotas, legal treatment (Southern Chinese faced heavier punishments). So yes, they stratified legally by origin. In **Russia**, they allowed local law for daily matters but any offense against a Mongol was punished far more severely than one against another Russian – effectively an occupier's law.

- **Coercive Conversion:** As noted, not a Mongol thing. If anything, some Mongol khans converted to local religions eventually (e.g. Mongke Khan flirted with Christianity due to his Nestorian mother, many Mongols in the Ilkhanate converted to Islam in late 1200s, the Golden Horde became Muslim under Berke Khan). But they did sometimes use sectarian affiliations instrumentally: e.g. during Hulagu's sack of Baghdad, some accounts claim that **Nestorian Christian** officers in his army took the opportunity to target **Muslims** (since Hulagu's wife was Christian and they were allied with Crusaders at that time). That had quasi-religious overtones, but it wasn't about conversion – more revenge/extermination.

- **Slavery and Human Trafficking:** The Mongol campaigns yielded innumerable captives and they certainly enslaved many. Skilled slaves they kept or gifted; young women were often taken as **concubines** (Genghis Khan and his offspring had massive harems – Genghis is genetically said to be ancestor of 16 million men today due to so many concubines and wives). Unskilled prisoners were sometimes forced to serve as **"arrow fodder"** in battles (e.g. marched in front to absorb enemy arrows). They also traded slaves; slave markets in places like Crimea thrived under Mongol rule (Caffa, a Genoese colony, traded slaves from Mongol territories including Slavs and Caucasians). The concept of *"Yasa"* also had slaves built into legal edicts (punishments often involved turning someone into a slave). So yes, a huge forced labor system existed – though perhaps not as systematized as later Atlantic slavery. Instead it was like constant capture and redistribution of human booty. Famously, **Marco Polo** mentions meeting many slaves from all over in Kublai's court – evidence of multi-ethnic slaves turned servants.

- **Sectarian Massacres:** The Mongols didn't target groups by religion per se; it was more total war against anyone resisting. So, *cleansing* was not ideological but strategic. One might consider their wiping out of certain **lineages** (like executing the entire aristocratic clan of the Kwarazm empire or the Abbasid family) as a form of targeted elimination. After conquering, sometimes they did eliminate *dissident sects*: e.g. in Persia, some historical notes suggest Mongols had a number of **Shamsi (Syrian) Christians and Shi'as** in their army who took out their anger on **Sunni** populations after Baghdad fell, indicating some sectarian element. But again, it wasn't official policy so much as collateral nastiness. On ethnic lines, they virtually wiped out some **cities/ethnic groups** that resisted – e.g. the **Tangut people** of Western Xia (northwest China) were nearly annihilated so that their language and culture disappeared in a couple generations. Same with certain **Assassins (Nizari Ismailis)** in Persia; their castles were destroyed by Hulagu. So, if we broaden sectarian to mean any identified group, yes the Mongols committed *genocidal acts* on multiple city-based or ethnic groups.

- **Suppression of Dissent:** Within the empire, **dissent among Mongols** was handled ruthlessly (executions for disloyalty as said). They didn't allow subject peoples to arm or rebel; any rebellion was met with immediate mass slaughter – e.g. when cities under their control revolted (like a rebellion in the city of Herat after initial surrender), the Mongols returned and massacred the entire populace as a warning. There was no freedom of speech obviously; but interestingly some religious figures under Mongol tolerance did critique them – e.g. an Islamic scholar in the Ilkhanate could publicly debate a Buddhist or Christian in front of the Khan as they encouraged interfaith dialogs for amusement. But speaking against the Khan's authority was death. And knowledge was controlled in so far as: the Mongols sometimes **killed scholars** or anyone who might rally resistance. For instance, after Baghdad's conquest, thousands of *ulama* and *sayyids* (descendants of Prophet) were killed, eliminating the intellectual leadership of Iraq; similarly in Northern China many Confucian scholars were out of jobs (though Kublai later patronized some to govern).
- **Gender Violence:** Mongols frequently practiced mass rape during conquests – survivors' accounts mention that after taking a city, Mongol soldiers would enslave women and rape them. The institution of harems meant capturing women was a deliberate aim. Genghis Khan's numerous offspring from captured princesses is case in point. They also committed atrocities like using captured women as **servants for soldiers' camps** (essentially sexual and domestic slavery). Mongol women within their society actually had relatively high status – Mongol queens ruled portions of the empire as regents at times – but that didn't translate to sparing enemy women. On the contrary, enemy women were part of the war booty. As far as law: the Yassa forbade adultery among Mongols on punishment of death, but of course that didn't protect non-Mongol women from being treated as concubines outside formal marriage.
- **Cultural Erasure:** The Mongols destroyed countless cultural treasures: libraries in Baghdad, ancient **Persian irrigation systems** (altering environment and wiping out agricultural heritage), Chinese imperial palaces in the north, etc. They sometimes **appropriated** rather than erased – e.g. they took artisans from one place to build monuments elsewhere (Karakorum was decorated with art stolen from everywhere). But in many cases, they were **indifferent to local culture**: e.g. when beseiging cities, they'd use holy sites as stables. They toppled monuments (the Caliph's great library, the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, was thrown into the Tigris river reportedly). That said, once the empire settled a bit, some Mongol rulers became patrons of local cultures (Kublai patronized Chinese opera and Tibetan Buddhism; in Golden Horde, later khans patronized Islamic learning). However, the initial blow often permanently altered cultural demographics – for example, **Buddhism** in Central Asia never recovered after the Mongols and earlier Turkic Muslim invasions leveled monasteries like **Nalanda**; the heartland of Buddhism shifted to East Asia, while Central Asia became mostly Muslim. One could partly attribute Buddhism's near-disappearance in India to the devastation of its institutions by Turkic and Mongol invaders (Mongols indirectly by destabilizing regions).
- **Economic Exploitation:** The Mongols' method was simple: take what you can. They imposed heavy **tribute**: for instance, Russian principalities had to pay a fixed hefty amount yearly or face a raid (when some like Novgorod delayed payment, the Mongols would come and devastate to remind them). In China, the Yuan dynasty extracted

revenues to fund wars against Japan, Vietnam, etc., burdening peasants; there were attempts at paper currency and inflation soared – their mismanagement and corruption (many Mongol aristocrats extorting the populace) is cited as a cause of peasant rebellions that ended Yuan rule in 1368. The Mongols also **plundered** art and precious metals – they famously looted the gold and silver of conquered lands to fill their coffers. One arguably positive effect: by securing the Silk Road, they facilitated commerce (the "Pax Mongolica"), but this was incidental – their motive was to tax that trade (they protected caravans for a cut). They often forced merchants to give them goods at arbitrary "prices" – effectively partial theft (Marco Polo recounts at Kublai's court, foreign merchants had to present fine goods to the Khan for which he gave compensation often below market). The Mongols taxed agriculture, but often without sustaining it – resulting in famine in some areas. So exploitation was heavy and not tempered by any ideological claim of fairness – it was raw extraction underpinned by threat of annihilation.

In sum, the Mongol harm profile is one of **extreme violence and devastation** unmatched until possibly the 20th century. Their short-term strategy of terror achieved the widest conquests, but long-term they didn't establish enduring institutions or win hearts, so after a generation or two their empire either assimilated (like the Golden Horde becoming Muslim and more settled) or disintegrated. However, their legacy in world history is huge: they connected East-West, perhaps helped transmit technologies (and unfortunately the Black Death along trade routes). But for our theme, the Mongols illustrate that **even without a religious ideology, a fanatical commitment to conquest for its own sake can yield similar atrocities**. Genghis Khan's empire shows that a *secular* (or rather non-theological) ethos – the cult of personality and tribe – can be as destructive as any holy war. This foreshadows modern secular tyrannies which we'll see later.

It's worth noting the Mongols eventually did pick up religions: many became **Buddhist** (Mongolia today is mostly Tibetan Buddhist), some became Muslim (like Golden Horde), but during their conquests religion was subservient to imperial ideology. Perhaps the greatest *leftover* of the Mongols, besides genetic and demographic changes, is a cautionary tale often cited by later empire builders about the use of fear – which sometimes deterred later leaders from going "full Mongol," opting instead for more stabilizing strategies.

(Having examined religions and this "control case" of the Mongols, we will now turn back to religious traditions: Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shinto, each in their historical contexts of power. We'll then conclude with modern secular ideologies.)

Judaism: Covenant, Kingdom, and the Quest for a Homeland

Belief System Overview: *Judaism* is one of the oldest monotheistic faiths, centered on a **covenant** between the Hebrew people and God (Yahweh) as recorded in the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). Its core cosmological claim is that there is one God who chose the Israelites for a special mission – to follow His laws (the 613 commandments of the Torah) and be a "light unto the nations." Unlike Christianity or Islam, Judaism is not universalist or seeking converts; traditionally it does *not* mandate spreading the faith to all humanity. Rather, it often

defined itself ethnically (descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and through adherence to the Law. In ancient times, Judaism did have a **political dimension**: the Hebrew Bible describes the establishment of a Kingdom of Israel (first under Saul, then David and Solomon) around 1000 BCE, wherein religious and political identity were one – Yahweh was the national God and the Temple in Jerusalem the center of worship and sovereignty. The biblical narrative even includes *divinely sanctioned conquest*: e.g. Joshua's conquest of Canaan is essentially a **holy war** origin story for Israel, albeit set in a legendary past. Thus, scripture provided an example of violently establishing a promised land. However, historically the ancient Israelite kingdom(s) were small and short-lived (the northern kingdom destroyed in 722 BCE by Assyrians, the southern kingdom of Judah exiled in 586 BCE by Babylonians). After that, for over two millennia, Jews mostly lived under foreign empires and did not wield sovereign power (exceptions being brief autonomy under the Hasmonean dynasty 2nd–1st c. BCE, and the revolt of 66–73 CE against Rome which failed). This meant Judaism's focus shifted inward: **Rabbinic Judaism** (after 70 CE) emphasized studying Torah, prayer, and waiting for a future Messiah to restore Israel, rather than exerting political dominion. A famous Talmudic injunction told Jews not to rebel against the nations. So the core ethical teachings stress justice, charity, and holiness in personal/community life, not expansion. There is an enduring *hope* though: the prayer "Next Year in Jerusalem" reflects the longing for return to Zion and restoration of Jewish sovereignty promised by prophets.

Imperial/State Adoption: In antiquity, Judaism was tied to state power during the time of the **Hasmonean Kingdom** (140–37 BCE) and later under **Herod the Great** (37–4 BCE, a client king of Rome). The Hasmoneans (the Maccabee family) actually led a successful revolt against the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire and established an independent Jewish state (the events celebrated in Hanukkah). During their rule, they were somewhat theocratic – the king often also assumed the High Priest role. They expanded territory into parts of what are today Israel/Palestine/Jordan and forcibly *Judaized* some populations (the Hasmonean John Hyrcanus is said to have forced the Idumeans to convert or leave – a rare instance of coercive conversion by Jews in power). However, this independent streak ended when the Romans intervened; by 6 CE most of Judea became a Roman province. Under Roman rule, Jews had limited autonomy (the Sanhedrin council could handle internal affairs) but heavy Roman oversight. A key event is the **Great Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE)** which was brutally crushed; Jerusalem's Temple was destroyed in 70 CE. A second revolt (Bar Kokhba, 132–135 CE) also failed, after which Romans banned Jews from Jerusalem and renamed the province **Palestine**. These defeats signaled the end of Jewish state power for a very long time.

In the diaspora period, Judaism survived under various empires – Roman, Persian, Islamic caliphates, Christian kingdoms – but as a subordinate millet or community. Notably, in medieval Islamic and Christian realms, Jews had no imperial aspirations or state apparatus, focusing on communal self-governance where allowed. The religion's *institutional architecture* revolved around local community councils and scholarly courts (Batei Din), not a central hierarchy (after the Sanhedrin was gone).

However, an unusual situation arose in the **Khazar Kingdom** (circa 8th–10th c.): the Turkic ruling elite of Khazaria (in today's southern Russia) **converted to Judaism** around 800 CE, apparently for political reasons to remain neutral between Christian Byzantium and the Muslim

Caliphate. This meant for a time there was a Jewish state – the Khazar Khaganate – which adopted Judaism as its official faith. It's a bit obscure in historical record, but it shows Judaism *could* serve as state religion, though Khazaria didn't embark on religious conquest (they were a trading empire). Khazaria fell in the 10th c. to Rus and other steppe tribes.

Fast forward to modern times: **Zionism** emerged in late 19th c. as a secular nationalist movement aiming to establish a Jewish state. Though initially secular (Herzl was not devout), it still drew on religious sentiment (the biblical tie to the Land of Israel). This movement eventually led to the founding of the **State of Israel (1948)**, effectively a re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty after two millennia. Israel's formation and ongoing conflicts can be seen as a modern fusion of Jewish identity with state power (though Israel is not a theocracy – it's a peculiar blend: officially a Jewish state but with democratic institutions).

So, historically, Judaism rarely held empire-level power; the main times it did (ancient Israel, Hasmoneans, Khazars, modern Israel) are instructive on how the religion interacts with rule.

Mechanisms of Expansion: Ancient Israel's expansion, according to the Bible, was at God's command (the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, which as mentioned is portrayed as a genocide of the indigenous tribes – though historically this account is debated and likely not as complete as described). The Hasmonean expansion in the 2nd c. BCE was more political but also cast as purifying the land of idolatry. In that period, some Idumeans (Edomites) and Itureans were indeed forcibly converted (Josephus, a historian, writes about John Hyrcanus compelling Idumeans to become Jewish or be exiled). This is a rare case because Judaism generally discourages conversion. But to unify their kingdom, the Hasmoneans did push it on some neighboring peoples. They also destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, indicating a desire to centralize worship in Jerusalem – essentially an act of cultural/religious dominance even within related populations.

After the Roman dispersal, Jews did not engage in expansion by arms anywhere – lacking a state, they expanded only by migration or population growth in host countries. They sometimes gained influence at courts (e.g. some Jewish viziers in Muslim Spain, or finance roles in Christian Europe) but that's different from communal expansion. Generally, Jewish communities remained a minority and often victim rather than perpetrator of expansionist harm.

