

NPQ

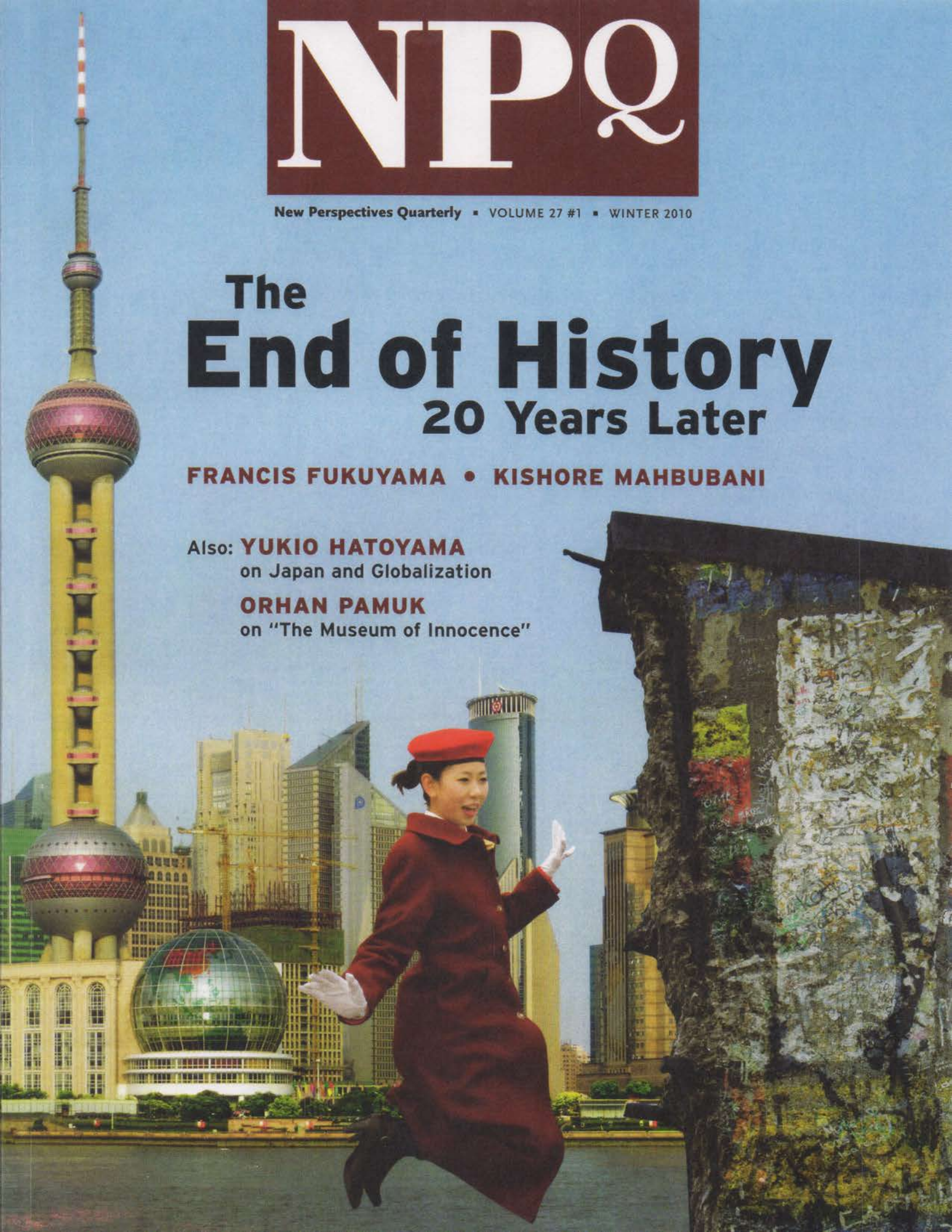
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The End of History 20 Years Later

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA • KISHORE MAHBUBANI

Also: **YUKIO HATOYAMA**
on Japan and Globalization

ORHAN PAMUK
on "The Museum of Innocence"



The Problem Is Not Faith, but the Faithful

Amina Chaudary of Islamica Magazine recently sat down with **ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU**, *a Nobel peace laureate, in Johannesburg, South Africa.*

NPQ | Just as religion should and can be a powerful source of peace and understanding, it can also be used as a powerfully destructive tool. When can religion become evil?

