Dag Hammarskjöld:
An International Civil Servant uniting Mystics and Realistic Diplomatic Engagement
Jodok Troy, University of Innsbruck

“Smiling, sincere, incorruptible—
His body disciplined and limber.
A man who had become what he could,
And was what he was—
Ready at any moment to gather everything
Into one simple sacrifice.”
Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*.

“The politics of nations … can never ignore the transcendent, spiritual dimension of human experience.”

Pope John Paul II

In the era of an at least claimed “global resurgence of religion” and where religious issues are becoming objects of national security, it is helpful to have a closer look at an international civil servant motivated by religious values in the recent past, at a time in which everyone is believed to live in a “secular age.”¹ A time in which one civil servant was deeply characterized by a religious and, moreover, mystical ethical framework. He is a modern example illustrating the positive effects that a religious ethical framework can have on humans, opposing the widespread fear of actors motivated by religion nowadays. The life, vision of polity, policies, and actual politics of the Swedish second secretary-general of the United Nations (1953-1961) Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961) are worth being examined in many ways but mainly because of their uniqueness. That uniqueness is essentially founded within Hammarskjöld’s rationality, characterized by a deeply realistic notion of politics and his political agency as secretary-general of the UN.² On the other side Hammarskjöld’s deeply spiritual and even mystical private life is outstanding in international leadership. This
pretended antagonism of Hammarskjöld between rational political agency and mystical private life was not discovered until after his death which led to the finding of his diary *Markings*, which was published posthumously.³ Although most times ignored or overlooked, it “is impossible to understand the statesman Hammarskjöld absent his moral convictions.” Rather, “it is possible to generalize that Hammarskjöld’s ethical framework also influenced both his international political agenda and his method of administration.”⁴

The example of Hammarskjöld is a somewhat outstanding pattern of uniting basic levels of analysis of individual leadership in international affairs with the more detailed background of pluralism, solidarism, realism, and particularly the English School. Furthermore, it offers a fruitful possibility to illustrate the positive effects a religious ethical framework can have on individuals in international positions. The life, policies, and legacy of the international civil servant and diplomat Hammarskjöld possess some of the most important elements of international affairs such as questions of war and peace. Finally, and often forgotten, the high-level diplomat Hammarskjöld is also an example of the significance of individuals and leadership in international affairs.⁵ In the case of the UN secretary-general it was the “call to promote a global ethic [which] falls most squarely … on the shoulders of the secretary-general as the head of the UN system.”⁶ This promoted global ethic, lying on the shoulders of the secretary-general Hammarskjöld was founded and deeply influenced in the mystical experience. A mystical experience, as Hammarskjöld holds in *Markings*, is

“[a]lways here and now— in that freedom which is one with distance, in that stillness which is born of silence. But–this is a freedom in the midst of action, a stillness in the midst of other human beings. The mystery is a constant reality to him who, in this world, is free from self-concern, a reality that grows peaceful and mature before the receptive attention of assent. In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.”⁷
Despite this obvious parallel between the global ethic influenced by the mystical experience of the secretary-general, Hammarskjöld is also a more general example of how “diplomatic theory and practice can be informed and enriched by experimenting with spirituality,”\(^8\) an often forgotten or ignored aspect of diplomacy. The article thus also sets out to answer positively Costas Constantinou’s question of whether we are “willing to innovate with and politicise discourses that reflect on the spiritual dimension of Otherness and its value in knowing the Self?”\(^9\) The article is thus guided by the value of understanding diplomat’s belief systems in managing conflicts when “the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive versions of truth is arguably the greatest enemy of diplomacy.”\(^10\)

**The mystic and diplomat Hammarskjöld: realistic optimism**

“Politics begins in mysticism, and mysticism always ends in politics.” Charles Péguy.