Zionism, however, in the 20th c. took on some characteristics of an expansionary ideology in practice. Jewish settlement of Palestine (1880s–1940s) was largely peaceful purchase of land, but after Israel's declaration and the 1948 War, Israel expanded beyond the UN partition plan's borders and some 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were expelled or fled (**Nakba**). Some Israeli historians (like Benny Morris) describe certain expulsions as deliberate to secure a Jewish majority – effectively a form of *ethnic cleansing* under a nationalist impetus, albeit not explicitly religiously driven (Zionism's leaders were mostly secular, but religion played a part in motivating some fighters with biblical claims to the land). In 1967, Israel further conquered East Jerusalem, West Bank, Golan Heights, etc. Settlement policies since have seen religious-Zionist groups leading the charge to settle biblical heartlands (Samaria/Judea). These actions illustrate that once Jewish people had state power again, a subset used biblical justifications for territorial claims, leading to conflict. However, it's crucial to separate the religious drive from nationalist –

they overlap in Israel, but many Zionists are secular. The West Bank settler movement though is quite religious, seeing themselves reclaiming God-given land.

Harm Profile: Because Jews seldom held power sufficient for large-scale harm, the historical record of "harm by Jewish-run polities" is relatively small compared to others. We do have a few:

- **Territorial conquest and annexation:** Ancient Israel (if biblical accounts are taken) did conquer Canaanite cities, and the Hasmoneans annexed territories like Idumea and Galilee, sometimes forcibly Judaizing them. Modern Israel conquered territory in 1948 and 1967 beyond what was allocated, annexed East Jerusalem and Golan (unrecognized internationally), and occupies West Bank. These conquests caused wars and displacement of Arab populations.
- **Forced displacement:** The prime example is the **1948 Palestinian exodus (Nakba)** – whether one argues it was planned or a wartime outcome, about 700k Palestinians ended up displaced. Also in 1967, another ~300k fled. From a harm perspective, that's a major population transfer. In antiquity, ironically, Jews themselves were often displaced by others (the Babylonian Exile, the Roman expulsion). But under Hasmonean rule, we don't have accounts of mass expulsions; rather they integrated or forced conversion of those populations.
- **Legal stratification:** In the ancient Israelite law, there was a concept of *ger toshav* (resident alien) and certainly non-Israelites (like Canaanites) were treated differently – sometimes enslaved or subjected to labor if allowed to live. Under the Hasmoneans, once Idumeans converted they were presumably equal as Jews (Herod was Idumean by ancestry, though always seen as semi-outsider). In modern Israel, there has been legal stratification: for a long time, Israeli law had different status for Jewish vs. Arab inhabitants (especially pre-1966, Arab citizens were under military rule in Israel; in occupied territories to this day, Israeli settlers live under civilian law, Palestinians under military law). The 2018 **Nation-State Law** of Israel explicitly says only Jews have the right of self-determination in Israel, essentially codifying an ethnic hierarchy. So one can cite that as an example of legal stratification as a leftover of fusing ethnic-religious identity with the state.
- **Coercive conversion:** Jews are perhaps uniquely known for *not* proselytizing (some small exceptions as noted with Hasmoneans). The forced conversions by John Hyrcanus of Idumeans around 125 BCE stands out. That was short-term and those people effectively became Jews (Herod's family among them). Since then, I'm not aware of any significant program of conversion by Jewish authorities. In modern times, conversion is not forced at all (the complaint more is they make it *too hard* to convert). So this vector is minimal for Judaism, except that one episode.
- **Slavery:** Ancient Judea had slavery (like all ancient societies) – laws in Torah permit indentured servitude, though with protections (Hebrew slaves to be freed in 7 years, etc.). Under King Solomon, biblical text says he conscripted labor from non-Israelite remnants for his building projects. Hasmoneans likely took some war captives as slaves. In recent history, Jews were more victims of slave trades than perpetrators (many Jews were sold as slaves after Roman wars). However, ironically, there were Jewish merchants in medieval times involved in slave trade somewhat (e.g. Radhanite Jewish traders in early

medieval period were middlemen including in trade of Slavs to Muslim markets – though it's debated how much). But under a Jewish polity, we don't see institutional slavery beyond normative ancient practices.

- **Sectarian violence:** Among internal sects, ancient Judea had conflicts (the Maccabean revolt itself was partly Jews vs. Hellenized Jews). The Hasmoneans did forcibly suppress Samaritan worship (destruction of Gerizim temple). They may have persecuted those deemed heretical or insufficiently observant. But since losing power, Jews haven't had the capacity for sectarian violence (they were minority everywhere). In the modern Jewish state context: one could categorize Jewish extremist attacks as sectarian (e.g. the Baruch Goldstein massacre of 29 Muslims at Hebron's Tomb of Patriarchs in 1994, motivated by a far-right Jewish ideology). And the conflict itself between Israel (a Jewish state) and Arab neighbors (mostly Muslim) has a sectarian aspect, though largely ethnic/national. No genocide by Israel akin to Nazi or Ottoman scale has occurred; however, the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre of Palestinians in Lebanon was perpetrated by Christian militias but Israel bore indirect responsibility for letting it happen (an Israeli inquiry found Defense Min. Sharon culpable). Some in the Arab world consider the Nakba as an ethnic cleansing event by Jews of Arabs.
- **Suppression of dissent:** Historically, under foreign rule, Jewish communities policed their own – sometimes zealots might kill Jews seen as apostates (e.g. accounts during Hellenistic period of zealots punishing those sacrificing to Greek gods). The Hasmoneans, being priest-kings, likely didn't tolerate open challenge to Torah law. In modern Israel, which is a democracy with free press and such, dissent is mostly allowed, although there have been cases of banning parties (like Kach, a Jewish extremist party, and some Arab parties at times). Under military occupation, Israel suppresses Palestinian dissent (e.g. jailing protest leaders, censoring, etc.), but that's an occupation situation, not within its civic framework.
- **Gender-based violence:** Classical Judaism was patriarchal – women had lesser roles, but not unusually harsh for the ancient world. No systematic campaigns of violence against women beyond normative patriarchy (women couldn't be kings or priests in biblical times, divorce favored men, etc.). In modern Israel, it's fairly egalitarian legally (women even prime ministers, etc.), though certain religious communities are very patriarchal internally. So this vector not prominent.
- **Cultural erasure:** The Hasmoneans trying to erase Hellenistic pagan practices in Judea (and forcibly circumcising Idumeans) counts as cultural imperialism. Also, modern Israel – one contentious issue is the erasure of Palestinian Arab history in the narrative (e.g. renaming places with Hebrew names, digging archaeological sites that emphasize Jewish history while sometimes neglecting Islamic/Ottoman layers, etc.). Some accuse Israel of trying to Judaize East Jerusalem (through settlement, archaeology, tourism emphasis on Jewish biblical significance while ignoring Christian/Muslim significance). The demolition of villages in 1948 and building new towns on top with Hebrew names is arguably a cultural erasure tactic, whether intentional or incidental. E.g. the village of Deir Yassin, emptied in 1948, was renamed; hundreds of such villages were destroyed and not shown on modern maps, which Palestinians see as erasure of their heritage.
- **Economic exploitation:** When Jews were in minority, they sometimes were economic middlemen but not exploiters controlling state apparatus. In modern times, critiques say Palestinians in occupied territories are economically exploited (cheap labor with few

rights, resources like water in West Bank diverted to settlements, Gaza blockade causing impoverishment). Israel proper's economy is advanced and not exploitative of citizens, but the occupation economy can be seen that way – settlements benefiting from occupied land resources, etc. Historically, under King Solomon, Bible mentions heavy taxes and labor burdens leading to discontent (after his death, the kingdom split partly over economic grievances). So there's that.

We should note though: *most harm associated with Judaism historically was harm **to** Jews (persecutions by others).* They rarely held the whip hand, except in the cases described. This makes the Jewish case interesting as an inversion: how a group surviving domination preserves identity and the impacts of that. For leftovers:

Internal Constraints or Reform: Judaism's own values often mitigated violence. Biblical prophets constantly rebuked kings for injustice or aggression – the tradition of ethical prophecy acted as a check. For example, prophet Nathan confronting King David for his wrongdoing (though that was a personal sin, not empire-building). Later, Rabbinic Judaism post-70 CE taught against rebellion (the Talmud's famous advice in Pirkei Avot: "pray for the welfare of the government, for without fear of it people would swallow each other alive" – ironically urging loyalty to gentile rulers to maintain order). After Bar Kokhba's failed revolt (which some rabbis initially endorsed thinking he was messiah), the mainstream rabbinic stance became **quietism** – wait for God's redemption, do not rise up by force. This is a strong internal constraint: Jewish law forbids endangering the community by rash actions, having learned from past catastrophes. This largely held until modern secular influences spurred Zionism. Even within Zionism, there were moderate voices (e.g. Judah Magnes advocating binational state). Ultra-Orthodox Jews (Haredim) historically opposed Zionism (seeing it as impious to re-establish Israel before messiah), ironically aligning them with restraint – e.g. the group Neturei Karta still is anti-Israel on theological grounds, some even cooperating with Palestinians.

So, Jewish ethics of diaspora – "the law of the kingdom is law" (dina de-malchuta dina) – taught Jews to follow local laws, avoid provoking authorities. This likely prevented radicalization. There were minor violent groups (the Zealots in ancient Judea, the Sicarii assassins of collaborators, and in modern times Irgun or Lehi undergrounds fighting British in the 1940s). But by and large, internal constraints (both ethical and pragmatic) limited Jewish-initiated violence historically.

Collapse or Transformation: Ancient Jewish sovereignty collapsed under the Romans in 70–135 CE, transforming Judaism from a temple-centered state religion into a **diasporic, portable religion** run by rabbis. This transformation was crucial for its survival: synagogue and study replaced temple and sacrifice. Jews became a nation without a country (with some exceptions like those Khazars). Fast-forward to the 20th century: the Zionist project was a massive transformation – from a dispersed minority to re-concentrating in a territory and forming a state (1948). This was seen as redemption by some, but it brought its own crises (Arab-Israeli conflict). Many Jews integrated as citizens of secular states in the modern era (e.g. US, France) with Judaism as just religion, not nationality – a different transformation where Judaism became a private faith, and political identity was national but not religious. The Holocaust (1941–45) devastated European Jewry, arguably catalyzing global support for Israel's creation. With Israel

established, Judaism in some sense regained a territorial dimension – but also split world Jewry into Israeli and diaspora experiences. Israel's establishment could be viewed as a collapse of diaspora life in many countries (Jews left Arab countries en masse 1948–70 due to tensions, reshaping the diaspora).

In summary, Judaism went from **nation-temple model** to **portable law-community model**, and now to a dual existence (one part still diaspora, another part with a revived nation-state). Each stage had different harm profiles: ancient stage had some power and inflicted minor conquests; long diaspora stage inflicted almost no harm externally while suffering much; modern state stage wields power and thus has potential to inflict harm (which it has in conflicts, albeit not on the world-conquest scale of others).

Enduring Leftovers:

- **Borders and conflicts:** The Israel-Palestine conflict is a glaring leftover of historical religious/ethnic history. The establishment of Israel partially redressed the past statelessness of Jews but created a new displacement and statelessness for many Palestinians. Jerusalem remains contested – sacred to Jews, Christians, Muslims, its status is unresolved and a perennial flashpoint (e.g. Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif access issues). Broader Middle East instability often references the Crusades and also earlier Jewish history (e.g. both Israeli and Palestinian narratives invoke ancient claims: Israel's flag has the star of David, invoking biblical kingdom; Palestinians often call Israelis "new Crusaders" or "Khazars" in propaganda). The **concept of Zion** vs. **concept of return (Right of Return for Palestinians)** are dueling leftover narratives from different eras of history.
- **Legal and cultural:** Halakhic (Jewish law) concepts have influenced Western legal thought indirectly (the Judeo-Christian ethic idea in human rights, etc., though specifics are more due to Christian adoption of Hebrew Bible morals). Many countries' laws were influenced by the Ten Commandments ethic (like Sabbath laws, etc.). Also, the **idea of ethnoreligious nationhood** from ancient Israel arguably inspired later nationalism (Zionism in modern form prefigured certain ethno-national movements). Within Israel, biblical place names have been revived, and ancient Hebrew language was resurrected into modern Hebrew – a unique cultural leftover (a once liturgical language became a national vernacular after 2000 years).
- **Memory:** The trauma of Jewish exile, persecutions (Babylon, Rome, pogroms, Holocaust) instilled a communal caution and also a drive for security. That mentality influences Israeli policy ("never again" ethos) but sometimes at cost of being overly militarized. On the other side, some Arabs/Muslims carry grievances against Jews from the creation of Israel and also historical perceptions (some still mention the old myth that Jews helped Crusaders or Mongols – e.g. Hulagu had a Christian wife, sometimes conflated unfairly with Jews). A lot of anti-Jewish tropes in the Middle East now are new variants of European anti-Semitism combined with anger at Israel's actions – memory of Jewish suffering ironically is now often overshadowed by memory of Palestinian suffering in that region, causing tension in how histories are told.
- **Diaspora networks:** Because Jews were scattered, they formed international networks (trading diasporas, scholarly correspondences) which arguably were precursors to

globalized identities (today's concept of global citizen partly foreshadowed by diaspora communities balancing local and transnational identity). These networks sometimes drawn into big power games (Rothschilds funding wars, etc., which then feed conspiracies). The existence of a politically successful, educated Jewish diaspora in Western countries continues to have influence (e.g. US foreign policy is partly shaped by a strong Jewish-American lobby, itself a leftover phenomenon of a people with diaspora influence).

- **Religious institutions:** Judaism gave birth to Christianity (originally a Jewish sect) and influenced Islam (many Quranic stories are from Jewish tradition). Thus, the leftover of Jewish theology is enormous as a foundation of Abrahamic religions that dominate world beliefs. More concretely, rabbinic tradition carried into Christian Old Testament interpretation and even secular ethics in law.

In conclusion, Judaism's direct imperial footprint was limited and long ago, but its indirect legacy through other religions and through the modern revival in Israel is profound. It illustrates how a religion can survive statelessness and then how regained statehood can echo ancient patterns (positive, like reviving Hebrew, and negative, like conflict over promised land). The core thesis holds: when Jews lacked political-military power, religious zeal caused limited harm (if any) externally; when they had a state (ancient or modern), then the familiar dynamics of territorial strife and hierarchy emerged – showing it's power context, not the religion's essence, that drives large-scale harm.

(Next, we will examine Hinduism, which, unlike Judaism, often had organic ties to state and caste systems in South Asia, with different patterns of power and harm.)