DESMOND TUTU | It isn't religion as such that is violent or incorrect. It is the adherents of whatever religion. Christians have to be some of the most humble and very modest in this regard. It is not any particular religion that is to blame. There is no religion in fact that I know that encourages or propagates violence that its adherents should carry out.

Christians are the last to be hoity-toity. Now... they talk about Islam as being a violent faith, (but) when you look at the history of Christendom, the Crusades and the many wars of religion that were fought, the cruelty of Christians in burning what they believed to be witches and burning heretics, and then very recently they were responsible for the Holocaust—it was Christians.

(Former United Nations Secretary-General) Kofi Annan put it very well: It was not the faiths—but the faithful—that were the problem. Because, as you know, there are very good Christians who are compassionate and caring. And there are very bad Christians. You can say that about Islam, about Hinduism, about any faith. That is why I was saying that it was not the faith per se but the adherent. People will use their religion to justify virtually anything.

People are able to justify immense cruelty and say that it is something that is sanctioned by their faith.

NPQ | The apartheid in South Africa was driven by some practicing Christians. You say, "The people enforcing it were not heathen, but those who claimed to be fellow Christians." They used the Bible to justify oppression and what they call creation ordinances. At the same time, many Christians also spoke out against apartheid through a Christian lens. Why is it that racism can be read from revelation in more than one way?

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TUTU | It is people. Because as you were saying, some people are able to use the Bible as a means of opposing injustice, whereas others are able to find justification. You can find justification for slavery in the Bible.

Some say this is what the Bible says and that closes the argument. You will find that the Bible, if you want it to, will justify many things.

St. Paul had a very male chauvinistic view of women. He would say things like women must not talk in church, must cover their heads, they mustn't talk and must remember that it was a woman who first tempted and this whole mess started because women messed us up. So you can read it in such a way that it justifies polygamy. Most of the leading figures of the Old Testament were polygamists. Abraham had several wives and concubines. If they wanted, they could say this was approved in the Bible.

NPQ | **This is obviously the same with regards to the Quran or any other religious text being misread and used to propagate evil. As I'm sure you've read the Quran in your religious studies as well, it is, as any religious book, one for instilling good morals and values and for people to live their lives ethically. Yet it is frustrating to see it's being used to justify evil and malicious purposes.**

TUTU | People will use anything. Look, when you think of the KKK, they actually have as their emblem a fiery cross. And they don't see any contradiction between the cross, an instrument of suffering that procured our reconciliation with God, and its use as a symbol for nefarious attacks on black people. But they believe that they are being obedient to God. People in apartheid South Africa can tell you that God cursed black people when they cursed Him. And so the hermetic people were condemned to be drawers of water and of wood.

NPQ | **So then, how do you reverse the use of religion to justify evil purposes? Especially when it becomes so powerful a force in the world today, as say Islamic or Christian or any faith-based terrorism.**

TUTU | You have to use the principles of interpretation. We say the final and full revelation of God is not a book; it is a person, Jesus Christ.

You have to then say, whatever it is that I say or do or think or teach must be something that will be consistent with who Jesus Christ was. So that is your ultimate litmus test, not that you've got specific words to say, whatever they may be saying. It is what is being said. They're consistent with the revelation of God that we encounter in Jesus.