Hinduism: Caste, Kingdoms, and Hindu Nationalism

Belief System Overview: *Hinduism* is a broad umbrella for the indigenous religious traditions of the Indian subcontinent. It is polythetic – encompassing diverse philosophies (from polytheism to monism) and lacks a single founder or creed. However, certain concepts unify it: **Dharma** (cosmic law and duty), **Karma** (action and consequence), **Samsara** (rebirth cycle), and **Moksha** (liberation). A core social doctrine that became entwined with power is the **caste (varna) system** – the idea, found in scriptures like the Manusmriti (~2nd c. BCE), that society is divinely divided into hierarchical classes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors/rulers), Vaishyas (merchants), Shudras (laborers), and outside the system, Dalits (untouchables). This is both religious (based on notions of purity and rebirth) and socio-political (justifying a stratified social order). Ethically, Hindu texts preach non-violence (*ahimsa*), truth, charity, etc., yet also contain war epics (Mahabharata, Ramayana) that sacralize righteous warfare (the Bhagavad Gita is a dialogue on duty on a battlefield). The cosmology is not exclusive – Hindus historically did not seek to convert others en masse (viewing all paths as possible and outsiders as following their own dharma). So, like Judaism, classical Hinduism wasn't evangelical. But unlike Judaism, Hinduism usually functioned within a civilizational context where religion and kingship went hand-in-hand: ancient Indian kings were seen as **protectors of Dharma**, often patronizing Brahmins to legitimize rule, and sometimes claimed divine status (e.g. the Gupta emperors [4th-6th c. CE] styled themselves as *Chakravartin* or world ruler in a cosmological sense).

There's also the aspect of **Hindu tolerance vs. rigidity**: historically, Hindu rulers generally allowed multiple sects and even other religions under their rule (e.g. ancient India had Hindus, Buddhists, Jains coexisting), but the caste system imposed an internal hierarchy that often-legitimized oppression of lower castes as a religious duty. The British would later exploit this for divide-and-rule and some discriminatory laws today are caste hangovers.

Imperial/State Adoption: Hinduism grew and evolved along with various Indian polities. In the earliest era (1500–500 BCE), we had semi-mythical kingdoms (as in epics). By the **Maurya Empire (4th c. BCE)**, which was initially Hindu (Chandragupta Maurya) then largely Jain/Buddhist under Ashoka, we see explicit state use of religion: Ashoka embraced Buddhism and spread it, but earlier Mauryas followed Hindu statecraft from Arthashastra treatise. After Mauryas, the **Gupta Empire (c. 320–550 CE)** is known as a golden age of Hindu culture; they reasserted Brahminical religion after Buddhism had flourished under Mauryas. Gupta kings took titles like *Paramabhagavata* (devotee of Vishnu) and performed Vedic sacrifices – essentially using Hindu ritual to legitimize their rule. They also, importantly, gave **land grants to Brahmins** establishing them in villages, which helped spread Brahminical socio-religious norms (including caste rules) across the countryside, embedding Hindu norms deeply. So the Guptas and later regional Hindu dynasties (e.g. Cholas in south, or Marathas in 18th c.) saw kingship as upholding *varna-dharma* (caste order and duty) and patronized major temples which often acted as local administrative and economic centers.

Hindu kingdoms weren't usually *theocratic* in the sense of priestly rule, but a symbiosis: **Kshatriya rulers + Brahmin advisors/priests**. Brahmins crafted genealogies linking kings to gods (many dynasties claimed descent from the sun or moon or epic heroes).

When *Islamic* invaders conquered much of India (~12th c. onwards), Hinduism became relegated to society while Muslims ran governments; however, some Hindu *Rajput kings* remained semi-autonomous, and later the *Maratha Confederacy* (17th–18th c.) rose as a Hindu power resisting the Muslim Mughals. The Marathas, under Shivaji, used religious symbolism (he was crowned in an orthodox Hindu ceremony by a Brahmin in 1674, after earlier being seen as low-caste; that Brahmin legitimization was key). They also saw themselves as protectors of Hindus against Mughals.

Under the British Raj (1858–1947), Hinduism wasn't a state religion (Britain was Christian-run), but they allowed Hindu law for personal matters. Then came **Hindu nationalism** in the 20th c.: in reaction to colonialism and competition with Muslim league, ideologues like Savarkar promoted *Hindutva* – the idea that India is a Hindu nation (with Muslims/Christians as outsiders). This was initially not mainstream in independence movement (Gandhi, a devout Hindu, still advocated pluralism), but after independence, a secular constitution was adopted for India, though with some favor to Hindu law in personal sphere. Over time, Hindutva politics grew (RSS, BJP), culminating in BJP's rise to power in recent decades. Today, India is officially secular but effectively leaning Hindu majoritarian (e.g. BJP govt 2014–present). This modern state adoption of Hindu identity is incomplete (institutions still secular, but cultural tilt visible).

Mechanisms of Expansion: Hinduism traditionally spread culturally rather than by force (it influenced Southeast Asia through trade and soft power – e.g. Indian epics and Brahmin priests

were invited by local kings in Cambodia, Java, etc., leading to Hindu/Buddhist kingdoms there). Within India, "expansion" of Hinduism often meant **assimilation** of local deities into the pantheon rather than eliminating them. Conversions were not forced usually, but caste society and patronage of Brahmins by rulers naturally led many communities to sanskritize (adopt Hindu customs to rise in status). There were episodes of *temple destruction* in internecine wars between Hindu kings, but not with the ideological fervor of crusades – more to humiliate a rival or seize wealth.

However, caste system itself was expansion mechanism: as kings extended territory, they'd often incorporate local tribes by assigning them a caste status (often low) and integrating them into the order – arguably a cultural colonization tool. Those refusing settled life remained outcast/outside (and sometimes oppressed).

Under Islamic rule, Hinduism "expanded" mostly by *resistance and resilience*: e.g. **Rajput kings** often fought against conversion pressures and maintained Hindu domains. There's legendary accounts of Rajput women performing *jauhar* (self-immolation) to avoid capture by Muslims – a tragic mechanism showing how far they'd go to prevent religious subjugation.

Modern Hindutva expansion mechanism is *political mobilization*: e.g. the **Ram Janmabhoomi movement** which in 1992 demolished the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya to build a Ram temple – that was a symbolic "reclaiming" of space for Hinduism. This movement galvanized voters, expanding Hindu nationalist control. Violence like the **2002 Gujarat riots** (where over a thousand, mostly Muslims, were killed) served to polarize and consolidate Hindu identity under BJP. Such communal riots are a grim mechanism to "expand" Hindu political dominance by intimidating minorities and rallying majority votes.

Harm Profile: Under traditional Hindu rulers, harm vectors were present mostly in internal inequalities:

- **Territorial conquest:** Many Hindu kingdoms did conquer territory within India – e.g. the Cholas conquered much of South India and even invaded Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian ports (in 11th c. they raided Srivijaya empire in Malaya). These conquests could be brutal; some Tamil records brag of decapitating foes. The Marathas expanded across India in 18th c., sometimes pillaging cities (e.g. Maratha raids up to Bengal were dreaded, their armies did plunder - one name "Bargi" still in Bengali folklore as bogeyman). But globally, Hindu conquests were limited to South Asia.
- **Forced displacement:** Not a common theme historically. Some defeated kings occasionally took vanquished foes' population as slaves or forced migrations to break rebellions (e.g. Ashoka reportedly deported some 150k Kalinga people after conquering Kalinga – though he regretted the war and turned Buddhist). The creation of Pakistan/India in 1947 caused about 14 million to flee across borders – a displacement along religious lines, partially due to Hindu-Muslim violence. That was more nationalist than religious in cause but took sectarian form.
- **Legal stratification:** The caste system is one of the most stratified legal-social systems ever, sacralized by religion. For millennia, it meant institutional oppression of lower castes: they were barred from certain temples, education, had to do menial jobs, and any

attempt to stray could be met with violence. Manusmriti prescribes harsh punishments for Shudras who insult Brahmins, etc. Untouchability (considering some so impure they can't even be touched) is a form of legal/social apartheid. This persisted de facto into modern times (India outlawed caste discrimination in 1950 constitution, but it persists socially). Under British, caste stratification was reinforced at times by categorizing in census. So yes, Hindu society inflicted systemic harm through caste for ages.

- **Coercive conversion:** Hindus generally did not convert others by sword. But within Hindu sects, at times when Buddhism or Jainism threatened Brahminism, some kings persecuted those sects: e.g. 7th c. Shaivite king **Mahendravarman** in South India is said to have tortured and impaled 8000 Jains for defying Shiva (this story is in Shaivite lore – the **Madurai Massacre** of Jains). If true, that's a religious cleansing by a Hindu ruler forcing Jains to convert or die. Later, some medieval texts mention temples built over Buddhist stupas, implying appropriation after possibly expelling Buddhist monks. By the 8th–12th c., Buddhism in India waned partly due to absorption into a more theistic Hinduism (like some Buddhist practices absorbed into new Hindu movements) and also due to Muslim invasions destroying monasteries – but also some pressure from Hindus earlier (lack of patronage, occasional harassment). However, forced conversion as an explicit policy wasn't mainstream in Hindu history.

- **Slavery:** Classical India had slavery, though often more like bonded labor or serfdom tied to caste (Shudras essentially life-long servants). There wasn't a large-scale slave trade by Hindus beyond domestic. However, Hindu kingdoms did enslave war captives occasionally. Under Islamic rule, many Hindus were taken as slaves by Muslims. Under British, many low-caste became indentured labor shipped abroad (semi-slavery). But slavery as a Hindu institution was relatively mild (arguably caste system served the function of providing labor without calling it slavery).

- **Sectarian violence:** India saw strife between sects: e.g. Shaivite vs Vaishnavite fights, some kings destroying rival sect temples. But the more pronounced violence has been Hindu vs non-Hindu: notably **Hindu-Muslim riots**, which have a long history from Partition to present (the 1946 Calcutta killings, 1947 Punjab carnage, 1992-93 Bombay riots, 2002 Gujarat riots) with thousands killed in each instance – essentially pogroms and reprisals, fueled by religious hatred (though often politically instigated). These fit sectarian/ideological cleansing patterns. Also anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi 1984 by Congress party mobs can be seen as majority Hindus punishing Sikhs (though that was partly political after PM Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards).

- **Suppression of dissent:** Historically, Indian rulers (Hindu or otherwise) were not shy to quash dissent, though free thought in religion was somewhat allowed – multiple philosophical schools debated under royal patronage. But a few did persecute heterodoxy: e.g. the Kashmir King **Harsha** (1089 CE) forcibly suppressed Hindu sectarian differences by plundering temples of one sect to fund another. In modern secular India, suppression has been more political than religious – during Emergency 1975-77, Indira Gandhi jailed opponents (not religious dissent though). Under current BJP, some critics argue dissenters (especially those who question Hindutva or speak for minorities) face harassment, sedition charges, etc. The assassination of Gandhi in 1948 by a Hindu extremist also shows how dissenting voices (he was too conciliatory to Muslims for some) can be eliminated by vigilantes.

- **Gender inequality/violence:** Traditional Hindu laws restricted women's rights (no property inheritance in many castes, child marriage common historically, practice of **Sati** – widows self-immolating on husband's pyre – was a horrific custom in some communities, sometimes coerced or out of societal pressure). Sati was outlawed by British in 1829 but still happened occasionally (last known in 1987 a case in Rajasthan). Dowry system has led to violence (dowry deaths). There was also **devadasi** system (temple girls effectively in sanctioned prostitution). These are cultural but rooted in religious practices. Modern Indian law has improved women's rights, but violence like rape and honor killings occur (though not unique to Hindus). Under Hindutva, one manifestation is vigilante violence around "love jihad" – conspiracy that Muslim men seduce Hindu women to convert them, leading to some extremists harassing interfaith couples and in worst cases murdering the Muslim partner (honor killings from the Hindu side).
- **Cultural erasure:** Hindu rulers, like others, sometimes tried to erase previous rulers' cultural markers – e.g. one king might deface another's inscriptions. But more notable is modern attempts: e.g. rewriting Indian history textbooks under Hindutva to minimize Muslim contributions and highlight Hindu achievements (a softer erasure academically). There's also the movement to rename cities (Bombay to Mumbai, etc.) – partly cultural assertion. Under Hindutva fringes, a desire to reclaim monuments (like demanding mosques built on former temples be returned – beyond Ayodhya, places like Mathura and Kashi have contentious mosque-temple sites). If pursued, that could entail removing Islamic-era structures – a form of cultural revisionism that could spur conflict.
- **Economic exploitation:** Within caste structure, exploitation of lower castes economically was rampant (bonded labor, etc.). Many landless untouchables toiled for upper castes with minimal rights. Kings sometimes extracted heavy taxes from peasants (some texts say 1/6 of produce was standard tax, but could be more in practice). Under British, a lot of exploitation happened (though British were outsiders, not Hindu-driven, but they manipulated caste to tax and control). Today, some critique that Hindutva policies favor big businesses and crony capitalists, hurting the poor (not exactly religious exploitation, but part of overall environment). The cow protection laws (banning cow slaughter in many states) economically hit Muslim butchers/leather industries which had been traditional occupations – one could see that as ideology harming certain livelihoods.

Internal Constraints or Reform Movements: Hinduism has had many reformist currents. **Buddhism and Jainism (6th c. BCE)** can be seen as internal ethical revolutions against Brahminical ritualism and caste – they advocated nonviolence, renunciation, and equality, and indeed caused some moderation in Hindu society (the success of these movements led some later Hindu kings to soften caste rigidity to prevent losing people to Buddhism). Later, in medieval times, the **Bhakti movement** (12th–17th c.) – devotional poets like Kabir, Tulsidas, Chaitanya – preached against caste and dogma, stressing personal devotion accessible to all. Some Bhakti saints were low-caste themselves and gained following, which undermined Brahmin hierarchy somewhat (though caste system survived). In colonial and modern times, social reformers emerged: e.g. **Raja Ram Mohan Roy (early 1800s)** who campaigned against sati and for women's education; **Jyotirao Phule (late 1800s)** who opened schools for low castes; **Swami Vivekananda** (turn of 20th c.) who reformed Hindu philosophy making it more universal; and **Mahatma Gandhi**, who although orthodox in many ways, strongly condemned untouchability

(calling Dalits "Harijan" children of God) and tried to abolish caste discrimination. Also **B.R. Ambedkar**, a Dalit leader, architect of Indian Constitution, who later led mass conversions of Dalits to Buddhism (seeing no future for equality within Hinduism). These reformers (within and leaving Hinduism) constrained harm by pushing for equality.

The Indian Constitution (1950) itself is a huge constraint, outlawing caste discrimination, guaranteeing freedom of religion, etc., reflecting these reform values. It has led to affirmative action for lower castes (reservations in jobs/education) to uplift them – a direct attempt to remedy past oppression.

Within Hindutva movement, there are also moderate voices cautioning against extremism, but currently the hardliners have more sway. Still, Indian democracy (independent judiciary, press, elections) serves as a check – e.g. state governments that stoke too much violence can be voted out or reined in by central govt (or vice versa).

Collapse or Transformation: "Hindu power" in pre-modern sense collapsed gradually under Islamic conquests (1192, fall of last major north Indian Hindu power at Tarain to Ghurids; 1565 fall of Vijayanagar in south to Deccan Sultanates). After that, Hindus lived under Islamic rule or later British. This transformed Hindu society: some aspects hardened (caste became more rigid in facing external rule, perhaps as internal order), some practices faded (e.g. animal sacrifices reduced, partly under Buddhist influence earlier and partly pragmatic under Islamic rule). The **British colonization ironically unified and awakened a pan-Hindu consciousness** – facing a common foreign ruler, diverse sects developed a somewhat unified "Hindu" identity (the term "Hindu" itself was originally a geographical label by Persians for people of Indus; it became a religious identity in modern period partly thanks to British census categories). The 19th c. saw a **Hindu revival** (Bengal Renaissance, Arya Samaj, etc.) mixing Western ideas with Hindu reform.

Post-independence, India's transformation into a secular republic meant, at least officially, a separation of state from religious favoritism (with some compromises like personal laws for each religion). Over 70 years, that held moderately well, but now we see a possible transformation towards *majoritarian democracy* where the majority's religion dominates public life and policy (some call India now an "ethnic democracy" trending towards illiberalism). If this continues, it's a transformation of Indian political identity to explicitly Hindu rashtra (nation), undoing Nehruvian secular legacy. How that will solidify is unfolding.

So Hinduism has proven adaptable – from ancient caste-kingdom form to a spirituality under foreign rule, to a modern identity mixing nationalism. The core thesis stands: when Hindu institutions captured state power (like now or historical kingdoms), they could be oppressive (caste, communal violence). When out of power, Hindu society still had internal oppressions (caste), but externally wasn't expansionist. The scale of violence by Hindu-led forces historically is less than that by e.g. Christian or Muslim empires, mainly because India didn't project power globally under a Hindu banner (some exceptions regionally). But internally, caste system's oppression arguably caused multi-millions to live in misery over millennia, a structural violence no less real for being slow-burning.

Enduring Leftovers:

- **Caste:** Perhaps the biggest leftover – independent India legally abolished untouchability, but caste bias persists widely, affecting marriage, politics (caste-based parties), and social interactions. This leads to sporadic violence (Dalit atrocities still occur; high-caste mobs attacking Dalits for trivial "violations" like riding a horse at their wedding – there are dozens of such cases a year). Caste dynamics also underlie some of India's economic disparities.
- **Religious demographics:** Present-day South Asia's religious demography is a legacy – India ~80% Hindu due to historical reconversions (some say many who converted to Islam under duress or for benefits eventually returned to Hindu fold at some points; also Partition separated many). Pakistan and Bangladesh being Muslim majority is obviously a leftover of Islamic rule and Partition. The communal tensions and even nuclear-armed rivalry (India vs Pakistan) are direct leftovers of partition and contrasting national ideologies (secular-ish vs Islamic republic).
- **Geopolitical alignments:** India's tilt in world affairs has some civilizational angle – e.g. in Cold War, India led Non-Aligned Movement partly from a civilizational pride perspective, not wanting to be seen as client of West (a bit of post-colonial Hindu assertiveness combined with socialist idealism). Today, some see an emerging alliance of India with other nationalist regimes (e.g. soft alignment with Israel – interestingly Hindutva folks admire Israel's tough stance as a model, forging a Hindu-Jewish understanding; also warming to US vs. Islamic extremism as common cause). Meanwhile, Pakistan aligns with Muslim countries (OIC etc.) partly due to Islamic bond leftover.
- **Cultural global influence:** Yoga and meditation, central to Hindu tradition, have spread globally (often in secularized form) – a benign leftover of Hindu philosophy on the world stage. There's also political usage: India's government uses "soft power" via International Yoga Day etc., projecting its culture as universal.
- **Monuments and tourism:** Many great Hindu temples (Khajuraho, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, etc.) remain as UNESCO sites fueling tourism and also sometimes causing debate (e.g. Ayodhya we discussed). Those physical leftovers keep history alive in public consciousness.
- **Laws and holidays:** India's calendar of national holidays retains many Hindu festivals (Diwali, Holi) – official recognition of majority faith, a leftover or carryover. Some personal laws like inheritance, marriage still follow Hindu custom (though codified via the Hindu Code Bills 1950s, they reflect tradition e.g. ban on polygamy for Hindus came with those reforms, whereas Muslims in India still allowed 4 wives, which causes a perceived unevenness fueling Hindu right demands for Uniform Civil Code – which is ironically a secular demand but motivated by resentment of minority "privilege").
- **Communal psychology:** Partition trauma on both sides lingers (India/Pak wars, Kashmir conflict stem directly from that leftover). Hindus often carry a historical narrative of having been invaded, plundered and ruled by foreigners for centuries (this memory includes framing Muslim rule as oppressive "700-year slavery" and British as another 200-year slavery, language Hindutva uses). This informs current politics – e.g. calls to reclaim mosques said to stand on temple sites (viewed as undoing historical injustice), and a hardline stance against Pakistan.
- **Secular vs Religious identity debate:** The tussle in modern India's soul between its secular constitutional legacy (Nehru, Ambedkar) and the rising religious nationalism

(Savarkar, RSS ideology) is an internal leftover conflict: it's essentially a continuation of pre-independence debates between pluralistic nationalism (Gandhi) and religious nationalism (Hindu Mahasabha) that were never fully resolved. The outcome will shape global largest democracy's character.

All in all, Hinduism's case underscores how a deeply stratified social religion can be both spiritually rich and socially harsh, and how colonial and modern forces can both mitigate and resurrect old fissures.

(Next, we turn to Buddhism – often seen as pacifist, yet when enmeshed with state (like in medieval Asia or present-day Myanmar/Sri Lanka), it too has had its share of violence and complicity in harm.)

Buddhism: State Legitimization and Sectarian Conflicts

Belief System Overview: *Buddhism* originated in the 5th century BCE in India with **Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha)** teaching the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to overcome suffering and achieve Nirvana (liberation). It started as a reaction against Vedic (Hindu) orthodoxy: Buddhism rejected the authority of the Vedas and the caste system, and accepted people of all castes into the monastic order (Sangha). The core ethical stance is **nonviolence (ahimsa)**, compassion for all sentient beings, and detachment from material desires. Buddhism initially had no concept of a creator god, focusing instead on personal enlightenment. Thus, it wasn't inherently a theocratic blueprint for state governance. However, as it spread, it developed ideas to engage political power. A key notion was the **"Chakravartin"** or Wheel-Turning Monarch – an ideal righteous king who rules ethically and propagates the Dharma (Buddha's teachings). This concept allowed Buddhism to align with kingship: the king supports the Sangha and the Dharma, and in return gains legitimacy as a protector of the faith. Buddhism tended to **flourish under state patronage** – e.g. Emperor Ashoka's conversion (3rd c. BCE) led to massive state promotion of Buddhism, missionary efforts abroad, etc. Over time, two main branches emerged: **Theravada** (in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia) which kept monastic orthodoxy, and **Mahayana** (in northern Asia – China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, etc.) which was more devotional and adaptable, including the idea of Bodhisattvas (compassionate beings assisting others). Later **Vajrayana** (Tibetan Buddhism) even integrated *tantric* rituals and had a unique **priest-state model** – e.g. the Dalai Lama was both spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet historically.

While Buddhism preaches nonviolence, in practice when it became tied to state power, it had to accommodate **"realpolitik."** For example, Buddhist texts developed justifications for kings going to war if necessary to protect the realm and the religion, albeit urging humane conduct (there are Jataka tales about compassionate rulers, but also some about righteous battles).

Imperial/State Adoption: *Buddhism spread largely by **missionary efforts and adoption by kings.*** The most famous case: **Emperor Ashoka** of the Maurya Empire converted after the bloody Kalinga War (~260 BCE) and thereafter patronized Buddhism massively – he built stupas, sent missionaries to Sri Lanka and beyond. He convened a council to purify the Sangha and inscribed edicts promoting Dharma and nonviolence (though interestingly, he didn't disband the army – just limited aggressive warfare). After Ashoka, Buddhism thrived in various Indian

kingdoms (the Shunga, Kushan, Gupta – though the Guptas reasserted Hinduism, they also tolerated Buddhism; e.g. caves at Ajanta were patronized under Gupta rule).

In **Sri Lanka**, Buddhism became state religion early (3rd c. BCE) under King Devanampiya Tissa (contemporary of Ashoka). Successive Sri Lankan monarchs styled themselves **"Defender of the Sasana (Buddhist order)"**, intertwining nationalism with Buddhism – a dynamic still alive today. Similarly, in **Southeast Asia**, kings of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, etc., embraced Theravada Buddhism from ~11th-13th centuries and made it the state ideology, often after earlier Hindu/Brahmanical court influences. For example, Burmese King Anawrahta (11th c.) adopted Theravada, consolidated the Sangha, and used Buddhism to unify his kingdom. In **Thailand**, kings took titles like "Dharmaraja" (righteous king) and even instituted that the king should be a Bodhisattva (in theory). They also kept a close control over the Sangha (e.g. modern Thailand's Sangha Act organizes the monkhood under state oversight).

In **East Asia**, Buddhism came via Silk Road to China in 1st c. CE; by 4th-6th c., it won patronage of various warlord rulers in disunited China (e.g. Northern Wei emperors). Some rulers used Buddhism to bolster authority, even claiming they were **Buddha-kings** (like Emperor Wen of Sui, 6th c., who presented himself as a Chakravartin). Buddhism at times rivaled Confucianism in court influence, leading to periodic backlashes (e.g. Tang Emperor Wuzong's suppression of Buddhism in 845 CE because monasteries had grown rich and were seen as un-Chinese). In **Japan**, Buddhism entered 6th c.; Prince Shotoku promoted it; later many sects emerged. While Shinto remained imperial cult, Buddhism became influential especially in certain periods (e.g. Kamakura era saw Zen patronized by samurai, later some Buddhist sects like Ikko-ikki even had their own armies that challenged warlords).

Mechanisms of Expansion:

- **Missionary propagation** by monks to new regions (e.g. Ashoka's son Mahinda to Sri Lanka; Silk Road monks to China like Kumarajiva; later Tibetans invited Indian sages like Padmasambhava).
- **State sponsorship**: kings building temples, granting land to monasteries (which helped economy too, as monasteries became centers of learning, hospitals, etc.). Such patronage made Buddhism attractive to masses because of royal example and resources poured into it.
- **Syncretism and adaptation**: Buddhism often merged with local beliefs (in China it blended with Taoist/Confucian ideas - e.g. Chinese Buddhism's filial piety emphasis not originally Indian; in Tibet, it absorbed Bon shamanism elements; in Southeast Asia it coexisted with spirit worship). This flexibility allowed it to integrate into various state contexts without entirely displacing older traditions.
- **Moral authority**: Buddhism gave rulers a moral narrative. Many kings embraced it after seeing moral failings of predecessors. For instance, Kalinga War's horror made Ashoka adopt Dharma to govern ethically – so Buddhism expanded as a *reform ideology within empire*. In modern times, we see similar: e.g. many ethnic conflicts in Myanmar or Sri Lanka have Buddhist vs. non-Buddhist framing, and monks sometimes lead activism (like 2007 Saffron Revolution in Myanmar, though suppressed, monks protesting

regime's injustice). That shows the lingering moral authority of Sangha to mobilize public.

Harm Profile: Buddhism in power generally had a relatively better record on *religious persecution* than monotheisms (no compulsory conversion by the sword – indeed Buddhist empires often had pluralism, e.g. ancient India had many sects). However, **sectarian and political violence** still occurred:

- **Territorial conquest**: Buddhist-led states did wage wars. e.g. **King Vijayabahu of Sri Lanka (11th c.)** fought to expel Chola (Hindu) invaders, presumably with religious fervor to save Buddhism in Lanka. **Burma vs Siam** wars (16th-18th c.) – both sides Theravada Buddhist, yet brutal wars happened for dominance (not religious cause per se, but holy images like Emerald Buddha were coveted war trophies used to legitimize victors). Mongols (while mostly shamanist) later adopted Tibetan Buddhism; e.g. Kublai Khan patronized lamas and tried to conquer Japan and Java (though not framed as "Buddhist crusade" obviously). In modern times, predominantly Buddhist nations like Vietnam and Cambodia had wars, but those were ideological or ethnic (Vietnam War, Khmer Rouge atrocities – interestingly Khmer Rouge killed many monks; they were communists and suppressed Buddhism).
- **Forced displacement/population control**: Not common from Buddhist motive. One could cite **Myanmar's expulsion of Rohingya (2017)** – predominantly by a Buddhist-majority government/military, targeting Muslim minority, which the UN calls ethnic cleansing. Although motives are ethnic/reactionary, extremist Buddhist monks like Wirathu incited hatred, giving it a religious tinge ("protecting the realm of Buddha"). ~700k Rohingya were violently driven to Bangladesh. Also, in Bhutan (a Buddhist kingdom), the government long suppressed Nepali-speaking Hindus in the south; in the 1990s, it expelled about 100k Lhotshampa people (Hindus) to maintain Buddhist demographic dominance. Those are clear modern examples of religious-ethnic cleansing by Buddhist regimes to "defend" their culture.
- **Legal stratification**: Traditional Buddhist polities didn't have an equivalent of sharia or canon law imposing on all. But they often privileged **Sangha** (clergy exempt from taxes, etc.) – as we saw in Mongols even. In Thailand and others, monks had separate courts for discipline, etc. Also, in some countries, Buddhism was state religion (like 1972 Sri Lankan constitution gave Buddhism "foremost place"). Minorities might face discrimination: e.g. in Sri Lanka under Buddhist-influenced policies, Tamil Hindus felt second-class leading to civil war (1983-2009). The new Myanmar constitution reserves some authority to promote Theravada Buddhism, implicitly making non-Buddhists less valued. So formal inequality not huge, but informal and constitutional favoritism can be significant.
- **Coercive conversion**: Historically, Buddhism spread by persuasion; forced conversion is basically not in doctrine (since genuine belief can't be forced per Buddhist view of mind). But there were rare cases: in 17th c., **Lhasa's 5th Dalai Lama**, with Mongol military aid, forcibly converted some Eastern Tibetans from indigenous Bon to Buddhism (and destroyed Bon monasteries). More recently, in Bhutan's case, some Nepali Hindus pressured to adopt Bhutanese dress and practices or leave. Also, reports from China's occupation of Tibet mention they forced some Tibetan Buddhist monks/nuns to renounce

and adopt Communist ideology – but that's inverse (targeting Buddhists for conversion to atheism). Conversely, Chinese government currently tries to sinicize Uyghur Muslims partly by pushing assimilation including some adoption of quasi-Buddhist imagery (like promoting Xinjiang as land of Dangun culture, etc.), but not exactly converting to Buddhism, more to secularism.