NPQ | **Do you believe that the conflict in Israel and Palestine is a religious one or a political one?**

TUTU | Ultimately, suffering is always political with all kinds of justifications—there are those who justify Israel's occupation of land as being a fulfillment of what

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God had promised. But then you can also say, in terms of that same Bible, they will be judged very harshly because the God who may have promised them this land is also the God who is the God of the widow, the orphan and alien, and who makes it quite clear that God will not welcome religious acts, no matter how elaborate, if they do not represent a person who demonstrates that they care about justice, about compassion and things of that kind.

So there would be those of us who say that in many ways; you worry about what the Jews in Israel are doing to themselves. Yes, they may at the moment have incredible power and are supported almost unconditionally by especially America, but most of the West as well. Yet what they are doing is contrary to the best teaching and highest teachings of their faith.

NPQ | It is often argued that everything in the Muslim world circles around this one issue. This seems to be the center of the extremist motivation. What do you think would happen to fundamentalist Muslims, like Osama bin Laden and the rest, if the Arab-Israeli crisis was actually resolved?

TUTU | Well, that is what we said in the Alliance of Civilizations (a United Nations “high-level group of experts,” established by Annan), that originally we were meant to be looking at clash of civilizations and the role of religion in that. In our final report, first of all, we said although there are tensions between the West and this so-called Third World or the South, it has found its chief expression in the tension between the West and the Islamic world. And we said in our report that all other points of tension pale in comparison to this whole matter of the Middle East. Unless that is resolved, the tensions that we are speaking about, the West and Arab world, those would not disappear, they will not be resolved.

NPQ | The United States is often seen by the Arab world as not having an evenhanded approach to the region vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Given this perception, what realistic role do you think the US can play toward achieving peace, and how likely do you think this will happen in the next 10 years?

TUTU | The US tries to be involved. America has a very important role that it could play. You’ve got Jimmy Carter who, as it were, put in a number of pitches there. I myself have not understood how (former British Prime Minister) Tony Blair (could be) a special envoy in the Middle East peace process when he’s been so much under the thumb of and depicted as (former US President George W.) Bush’s poodle. Of course, there is hardly any love lost between Bush and the Arab world, especially because of the invasion of Iraq.

NPQ | Iraq used to be the best example of peaceful coexistence among cultures, religious sects and different religions. Saddam Hussein did the greater part

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of the modern-day destruction to Iraq, but the US invasion also had drastic consequences on the delicate stability that used to exist in Iraq between Shiites and Sunnis, who have very deep distrust for one another. Drawing from your experiences, how can this deep-seated sectarian conflict taking place in the Middle East and beyond be resolved now?

TUTU | By people sitting down and beginning to really hear one another and not being influenced by their stereotypes. Really sitting down and trying to hear: What is it that bugs you? Why don't you think you like me and maybe I will tell you why I don't like you. Of course, you've got to reckon with the burden of the past. You can't just easily dismiss it.

It is a legacy and often you have to carry an albatross. And it won't happen until people are able to have a certain level of trust and try to speak to each other, not as caricatures but as people. It turns out that all would really want peace and all would want to be sure that they would not be taken advantage of. They want much the same things, but they have been formed by history to have a particular perception of the other.

NPQ | **Do you think the global Muslim community is doing enough to combat extremism?**

TUTU | It will be very difficult out of a vacuum to say no. You know, when people see what is happening in Gaza, that can't make you too fond of the perpetrators—the Israelis. If you are a Muslim and you look at what is happening there, it fills you with a lot of resentment. Especially if you are weak, then you are nursing these grudges and you are increasing in bitterness and looking for a chance to get your own back.

One of (my) friends is a professor at Harvard, and she is involved in conflict resolution and has propounded very cogently and credibly this theory about dignity. She says the moment our dignity is undermined, we get up in arms and want to see our dignity restored—especially if we are humiliated. Every situation of justice is an occasion where someone is being humiliated and they want to restore their dignity. They think, "I am a human being and I may not be able to defeat these people or destroy them, but I will hit out at them, because I am not a thing, I am human."



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