- **Slavery**: Not typically associated with Buddhism. Ancient Buddhist societies like Mauryan India had slaves (not eliminated by Buddhism's presence). In Tibet, pre-1959, some serfdom existed under the theocratic government (monasteries and nobles had serf-like peasants). That was often highlighted by Chinese to justify their "liberation" of Tibet. But widespread slave trade or such under Buddhist rule was absent.

- **Sectarian violence**: Within Buddhism, different sects sometimes clashed – e.g. in Japan, **Ikko-ikki (Pure Land sect militias)** in 15-16th c. fought samurai lords; Oda Nobunaga suppressed them brutally (he saw their theocracy as a threat, and razed their fortress temples). In 1361 Kyoto, warrior monks of Enryakuji burned rival sect temples (Nichiren sect's). Tibet had periodic strife between sects (the rise of Gelugpa [Dalai Lama's school] to power in 17th c. marginalized Kagyu sect – enforced by Mongol troops; some Kagyu monasteries possibly destroyed). In modern Sri Lanka, hardline **Buddhist monks (BBS)** incited riots against minority Muslims (2014, 2018 incidents). So while Buddhism ideally pluralistic, institutional competition led to violence akin to religious wars albeit smaller scale than e.g. European Reformation wars.

- **Suppression of dissent**: In many Buddhist kingdoms, the Sangha often had significant say and allied with kings to stamp out heterodoxy: e.g. in 17th c. **Lan Xang (Laos)**, King Sulinya along with monks banned spirit worship and enforced Theravada conformity, punishing those who did not attend temple. In Tibet, as a theocracy, blasphemy or anti-Dalai Lama sentiment would certainly be persecuted (Tibet did have prisons and punishments for criminals and rebels – the Chinese exaggerate cruelty, but some forms like eye gouging for treason did exist per accounts). In Myanmar recently, dissent by Buddhist monks against military rule in 2007 was violently suppressed (monks were beaten, killed, defrocked forcibly by the junta). Also ironically, the current junta, although not religiously motivated to kill Buddhists, has no qualms murdering dissenting monks as in 2021 protests, but they do cloak themselves in Buddhism's mantle to gain support. That is, they suppress actual Buddhist values while claiming to defend them.

- **Gender inequality**: Buddhism in principle has no caste or inherent hierarchy – but practically, nuns (bhikkhuni) have often been second-class to monks. In many Theravada countries, the nun's full ordination died out historically and only recently revived after struggle, facing opposition from male clergy. That's a structural inequality. Also, some Buddhist cultures had patriarchal norms shaped by local tradition (e.g. in Japan, monks could marry from Meiji period, turning temples into family businesses often inherited by sons). But Buddhism did allow more spiritual agency for women than many religions (e.g. early Buddhist texts include capable nuns). Instances of violence specifically against women due to Buddhism are rare – though in Myanmar, the ultra-nationalists push the narrative of protecting Buddhist women from Muslim men, fueling vigilante violence.

- **Cultural erasure**: There were times Buddhist rulers tried to root out "heretical" practices: e.g. King **Langdarma of Tibet (9th c.)** reversed his brother's patronage of Buddhism and persecuted monks (he was a Bon adherent), trying to restore Bon – that ironically is Buddhist being persecuted rather than persecutor. On the flip side, when

Buddhism regained power, they suppressed Bon to minimal fringe. In modern era, in Bhutan, policies pressuring Nepali Hindus to conform to Drukpa Buddhist culture (dress language) is cultural homogenization attempt. In China's policy in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, they've destroyed some monasteries (like cultural genocide attempts), but that's Communist-led rather than stemming from Buddhism (Communists ironically co-opt some Buddhist symbolism now for tourism but erase the real religious culture).

- **Economic exploitation**: Historically, large monastery landholdings meant peasants working monastic estates could be exploited (heavy rent to support monks' often comfortable lives). In Tibet, pre-1959, about a third of land was monastic estate – peasants there paid tithe and labor to lamas, which critics say was exploitative feudalism. In Sri Lanka under colonial, some Buddhist temples had service tenures where villagers had to provide free labor to temple paddy fields (abolished eventually). Additionally, states sometimes taxed people specifically for temple maintenance. Not huge exploitation relative to secular states, but notable. Also, in some war times, Buddhist institutions hoarded wealth (leading kings like Wuzong to shut them down claiming they drained economy by keeping tax-free wealth).

Overall, Buddhism's direct hand in causing harm has been less pronounced than some other religions, yet once enmeshed in worldly power, it too became implicated in oppression (especially of minorities in places like Myanmar/Bhutan, or of lower social strata in theocratic Tibet). Its reputation for nonviolence holds more for ideology than history – as Buddhist actors have, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes zealously, engaged in wars and politics.

Internal Constraints or Reforms: Buddhism inherently contains self-correcting principles: the doctrine of compassion and non-harm is a constant goad against violence. Thus, even warrior-kings patronizing Buddhism often got admonished by monks to show mercy (Ashoka's edicts literally plead officials to ensure fair treatment of prisoners, reflecting Buddhist ethic restraining imperial brutality). The monastic community could also act as a counterbalance to state, at least morally. For example, in Sri Lanka, when kings became tyrannical, often chronicles mention monks intervening or leaving the kingdom in protest (a soft power threat – since kings needed Sangha sanction). In Myanmar, we saw monks spearhead peaceful protests.

Also, internal to Buddhism, whenever it became too entangled in power and ritual, reform movements arose: e.g. **Zen in Japan** emerged partly as a reaction to perceived decadence of state Buddhism and offered a more austere approach. **Protestant Buddhism** in 19th c. Sri Lanka (figures like Anagarika Dharmapala) reformed Buddhism to be more laity-involved and socially active, pushing back on colonialism and Christian missions with a non-violent, rationalized Buddhism that appealed to modern values – curbing missionary influence and giving Buddhism a modern social role. Those reforms typically emphasized the core compassionate teachings and de-emphasized superstition or violence.

Modern checks include global Buddhist leaders like the **Dalai Lama** promoting peace, which creates soft pressure on Buddhist-majority states to live up to ideals (though, e.g. Myanmar's generals ignore him as "foreign meddling" since he criticized Rohingya abuses).

Collapse or Transformation: Buddhism virtually collapsed in its Indian homeland by 12th century – partly due to losing royal patronage to revived Hinduism and then the coup de grâce by Muslim invasions destroying famous monasteries like **Nalanda (c. 1200 CE)**. It survived more vibrantly in **East and Southeast Asia**, often transforming as it went (e.g. Chinese Chan, Japanese Pure Land, etc.). Many of these countries later faced colonialism, which sometimes marginalized Buddhism (like in Vietnam under French, Catholicism favored; in Korea/Japan under Confucian/State Shinto, Buddhism suppressed somewhat). 20th century saw revivals: Sri Lanka independence linked to Buddhist Sinhalese identity; Tibet's tragedy transformed its Buddhism into a global diaspora cause (Dalai Lama's exile spread Tibetan Buddhism worldwide).

In places like Thailand and Myanmar, Buddhism remains deeply ingrained but now coexists with modern nation-state apparatus – leading to interesting transformations such as monks engaging in electoral politics (in Myanmar 2015, many monks subtly supported Aung San Suu Kyi's democratic movement; in Sri Lanka some monks even ran for parliament on nationalist tickets, a controversial break from tradition).

In Communist Asia, Buddhism was heavily repressed (China, Mongolia under USSR, Cambodia under Khmer Rouge nearly wiped out monks) but has resurged since (Mongolia now free to practice, Chinese Buddhism revived albeit state-controlled). So Buddhism survived huge upheavals by adjusting – often by retreating to cultural sphere and letting go of formal power (e.g. Japan today Buddhism mostly focused on funerals and personal practice, no political role; contrast to pre-Meiji when monasteries had armies).

The most dangerous transformation is arguably the ongoing one in places like Myanmar: from a traditionally quietist Theravada to an ethnonationalist mobilizing force (monks like Wirathu using social media to spread hate – a very new phenomenon linking ancient religion with modern extremism). If that persists, Buddhism might unfortunately follow the trajectory other religions did in earlier times – fueling cycles of sectarian conflict.

Enduring Leftovers:

- **Sacral Kingship Concept:** The idea of righteous ruler persists in subtle ways – e.g. Thailand's monarchy is semi-sacralized (King Bhumibol was revered almost like a Bodhisattva; coups were justified as protecting the Dhammaraja system). Even after abolishing monarchy, in places like Bhutan they instituted a democratic monarchy still upholding Vajrayana ideals.
- **Monuments and Pilgrimage:** Sites like Bodh Gaya (India), Lumbini (Nepal), Kandy's Tooth Relic (Sri Lanka) remain pilgrimage centers connecting Buddhist countries in peaceful exchange (these relic-oriented devotions often foster international ties; e.g. tooth relic gifted between countries as diplomacy historically). There's a leftover concept that having a Buddha relic or image legitimizes a capital – still, Thai and Myanmar governments compete softly to show their relics as genuine.
- **Education and literacy:** In many Asian countries, traditional education was in monasteries; even today, monastic schools provide free education in e.g. Myanmar to

rural kids – an institutional leftover beneficially aiding literacy and preserving classical languages (Pali, Tibetan).

- **Violent legacies:** Sadly, the Rohingya crisis is a leftover of complex history including colonial divide (British favored Indian Muslim migrants in Arakan, breeding resentment among Rakhine Buddhists). That unresolved colonial-era tension exploded recently; it's a leftover conflict with religious overtones.
- **Interfaith boundaries:** Buddhist-majority regions abut Muslim-majority ones in Asia (like Thailand-Malaysia, Bangladesh-Myanmar), often those borders were drawn by colonial powers or pre-colonial wars. They remain sensitive frontiers (the south Thai insurgency by Malay Muslims, the Rakhine issue, etc.).
- **Soft Power and Image:** Buddhism's association with peace and wisdom remains strong globally – figures like the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh shaped Western perceptions. This has political effects: e.g. Western pressure on Myanmar partly came because they expected "peaceful monks" not hate preachers (shock triggered more scrutiny). Also, Western buddhophilia encourages tourism and cultural clout (like Japan's Zen influence on arts, "mindfulness" industry, etc., which ironically came via Buddhists adapting to Western psychology).
- **Diaspora contributions:** Many Chinese diaspora in SE Asia are Buddhist and helped shaped those economies (though often mixing with Taoism). Now, Westerners adopting Buddhism (convert Buddhists) have created new communities that sometimes advocate for human rights (like Western Buddhist organizations speaking against Burma's abuses, or raising funds for Tibetan cause).
- **Political activism ideology:** The concept of **"Engaged Buddhism"** (coined by Thich Nhat Hanh during Vietnam war) encourages Buddhists to actively address social suffering (peace protests, social work). This inspired e.g. Buddhist NGOs in Cambodia post-Khmer Rouge helping rebuilding, and globally such groups (the Buddhist Peace Fellowship etc.). That's a positive leftover developing into a modern movement.

In summary, Buddhism's history confirms: no belief is immune to being used for power, but also its core ideals can inspire powerful movements for nonviolence and reform. The interplay of those has left a complicated legacy—shining examples of compassion in action, alongside instances of tragic contradiction (monks inciting violence).

(Having examined major world religions, we will now briefly consider Shinto in Japan – a state cult turned modern symbol – and then move to modern secular ideologies like fascism and communism which in the 20th century arguably rivaled or exceeded religions in their capacity for harm.)

Shinto: Sacral Empire and Militarism

Belief System Overview: *Shintō* ("Way of the Gods") is Japan's indigenous belief system, centered on **kami** – spirits or deities associated with natural phenomena, ancestors, and clan founders. It has no historical founder or single scripture (though early myths are recorded in Kojiki, 712 CE). Shinto is intertwined with Japanese mythology of creation and imperial lineage: the sun goddess **Amaterasu** is said to be ancestress of the Imperial family. Thus a core cosmological claim was that the Emperor is **divine or at least sacred**, descended from

Amaterasu, and Japan itself is a land of the kami (this fosters a unique ethnic-religious nationalism). Ethically, Shinto focuses on purity vs impurity (e.g. ritual cleanliness) rather than codified moral law – it historically coexisted with Buddhism and Confucian ethics. For many centuries, Shinto was not a clearly separate "religion" – it was more local shrine practices and state rituals, mixed with Buddhism (a syncretism called Shinbutsu-shūgō). Only in the modern era did Shinto get systematized into "State Shinto."

Imperial Adoption: Shinto has always bolstered **imperial authority** through myth: from ancient times the Japanese Emperor (Tennō) was considered descendant of Amaterasu via Ninigi no Mikoto handing the Three Sacred Treasures (mirror, sword, jewel) to the first Emperor Jimmu. In practice, for much of feudal history, Emperors had little power (shoguns ruled), but Shinto rites still legitimized the state (e.g. coronation rituals). The major turning point was the **Meiji Restoration (1868)** when the Emperor was restored to central power and Japan rapidly modernized. The Meiji oligarchs established **State Shinto** as a quasi-religion tightly controlled by government. They did things like: made shrine attendance a duty for subjects, integrated Shinto teachings into compulsory education, placed all shrines under state oversight. They distinguished **"State Shinto" (Kokka Shintō)** – patriotic civic ritual – from sect Shinto (independent religious sects) which were allowed but not state-funded. The Emperor was elevated as a living kami. Certain big shrines were promoted as national symbols (e.g. **Ise Grand Shrine** dedicated to Amaterasu, intimately linked to Emperor; **Yasukuni Shrine** founded 1869 to enshrine war dead). Shinto thus became the *spiritual backbone* of Japan's empire-building from late 19th c. through WWII.

Mechanisms of Expansion: As Japan modernized and built an empire (colonizing Taiwan 1895, Korea 1910, parts of China from 1931, Southeast Asia 1941-42), Shinto was **exported as part of cultural assimilation**. For example:

- In **Korea**, the Japanese imposed **shrine worship**: Koreans were pressured or required to attend Shinto shrines to show loyalty. Many Koreans deeply resented it as forced idolatry (since they were largely Christian or Confucian). By late 1930s, this was mandatory for government workers and students in Korea and Taiwan.
- Similar in **Taiwan** and **Manchukuo** (puppet Manchuria): Shinto shrines built, locals urged/forced to pay respects. The idea was to spiritually cement the Japanese emperor's sovereignty – essentially religious imperialism under guise of loyalty oath.
- Japanese expansion ideology invoked Shinto-influenced slogans: **Hakko Ichiu** ("eight corners of the world under one roof") – phrase from Nihon Shoki (chronicle) implying Japan's destiny to unite world. Soldiers were taught to see the Emperor as a father-figure deity and sacrifice willingly; revived **Bushidō** code (samurai ethos) in a Shinto-Confucian blend, venerating loyalty unto death. **Kamikaze pilots** 1944-45 took name from "divine wind" kami legend (typhoons that saved Japan from Mongols), and their suicide attacks were sanctified as offering one's life to Emperor; many carried **talismans from Ise shrine** or wrote farewell poems equating themselves to falling cherry blossoms (symbol of ephemeral beauty and loyalty).

So militarist Japan used Shinto to inspire fanaticism: entire atrocities (Nanjing Massacre 1937, Unit 731's experiments, etc.) were not *directly* religious hate crimes, but the conditioning of

soldiers included belief in their **spiritual superiority and emperor's infallibility**, which dehumanized foreign enemies (some soldiers saw Asians refusing to bow to Emperor as impure or subhuman, akin to how crusaders saw infidels). Also, **seppuku** (ritual suicide) and "no-surrender" ethos had roots in bushido and Shinto honor – leading to waste of life among Japanese and brutal treatment of POWs (they saw surrender as dishonor, thus surrendered enemies undeserving mercy). The **comfort women** system (sexual slavery for troops) wasn't justified by religion, but was part of militarist culture underpinned by ultra-nationalism that Shinto-fueled nationalism fed.

In occupied lands, attempts to **eradicate local culture** like shrine enforcement in Korea and forcing name changes (Name Order of 1940 in Korea, requiring Koreans to adopt Japanese-style surnames) were forms of cultural violence intimately tied to Emperor-worship policy.

Back home, **State Shinto suppressed dissent**: e.g. the **Peace Preservation Law (1925)** banned ideologies opposing the **kokutai** (national polity), meaning if you criticized Emperor or Shinto, you could be imprisoned. Christian schools had to display Emperor's portrait and have students bow or risk closure – some missionary schools shut rather than comply.

Gender roles under militarist Shinto were strict: women expected to be "good wife, wise mother" supporting men – not violently abused per se (beyond normal patriarchy), but limited in public life (though some women participated in war efforts as nurses, etc.).

Internal Constraints or Reforms: There were few domestic constraints pre-1945 because Japan's secret police (Tokkō) and conformist culture stifled opposition. But some brave intellectuals like **Professor Tsuda Sōkichi** questioned the historicity of the Emperor myths in 1942 and was persecuted for "blasphemy" against kokutai. Some Buddhist and Christian groups that tried to resist war were suppressed (e.g. some sects that refused Shrine worship were banned). So internal dissent was minimal or crushed.

The biggest constraint came externally – Japan's defeat in WWII. Under Allied Occupation (1945-52), **State Shinto was dismantled** by law: the Emperor issued the 1946 **Ningen-sengen** (Humanity Declaration) renouncing divinity, and Occupation (SCAP) issued directives ending government support for shrines and Shinto indoctrination in schools. Shinto was **disestablished** – shrines became private religious institutions. Many Japanese actually welcomed a break from war fanaticism.

Post-war, Japan's 1947 Constitution enshrined religious freedom and separation of religion and state. This permanently constrained Shinto's political role (government can't fund or endorse Shinto specifically). The imperial family remained but only as "symbol of the state" without political power, and they toned down public religious presence (Emperor still performs Shinto rituals but privately; any public funding of such is controversial and usually avoided).

Japanese society also introspected greatly: many felt deceived by wartime ideology. Emperor Hirohito's renunciation of divinity was psychologically huge – it left Japanese asking what of those who died for him if he's not a god? That disillusionment made Japan **averse to mixing**

religion and state or any militarism – a pacifist consensus emerged (enshrined in Article 9 renouncing war), though right-wing elements lingered.

However, some internal constraints beyond law exist: the imperial household itself evolved; modern Emperors like **Naruhito** are conscious of post-war responsibility and wouldn't dream of overt political acts. Many Shinto priests reframed Shinto as cultural heritage, not supremacist creed. Yet revisionists remain – a segment of nationalists (often in ruling LDP's right wing) who want to restore some old symbols. For example, prime ministers visiting Yasukuni (which honors war dead including war criminals) – seen as attempts to honor imperial militarist legacy, causing domestic and international outcry. Each time a PM did it (Koizumi annually 2001-06; Abe once in 2013), it drew criticism even internally from moderates who prefer not to antagonize neighbors or resurrect militarism. So civil society and media act as some check on overt revival of State Shinto.

Collapse or Transformation: State Shinto *collapsed in 1945*. Shinto returned to being a folk religion of shrine visits for life events and festivals, rather than an ideology of state. The Emperor system survived but was thoroughly redefined – from war god to a gentle figurehead who prays for peace.

However, bits of the old thinking survived in conservative circles. Post-war, groups like the **Association of Shinto Shrines** quietly lobbied to preserve shrine funding (via disguised cultural support). Some school textbooks still gloss over wartime atrocities – result of conservative pressure. Politically, Japan's "1955 system" had the LDP in power almost continuously, many of whose members had pre-war ties or sympathies, but they couldn't overtly revive State Shinto due to American oversight and global watch. Instead, they funneled nationalism into economic building and alliance with US (and only more recently under Abe did we see stronger moves to reinterpret the pacifist constitution and increase patriotic education – a careful creep towards moderate nationalism rather than ultra-spiritual form).

Modern Leftovers:

- **Memory in East Asia:** Memories of Japan's Shinto-fueled imperialism remain strong in China, Korea, etc. They suspect any Japanese moves like altering history books or increasing defense as possible return to that mentality. Yasukuni visits remain a diplomatic flashpoint – symbolizing unresolved historical reckoning.
- **Imperial Institution contested significance:** Older Japanese still hold Emperor semi-sacred emotionally; younger are more indifferent. But events like Emperor Akihito's abdication in 2019 had elaborate Shinto accession rites and national reverence – showing leftover respect.
- **Far-right fringes:** Groups (uyoku dantai) still revere pre-war symbols – they drive around in sound trucks blaring wartime music, wave the Rising Sun flag, and call for restoring Emperor's full glory. They are marginal but occasionally harass people (e.g. protests against comfort women statues).
- **Positive side:** Traditional Shinto arts (like shrine festivals) and reverence for nature remain strong. Many credit Shinto influence for Japanese ethos of living in harmony with nature (though industrial reality contradicted that often) – culturally the idea persists.

Shrine festivals and fortunes (omikuji) are part of daily life now without militarist overtones.

- **War memory revisionism:** Yasukuni Shrine's war museum still propagates a narrative that the war was justified self-defense and Asia liberation – this unrepentant State Shinto ideology leftover strains Japan's moral relations in Asia.
- **Political influence:** Modern right-wing politicians in Japan often belong to Shinto-affiliated groups (like Shinto Seiji Renmei, Shinto Political League) – they quietly push for, say, official support to shrines, or constitutional revision to bring back some Emperor prerogative. So far, they haven't undone secularism, but the influence is there.
- **Cultural identity:** Many Japanese now see Shinto as culture, not religion, but it still fosters a sense of unique identity (e.g. Japanese new year shrine visits are near-universal regardless of personal belief – it's a national custom). As such, Shinto persists in providing social cohesion (perhaps a benign leftover).
- **Nationalist sentiment watch:** The leftover challenge is mainly about addressing history and ensuring nationalist sentiment doesn't erode Japan's peace and regional trust. So far, pacifism is still strong in populace, but regional tensions with China/North Korea have allowed some remilitarization with less public pushback.

In conclusion, Shinto's entanglement with modern Japanese state caused intense harm in early 20th century but was severed by defeat. Japan emerged pacifist, culturally Shinto persists but used for identity not aggression. Leftover challenges revolve around historical reckoning and vigilance that nationalism doesn't creep too far.

(Now we transition to modern secular ideologies – Fascism, Marxism-Leninism, and Technocratic Nationalism – which in the 20th century arguably caused more death than any religious regimes, showing that absolutist belief plus state power is deadly whether "God" is invoked or not.)

Secular Ideologies (Fascism, Marxism-Leninism, Nationalism, Technocracy)

Belief System Overview: The 20th century introduced avowedly **secular ideologies** that functioned much like religions in motivating political movements and justifying power. They replaced theology with ideology – absolute belief in a race, a classless utopia, a nation-state's destiny, or "scientific" progress. The major examples:

- **Fascism:** An ultranationalist, authoritarian ideology idolizing the state or race, often under a charismatic leader (**Führerprincip** in Nazi Germany). It's inherently expansionist, seeking glory through conquest (Hitler's *Lebensraum*, Mussolini's new Roman Empire) and violently suppressing "inferior" groups or dissenters. Core claims: Social Darwinism (the strong survive, the weak perish), racial hierarchy (Nazism particularly), and a mythic past greatness to be restored. Ethically, it dismisses individual rights as subordinate to collective strength. Fascist institutional architecture included one-party rule, propaganda apparatus, youth indoctrination (Hitler Youth, etc.), paramilitary forces (SS, Blackshirts). It achieved state capture in Italy (1922), Germany (1933), Spain

(Franco, though he's semi-fascist), and Japan had a parallel militarist ideology akin to fascism (though with Emperor at core rather than a populist leader). Under fascism, the state basically became a tool of ideological aggression – e.g. Nazi Germany mobilizing entire society for racial war.

- **Marxism-Leninism (Communism):** A revolutionary socialist ideology aiming for a classless, stateless society (communism) via a transitional "dictatorship of the proletariat." Core claims: history is class struggle inevitably leading to proletarian victory; capitalist exploitation must be overthrown by force. It posits an almost messianic inevitability (scientific socialism) – thus giving an absolutist mandate to the Party as the "vanguard" of history. Ethically, it professed human equality and common ownership, but in practice produced dictatorship and often justified any means (purges, gulags) by the utopian ends. Institutional architecture: a one-party state controlling all branches, planned economy, suppression of religion (atheism was enforced to a degree, churches closed), an international revolutionary network (the Comintern 1919–43) to spread revolution abroad – a kind of ideological empire. State capture occurred in USSR (1917), Eastern Europe post-WWII, China (1949), Cuba (1959), etc.. Once in power, these regimes functioned as totalitarian empires of ideology: internal consolidation (multiethnic USSR with Russification, labor camps akin to internal colonies) and external attempts to expand influence (funding communist movements globally).

- **Nationalism:** A broad secular idea that loyalty to one's nation (often defined by ethnicity, language, or civic identity) is paramount. It's not inherently violent but can be – extreme ethnic nationalism justifies ethnic cleansing or unification wars (e.g. Greater Serbia under Milosevic leading to Bosnian genocide 1995, Hutu Power in Rwanda 1994 leading to Tutsi genocide). In the 19th century, nationalism became a dominant ideology in Europe (leading to unifications like Germany/Italy and also colonial competition justified by national prestige). Colonial liberation movements often used nationalism too. If civic, it seeks independence or expansion for state's glory; if ethnic, it may seek to purify or enlarge territory to include all of that ethnicity (e.g. Serbian vision of uniting all Serbs, or German lebensraum for Aryans). Many atrocities are rooted in extreme nationalism (Armenian Genocide 1915 by Turkish nationalists, Holocaust partly had nationalist motives as well as racial). Institutional expression varied: could be democratic or dictatorial. Almost every modern state adopted some form (the difference is extreme vs moderate). Extreme ethnic nationalism examples beyond fascism: e.g. **Bosnian War** (Serb nationalism massacre of Muslims at Srebrenica 1995), **Rwanda 1994** (Hutu elites' propaganda of Tutsi as enemy lead to genocide).

- **Technocracy:** More an approach than a mass ideology, but there was a movement in early 20th century believing scientists/engineers should govern rationally. It's secular and purportedly apolitical, valuing efficiency and data over ideology or democracy. As an "ideology," it can lead to authoritarian decisions overriding popular will because "experts know best." Few states openly say "we are run by engineers," but many authoritarian regimes legitimize themselves via development claims (e.g. post-war South Korea under Park Chung-hee, or modern China's CCP, justify one-party rule by delivering economic growth – a technocratic efficiency claim). The EU is often criticized as a technocracy where central bank and commission make decisions with little input – causing harm like austerity in Greece that led to social crisis. Technocracy doesn't expand by war but by creeping influence: e.g. global financial governance by IMF, World Bank –

undemocratic, run by experts from powerful countries – imposing structural adjustments in 1980s/90s that some liken to economic neo-colonial control causing social harm (poverty in Africa/Latin America worsened by those policies). So harm is via democratic deficit and insensitivity. Surveillance states (using technology to control people) are another technocratic tool of oppression – e.g. China's **Social Credit System** merging data to enforce "good" behavior; only constraint is if it backfires causing public discontent or inefficiency, but in short term it strengthens authoritarian control.

State Capture & Empire Function (Secular Ideologies):

- **Fascism:** Achieved state capture through political crises (Italy's march on Rome 1922, Germany's electoral victory & enabling act 1933). Once official, the state became an instrument for aggressive expansion (Italy invaded Ethiopia 1935, Germany annexed neighbors 1938-39) justified by racial/national destiny. Fascist empire function: internal total mobilization (economy geared to war, youth indoctrinated) and external subjugation of "inferiors" (e.g. Nazis in occupied Poland treating Slavs as slaves, implementing the General plan Ost to clear out lands for Germans). It ran on terror and propaganda – e.g. **Holocaust** was genocide of 6 million Jews (and others) industrially executed, guided by Nazi racial ideology. Fascist regimes fell mostly via war defeat (Germany, Italy, Japan 1945). Spain/Portugal's lingered longer but eventually gave way (Spain transformed to democracy after Franco's death; Portugal's fascist Estado Novo overthrown in 1974).
- **Marxism-Leninism:** The Soviet Union institutionalized it – Communist Party took absolute control, planning replaced markets, enforced atheism to a degree (churches closed), set up Comintern to spread revolution – a sort of empire of ideology. Under Stalin, it became extremely repressive: the Great Purge killed ~700k "enemies," Gulag labor camps held millions, engineered famine (Holodomor in Ukraine) killed millions – essentially class-war ideologies wreaking havoc akin to religious zeal but under secular banner. Externally, USSR after WWII had a bloc (Eastern Europe) effectively an empire (though nominally independent, they followed Moscow's line; uprisings in East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Prague 1968 crushed by Soviet tanks). Meanwhile, Marxism inspired many anti-colonial movements – some succeeded (China, Vietnam, Cuba, Angola). Communist international solidarity was a vehicle for interference – e.g. Soviets and Chinese supported revolutions or client states (from Latin America to Africa), causing proxy wars (Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan). They justified it as aiding world revolution, similar fervor as religious crusades albeit class-based. The Cold War essentially globalized conflict of secular ideologies: liberal democracy vs communism.
- **Nationalism:** Almost every modern state is shaped by it. It led to consolidation of nations (Germany 1871, etc.) but also to colonial conquests (European powers carving Africa claiming to "civilize" – a mix of Christian mission and nationalism's glory). Extreme cases: **Nazi racial nationalism** culminating in Holocaust (6 million Jews, 5 million others killed – industrial gassing, mass shootings, working to death); **Serbian nationalism** in 1990s doing ethnic cleansing of Bosniaks (Srebrenica genocide ~8k men and boys) (HMDT, 2025); **Rwandan Hutu nationalism** in 1994 pushing elimination of Tutsis (~800k killed in 100 days). Nationalism's empire function depends: colonial era it justified overseas empires; post-colonial it fueled wars (India-Pakistan over Kashmir, Arab-Israeli conflict with dueling nationalisms, etc.). It's often merged with religion or

race (e.g. Zionism linking Jewish identity to statehood – both liberation movement and settler-colonial project as some argue; Hindutva linking Indian nation to Hindu ethos).

- **Technocracy:** Not an "empire" in militant sense, but global institutions like **IMF, WTO** can impose policies on countries (structural adjustments in 1980s that led to unemployment, cuts in social services causing suffering). EU's handling of Greek debt crisis (forcing austerity that led to recession) is often cited as technocracy overriding democracy (Greeks voted against austerity in referendum 2015 but troika imposed it anyway). On domestic front, modern surveillance states (like China's **Social Credit** merging Big Data to enforce "good behavior") show technocracy harnessed to strengthen control. Only internal constraint is if too much surveillance inefficiency or leaks cause public outcry, but authoritarian regimes manage that tightly. Technocracy as governing principle hasn't collapsed because it's integrated quietly – people often don't rally against rule by experts unless crises reveal their unaccountability (e.g. EU after 2008 crisis faced backlash populism).

Harm Profile Summaries:

- **Fascism/Nazism:** left deep scar and cautionary lesson codified in global norms (genocide is a crime, racism delegitimized, UN formed to prevent such world wars). But in practice, echoes in neo-Nazi groups or authoritarian trends still worry. Specific harm: WWII ~60 million dead, Holocaust ~11 million murdered systematically; entire cities destroyed. Fascists also enslaved: Nazi forced labor of millions, exploitation of occupied lands (stealing food causing famines in Greece, etc.). They committed sectarian cleansing par excellence (Holocaust against Jews, Porajmos against Roma, etc.). Gender violence was part (mass rapes by Axis in Eastern front). Fascism collapsed with regime defeats, but ideas survive on fringe.
- **Communism's leftovers:** nuclear-armed states (Russia, China) shaped by communist past now have different ideologies (authoritarian capitalism or personalist rule) but much of their security state apparatus and geopolitical stance (e.g. suspicion of West) come from Cold War legacy. Post-communist societies often grapple with legacy: e.g. corruption networks from old party elites turned oligarchs (Russia), cultural trauma (millions executed or starved under Mao and Stalin, leaving generational scars). Also environment: USSR and China's industrial drive (Aral Sea desiccation, Chernobyl) inflicted lasting harm. However, communism did produce some social modernizations (literacy, women's rights improved in some contexts) – complex legacy.
- **Nationalism's leftovers:** basically nearly every border dispute or ethnic conflict has roots in nationalist or colonial history. Examples:
  - *Kashmir* (stem from 1947 partition ambiguities).
  - *Israel-Palestine* (Zionism vs Arab nationalism clash leftover of British Mandate decisions).
  - *Many minority rebellions* (Kurds across Turkey/Iraq/Syria – leftover of post-WWI borders ignoring Kurdish nation; Rohingya – leftover of colonial migration and post-colonial Burman ethnonationalism).
  - Even seemingly religious conflicts often at core nationalist (e.g. Northern Ireland – Catholic vs Protestant but really Irish vs British national identity).

- o Partition memories cause communal distrust generations later (India-Pak riots etc.).
  - o Balkan tensions still present (Bosnian Serbs vs Bosniaks uneasy peace under Dayton, Kosovo status unresolved – leftover of Yugoslav wars).
  - o In Africa, most borders drawn by colonizers have led to continuous ethnic tensions or civil wars (e.g. arbitrary merging of tribes in Nigeria, Sudan's north-south, etc.).
- **Technocracy's leftovers:** not often labeled but certain global structures (IMF, WTO) are viewed as undemocratic causing inequality – fueling populist backlash or resentment in poorer countries (e.g. African/Latin countries in debt crises saw structural adjustments in 80s leaving worse poverty, feeding anti-West sentiment). Within nations, overreliance on unelected experts can hollow democracy – some argue this contributed to populism's rise (people feeling disempowered by "elites"). Also the digital surveillance architecture built (like NSA global spying revealed by Snowden) is a tech-legacy raising ongoing human rights concerns.

In the **four-layer model context**: these secular ideologies in power mimic religions' patterns:

- They have **absolutist claims** (Master race, dictatorship of proletariat, supreme national will, infallibility of science planners).
- They created **institutions** (propaganda ministries, single parties, secret police) paralleling churches or clerical hierarchies in controlling thought.
- They seized **states** and ran **empires** (Nazi Germany's Lebensraum empire in Europe; Soviet communist sphere; Western colonial empires propelled partly by nationalist or "civilizing" ideologies).
- They exploited **modern technology** to execute at scale – thus the 20th c. atrocities outdid pre-modern ones largely because of industrial and bureaucratic means (Holocaust trains and gas chambers, Stalin's rail deportations, atomic bombs, etc.).

Internal Constraints/Reforms:

- Fascism had almost none internally – it was undone by external defeat. A few internal conspiracies (e.g. German officers' Valkyrie plot 1944) but they failed.
- Communism had some internal correctives after extremes: e.g. post-Stalin "de-Stalinization" by Khrushchev 1956 moderated terror a bit (released Gulag prisoners, slightly more cultural thaw) – though USSR remained authoritarian. China after Mao moderated under Deng (stopped mass campaigns, allowed economic freedom, though still one-party dictatorship). These were partial reforms to sustain regime, not true liberalization (except in some Eastern Europe states that tried "Socialism with a human face" – quickly crushed by hardliners or Soviets).
- Nationalism's constraints usually came after horrific wars (exhaustion after WWII made Europe move toward integration (EU) to constrain national rivalries). Also international law developed (UN, human rights) to check extreme nationalism – albeit enforcement is spotty.
- Technocracy's check is democratic oversight if present – e.g. central banks have had to increase transparency after 2008 crisis due to public criticism of unaccountability.

Whistleblowers like Snowden raised awareness forcing slight surveillance reforms (e.g. USA ended bulk metadata collection program ostensibly). So public outcry can curb worst abuses, albeit slowly.

Conclusion:

Secular ideologies when fused with power have arguably caused more death in last century than religious ones (two world wars, nuclear bombs, multiple genocides) showing the root cause is not religion per se but the **combination of absolutist belief – whether God or utopia – with unchecked power and modern means**. The patterns we saw in theocracies repeated in secular tyrannies: a fanatical ideology, institutionally enforced, state-powered, executed with advanced technology, yields mass harm. Nazi racism or Stalinist class hatred played the same role as medieval religious zeal in justifying conquest or purges.

Understanding this underscores that **no worldview is immune**: the key predictors of atrocities lie in **monopoly on violence, dogmatic intolerance of "others," bureaucratic machinery enabling large-scale action, and dehumanization** of target groups. Whether the banner is the Cross, Crescent, Red Star or Swastika, if those conditions align, extreme harm follows. Conversely, pluralism, rule of law, and accountability (internal reform voices, external checks) can mitigate these dangers irrespective of culture.

Having traversed ancient faith empires to modern ideologies, we now provide a comparative timeline to visualize how these forces rose, fell, and overlapped through history, illustrating that when one empire falls, another often adapts or reacts to its legacy – often inverting ideology (the oppressed adopting a rival creed or hardened identity). The through-line is the immense capacity of organized belief to mobilize people – often violently – and the enduring structures even after the swords and guns fall silent.

Master Comparative Timeline (Macro-Comparative)

- **Antiquity to Early Middle Ages:**
  - **c. 1300–500 BCE:** Rise of early civilizations with religion tied to rule (Egyptian Pharaohs as gods, Mesopotamian kings chosen by gods, Chinese Mandate of Heaven concept). Zoroastrianism in Persian Empire promotes idea of holy truth vs lies under divine king. **Monotheism emerges:** Hebrew kingdom of Israel (c. 1000–586 BCE) fuses covenant religion with state briefly; ancient Israel's scriptures later influence world.
  - **4th century BCE: Alexander the Great** embraces godlike status to legitimize conquests.
  - **Ashoka's Maurya Empire (3rd c. BCE):** After bloody Kalinga War, converts to **Buddhism** and spreads it (missionaries to Sri Lanka, edicts of nonviolence).
  - **1st–3rd century CE: Christianity** begins as persecuted sect in Roman Empire. Roman Emperor **Constantine** converts (312) & Edict of Milan (313) ends persecution; Emperor **Theodosius** makes Christianity state religion (380). Imperial might now enforces orthodoxy: pagan temples shut, heresies condemned.
  - **Early 5th c.: Augustine** develops Just War theory within Christian context, foreshadowing religious war justification and constraints.

- o **622–750: Islam** rises in Arabia; **Caliphate** rapidly expands (Syria/Egypt/Persia by 650; Spain by 711). Conquests brutal but pragmatic: non-Muslims become dhimmi second-class but not usually forced to convert. By 750, early **Umayyad/Abbasid** empires stretch from Iberia to Indus – largest pre-Mongol empire.
- o **Late 8th c.: Charlemagne** crowned Emperor (800) revives ideal of **Christendom** in West – forcibly converts Saxons (Massacre of Verden 782); Eastern Europe likewise Christianized often by force (e.g. 14th c. **Northern Crusades** against Baltic pagans).
- o **9th c.: Mongol** tribes stir; **Khazar Empire** (Turkic) converts to **Judaism** (c. 800) – unique case of state adoption of Judaism.
- o **Late 9th–10th c.: Viking/Varangians** convert to Christianity (Norman & Kievan Rus rulers) integrating into Christian Europe.
- o **10th c.: Hindu Rajput** kingdoms in India resist Ghazni's Muslim raids; Chola Hindu empire in South India reaches height – even raids Srivijaya (Sumatra) 1025, showing religion not barrier to conquest.
- o **11th c.: Investiture Controversy** in Europe (church vs state power tussle) – Pope Gregory VII asserts papal supremacy (1075); Emperor Henry IV does penance (1077). Church power high: calls for **Crusades**. **First Crusade** launched 1095 – captures Jerusalem 1099 with mass slaughter. Crusader states & further Crusades follow (to 1291) – intense Christian-Muslim conflict, also intra-Christian violence (1204 sacking of Orthodox Constantinople by 4th Crusade).
- o **12th c.: Bhakti movement** in India begins – Hindu saints stress devotion over caste, sow seeds of reform. In Europe, **Inquisition** starts (papal 1184) targeting heresy (Cathars etc.), burning thousands over centuries.
- o **13th c.: Mongol explosion** under Genghis Khan (1206–1227) – annihilates Khwarezmia, devastates Persia/China/Kievan Rus. Possibly 30–40 million killed (some historians claim ~10% of world pop). Mongols religiously tolerant but extremely brutal in conquest (massacres e.g. Baghdad 1258, reducing Islamic Golden Age centers to ruin). Their empire largest contiguous in history. After Genghis's death (1227), Mongol Empire splits by 1260s into khanates, many later convert to local faiths (Ilkhanate to Islam by 1295; Golden Horde to Islam by 14th c.; Yuan in China patronizes Tibetan Buddhism).
- o **Late 13th–14th c.: Maritime Asia** sees religious transitions: Srivijaya's Buddhist empire falls, replaced by Majapahit (Hindu-Javanese) and rising Islam in Malay world via trade. In Europe, **1309–1377 Avignon Papacy** shows church's vulnerability to state (French king captures papacy). **14th c. Black Death** undermines feudal/Church authority eventually.
- **High Middle Ages to Early Modern:**
  - o **15th c.: Ottoman Empire** (Sunni Muslim) conquers Constantinople (1453) ending Byzantine Christian state. Ottomans claim Caliphate, rule diverse peoples with millet system – relative tolerance but institutionalize Muslim dominance. Meanwhile, **Spain** completes Reconquista (1492), expels Jews and Muslims or forces conversions – a Christian purification of Iberia.
  - o **1492 onwards: Age of Exploration**: European Christian powers expand globally. Papal Bulls (Dum Diversas 1452, Inter Caetera 1493) grant rights to colonize

non-Christian lands – *Doctrine of Discovery* justifies conquests as spreading Christianity (Tomchuk, T, 2022). Spanish in Americas enact **Requerimiento** ("submit to Church and Crown or face war") to indigenous – leading to mass violence and forced conversions. Encomienda system enslaves natives "for their conversion". Entire civilizations (Aztec, Inca) destroyed under pretext of religion + greed. Millions of indigenous die (most to disease, but also warfare, slavery).

o **16th c.: Protestant Reformation** fractures Christian unity (1517 Luther). Europe convulsed in religious wars (e.g. **Thirty Years' War** 1618–48) – though as much political, these wars kill large portions of German population. Ultimately ends with Peace of Westphalia 1648 – principle of cuius regio eius religio (ruler picks religion) and modern state sovereignty emerges, effectively beginning secularization in politics. In India, **Mughal Empire** (Muslim) at height (Akbar 1556–1605 fosters toleration, abolishes jizya; but Aurangzeb 1658–1707 reverses, enforcing Sharia and destroying some temples, fueling Hindu resentment).

o **1565: Battle of Talikota** – Muslim sultanates crush Vijayanagara (last great Hindu empire in South India) – ends era of Hindu imperial power, ushering more Islamic rule.

o **17th c.: Sikhism** rises in Punjab (syncretic but distinct faith) and faces persecution from Mughals (Guru Arjan executed 1606, Guru Tegh Bahadur 1675 for refusing conversion). Sikhs militarize under Guru Gobind Singh, forming Khalsa (1699) – showing even new religions can evolve into warrior community under oppression.

o **1644: Manchu Qing Dynasty** in China (Confucian governance, tolerating Buddhism/Taoism but later suppresses minority faiths like Tibetan Buddhism after 1950 annexation by PRC). **Japan Tokugawa Shogunate** (1603-1868) enforces sakoku (isolation); persecutes Christians (Nagasaki martyrs 1597, Shimabara revolt 1637 crushed, then Christianity banned).

o **18th c.: Enlightenment** in Europe (Voltaire, etc.) promotes secular reason, religious tolerance. Many states gradually secularize law (e.g. Austria's Joseph II 1780s ends torture, eases censorship, grants minority religious freedom). **American Revolution 1776** yields first modern secular constitution (no establishment of religion). **French Revolution 1789** secularizes state, even attempts Cult of Reason – also triggers backlash (Napoleon later concordat with Pope but uses Church under state).

o **1791: Haitian Revolution** begins – slaves + mixed-race leaders (some voodoo practitioners) overthrow French colonial rule by 1804; first Black republic. A mix of enlightenment and African spiritual inspiration.

o **Early 1800s: Napoleonic Wars** spread nationalism and Napoleonic code – undermining old religious order (dissolves Holy Roman Empire 1806). Latin American wars of independence free colonies from Spain/Portugal, often anticlerical at elite level but Catholic at popular level (Mexico 1810 rebellion led by priest Hidalgo).

o **19th c. Colonialism:** European secular nationalism and economic ideology drive **Scramble for Africa** (1880s) – though often cloaked with missionary rhetoric of "civilizing mission". Victorians push Christian morals globally but also scientific racism emerges (Social Darwinist justification of white rule).

- o **Mid-19th c.: Taiping Rebellion** in China (1851-64) – heterodox Christian-inspired cult leads massive revolt; Qing crush it with 20-30 million dead – one of deadliest conflicts ever, showing a pseudo-religious war.
- o **1857: Indian Rebellion** against British – partly sparked by religious offense (greased cartridge controversy offending Hindu/Muslim sepoys), after which British crown assumes direct rule and missionaries increase presence. British Raj uses divide-and-rule, entrenching communal identities (1871 census categorizes by religion/caste).
- o **1868: Meiji Restoration** in Japan – end of shogunate, Emperor restored. **State Shinto** constructed as national ideology; leads to rising militarism.
- o **1870: Italian unification** completes; Papal States annexed, Pope loses temporal power (Vatican left as microstate). European states become mostly secular or with symbolic state churches.
- o **Late 19th c.: Political Zionism** emerges (Herzl's *The Jewish State* 1896) aiming for Jewish homeland in Palestine – secular nationalist response to antisemitism, but invokes biblical connection. **Hindutva** idea formulated by Savarkar (book 1923) linking Indian identity to Hindu-ness. **Muslim League** in India (1906) pushes separate Muslim state idea eventually.
- o **1905: Russo-Japanese War** – Japan wins, first Asian power beating European; fosters Pan-Asian pride and Japanese militarist confidence, fueling further expansion with bushido-Shinto ethos.
- **20th Century – World Wars and Cold War:**
  - o **1914-18: WWI** – ostensibly secular imperial rivalries; massive death (16M). Ottoman calls **jihad** in 1914 to rally Muslims vs Allies (with limited effect). War ends old empires (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian tsar). Russian 1917 **Bolshevik Revolution** creates first atheist state with communist ideology.
  - o **1915: Armenian Genocide** – Ottoman nationalist Young Turks kill ~1.5M Armenians (Christian minority) – a sectarian/ethnic cleansing under war cover.
  - o **1917: Balfour Declaration** – Britain supports "Jewish national home" in Palestine (Zionist lobbying success). Soviet regime begins antireligious campaign (churches seized, clergy shot or gulag).
  - o **1919-20: Treaty of Versailles** and **League of Nations** attempt new order. Many new nation-states created (some along ethnic lines in Europe, setting up later conflicts). Colonial mandates in Middle East carve up Ottoman lands (e.g. British Mandate Palestine sets stage for Zionist-Arab conflict).
  - o **1920s-30s: Fascism rises** – Mussolini takes power 1922 (Italy), Hitler 1933 (Germany). State propaganda, youth indoctrination ramp up. **Nuremberg Laws 1935** strip German Jews' rights – step toward Holocaust. Japan militarists invade Manchuria 1931, leave League 1933, fully invade China 1937 (Second Sino-Japanese War) – atrocities like Nanjing Massacre (~300k killed).
  - o **1939-45: WWII** – deadliest conflict. Nazi genocide against Jews, Roma, others. Japan's brutal Pacific war (Unit 731, comfort women, etc.). War ends with Hiroshima/Nagasaki atomic bombings (first nuclear use – mass civilian casualties ~200k). Allies occupy Axis nations, disband fascist institutions. **UN** founded 1945 to prevent war, with human rights charter (influenced by liberal Christian and secular thinkers).

- **1945-49: Cold War** begins – world divides between US-led capitalist bloc and USSR-led communist bloc. Europe's colonies begin decolonization (India/Pakistan independent 1947 – Partition violence ~1M died in Hindu-Muslim riots; Israel established 1948 – Arab-Israeli War displaces 700k Palestinians; Indonesia independent 1949 after fight with Dutch).
- **1949: Chinese Communist Revolution** – Mao's PRC starts radical societal overhaul (land collectivization, suppressing religions – Tibetan uprising 1959 crushed, Dalai Lama exiled).
- **1950-53: Korean War** – proxy war of ideologies; North (communist) vs South (capitalist), ends in stalemate and partition; millions civilians dead, war atrocities (North's mass executions of bourgeois, South's anti-communist massacres).
- **1955: Bandung Conference** of non-aligned nations – emergence of Third World solidarity beyond Cold War blocs, often blending nationalism with socialism (e.g. Nasser's pan-Arabism, Nehru's secular socialism).
- **1960s:** Many African nations gain independence (often secular socialist leaning). **Vietnam War** (1965-75) – massive civilian toll ~2M, chemical warfare; communist North vs US-backed South, war extends to Cambodia/Laos.
- **1966-76: China's Cultural Revolution** – Mao's attempt to purge "capitalist roaders," unleashes Red Guards; ~1.5M killed, cultural heritage smashed (temples, historical sites) in fanatical secular iconoclasm akin to extreme religious zeal but for Maoism.
- **1971: Bangladesh Liberation War** – ~3M killed (Pakistani army and local Islamists commit genocide against Bengali Hindus and Muslims supporting independence). Illustrates interplay of national and religious hatred (West Pakistan soldiers often targeted Hindus in East).
- **1975-79: Khmer Rouge** in Cambodia – ultra-communist regime kills ~1.7M (intellectuals, minorities) in genocide, including nearly exterminating Cambodian Vietnamese and Cham Muslim minorities – an atheist utopia attempt with quasi-religious fervor.
- **1979: Iranian Revolution** – overthrow of US-backed Shah, establishment of Shi'a theocracy (Ayatollah Khomeini) – first modern theocratic state after a period of secular nationalism. Also **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan** 1979 triggers decade war, US and Saudi support Afghan mujahideen (jihad framed vs atheist invaders) sowing seeds of future extremist groups.
- **1980s: Latin American Dirty Wars** – right-wing regimes (often with tacit US support) vs leftist guerillas, e.g. Guatemala's anti-Mayan genocidal campaign (200k killed early 80s) – ideology of anti-communism with racist undertones.
- **1989: Fall of Berlin Wall**, collapse of Eastern European communist regimes (mostly bloodless except Romania). Soviet Union dissolves 1991 – Cold War ends. Many new states form (some with ethnic conflict – Yugoslav wars, Caucasus wars).
- **1990s: Yugoslav Wars** – nationalist and sectarian conflicts as Yugoslavia breaks up. **Bosnian War 1992-95**: Serb forces commit genocide against Bosniak Muslims (Srebrenica 1995) (HMDT, 2025); rape used as weapon (est. 20-50k women raped). **Rwanda Genocide 1994** – extremist Hutu nationalism leads to ~800k Tutsi and moderate Hutus killed in 100 days.

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  - **2001: 9/11 attacks** by Al-Qaeda – Islamist terrorism mass-casualty event (~3k killed). **US "War on Terror"** launched – leads to US/NATO invading Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). Afghanistan war ousts Taliban (who return to insurgency), Iraq war topples Saddam but sparks sectarian civil war (Sunni-Shia violence, ~200k civilians killed 2003-11).
  - **2010s: Arab Spring 2011** – uprisings topple dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen; Syria descends into multi-sided war (regime vs rebels vs ISIS vs Kurds), half-million dead, war crimes (chemical weapons, sieges). **ISIS** emerges 2014 in chaos of Syria/Iraq, declares new **"Caliphate"** – uses extreme brutality (genocide of Yazidis, enslaving Yazidi women, execution of Shias, terrorist attacks globally) until military defeat 2019. Demonstrates revival of medieval-style theocratic expansion using modern terror tactics.
  - **2010s: Myanmar** – military and extremist Buddhist monks persecute **Rohingya Muslims**, culminating in 2017 expulsion of ~700k Rohingya (UN calls it genocide). **China** – Xi Jinping's techno-authoritarian state detains ~1M **Uyghur Muslims** in "re-education" camps (some say cultural genocide), uses AI surveillance to enforce atheist Han-nationalist ideology.
  - **2020s:** Rising **populist nationalisms** (some religious, some secular xenophobic) globally challenge liberal democracy: e.g. Hindu nationalist BJP in India (since 2014) mainstreams Hindutva – lynchings of Muslims over cow rumors, revocation of Kashmir autonomy 2019, discriminatory citizenship laws – signs of shifting from secular pluralism to majority dominance. Western countries see far-right surges (Trump, European nationalist parties) – though not theocratic, they echo fascist themes (anti-immigrant, majority-chauvinist, disdain for liberal norms).
  - The timeline hasn't ended its cycle: new aspirants for empire (or hegemony) are rising often draping themselves in old flags – be it the **caliphate's black banner** (ISIS or successor jihadists), the **Russian double-headed eagle** (Putin invoking Orthodox holy war in Ukraine), or the **Chinese Dragon** asserting a Confucian-communist manifest destiny in Asia. History is not linear progress but cycles where different ideologies take center stage in causing large-scale harm at different periods, often overlapping.

This macro-timeline illustrates that from ancient conquests to today's conflicts, the interplay of belief and power continually reconfigures but never disappears. When one empire falls, another often adapts or reacts to its legacy – sometimes inverting the ideology (the oppressed adopting a rival creed or hardened identity). The thread running throughout is the immense capacity for **organized belief to mobilize people for collective endeavors – unfortunately, often violent ones – and the durability of those belief structures even after the swords and guns fall silent**.

Conclusion

Empires and ideologies drive harm **not because of the specific gods they invoke or manifestos they quote, but because the pursuit of domination tends to breed atrocities**. It is the **will to power and expansion** that correlates with mass violence, whether those empire-builders wore a

cross or a red star, rode horses or tanks. The belief systems serve as justifications or mobilizing narratives – ideology gives moral cover or fervent motivation to do what raw ambition alone might hesitate at. A crusader's cry of "Deus Vult!" ("God wills it") sanctified medieval conquests, just as a communist's insistence "History wills it" or Nazi's "Nature (race) wills it" proved equally potent and deadly rallying cries in modern times.

Religion is a vehicle, not the engine. The engine is the desire of elites (or masses) for wealth, security, revenge, glory, utopia – essentially political or material goals. Religion or secular ideology *supercharges* these goals with legitimacy and zeal. But as we've seen, take nearly any ideology – Christian universalism, Islamic jihad, revolutionary socialism, racial "science," militant Buddhism, ultranationalism – and under the right (or wrong) conditions, it has been used to unleash heinous acts. Conversely, all these belief systems have also shown they can inspire heroism, compassion, and progress in other contexts. The difference lies in **how power is structured and checked.**

Thus, it's simplistic and misleading to blame, say, "Islam" for terrorism or "Christianity" for colonialism or "atheism" for communist purges. Those labels are too broad and static. Instead, we should focus on **preventing concentrations of unchecked power, challenging absolutist narratives that paint opponents as existential evils, and maintaining accountability and empathy in our political culture**. A world with many beliefs need not be a world of war – if those beliefs coexist under rule of law, moderation, and mutual respect. Indeed, pluralistic societies today (though not perfect) suggest that when no single ideology can completely capture the state or define another group as subhuman, large-scale violence is much less likely.

In examining history's darkest chapters, we find more **similarities** than differences in the perpetrators' playbook – whether they carried a Bible, a Little Red Book, or a nationalist flag. **Power corrupted them similarly** when concentrated, and ideology – holy or secular – was bent into a sword. Understanding this sobering commonality is key to preventing future atrocities. We must guard the mechanisms (political and psychological) by which ordinary people are led to commit or permit extraordinary evil. Learning from the past, we can hope to interrupt those mechanisms – with **institutions that distribute power, narratives that humanize rather than demonize, and a vigilant global community that does not turn away when leaders start invoking destiny to justify destruction**.

Only by focusing on these true predictors can we avoid falling into the trap of finger-pointing at one civilization or creed, and instead shore up the defenses of a humane, accountable world order that resists any new empire of hate, whatever its banner. The annals of history, drenched in blood across so many eras and emblems, ultimately counsel one clear lesson: **it is not the name of the god or ideology that matters, but how humans choose to wield it**. And when they have chosen to wield it for domination, the results have been devastatingly similar.

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