In order to illustrate the life and legacy of Hammarskjöld it is necessary to take a closer look at his ethical framework, which was strongly influenced—in the appearance of mysticism—by religious values. An “ethical framework can be defined as the combination of personal values that establish the beliefs, forms of reasoning, and interpretations of the world that guide an individual when making judgments about proper behavior in specific contexts.”\(^11\) There is a nearly endless body of literature concerning mystics and its definition. Only a brief and general definition will be used here to approach the field. Bernard McGinn defines “[t]he mystical element in Christianity [as] that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.”\(^12\) Somehow more satisfying, particularly regarding the
person Hammarskjöld, is the definition and distinction of Gnostic spirituality and erotic-mystics or *agape* outlined by Dallmayr:

In essence, gnostic spirituality culminates in the recognition of one’s own basic unity or identity with the godhead, hence in a form of deification. It is chiefly on this point that erotic-mystical or, *agape*, spirituality demurs. By not accepting the radical dualist scenario, erotic spirituality also refuses to endorse its telos or cosmic teleology. In lieu of the eventual conquest or erasure of the world by the divine, *agape* stresses the mediated and covenantal relation between the two shores; accordingly, the gnostic path of deification or self-deification is here replaced by the ascending path of loving redemption.\(^{13}\)

Hammarskjöld’s mysticism, on the mere “philosophical” side, was strongly influenced by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and the German protestant theologian and tropical physician Albert Schweitzer. Like the charity of Schweitzer, Hammarskjöld’s activities were aligned towards practice and universality. Hammarskjöld thus, to a certain degree, united the ethic of conviction, his personal mystical belief, with an ethic of responsibility, his personal, constantly neutral, political engagement in international affairs. The “morality” of the statesman Hammarskjöld “goes beyond the public-private distinction. It is best explained as a three-way exchange between one’s own personal communication with God, God’s influence on the mundane world (manifest in public service), and the personal divinity that one applies there as well.”\(^ {14}\)

Shortly before his death, Hammarskjöld had started translating Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* and agreed with his spiritual mentor “that a separation of politics and spirit was a sin against the spirit as well as a sin against politics.”\(^ {15}\) Hammarskjöld was also deeply influenced by the
Christian tradition of the *Imitatio Christi* by the mystics Thomas von Kempen, St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart. Hammarskjöld’s fondness for the philosopher Buber is not surprising. “In every case, Christian agape spirituality involves a loving relationship between an ‘I’ and a ‘You’ ... between humans and the divine.”

Hammarskjöld’s own words capture his tenet of medieval mysticism most comprehensively in the context of his understanding of “serving” as an international civil servant who “is active as an instrument, a catalyst, perhaps an inspirer—he serves.” as he outlined at his statement to the press on arrival in New York shortly before he took office. But to fulfil this duty as someone who serves the international community, it is necessary to say “yes” to every demand and fate, as he described in his contribution “Old Creeds in a New World” in the radio program *This I Believe* in 1954:

> But the explanation of how man should live a life of active social service in full harmony with himself as a member of the community of the spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom ‘self-surrender’ had been the way to self-realization, and who in ‘singleness of mind’ and ‘inwardness’ had found strength to say yes to every demand which the needs of their neighbours made them face, and to say yes also to every fate life had in store for them when they followed the call of duty…”

One characteristic of Hammarskjöld’s mystic is that his spirituality is not incompatible with reason. Rather, he was convinced that reason can be a starting point for mystics and that mystics can lead to pure reason. Furthermore, and even more important, Hammarskjöld’s mystics disembogues into political action: “[F]or Hammarskjöld, mystics are real flesh and blood persons who have chosen to risk a lifetime in service.” John of the Cross, one of
Hammarskjöld’s most intensively studied and meditated mysticals, stressed the active and rational component of *agape*:

As John [of the Cross] himself elaborates: ‘Our soul becomes unified with God not through cognition of mental representations, nor through passive enjoyment or anything sensual, but intellectually only through faith, recollectively through hope, and actively through love’—where *love* means an ek-static movement towards the ‘You’ of God and also laterally toward the ‘You’ of fellow human beings.  

For Hammarskjöld, mystics must not be detached from the real world or become an end in itself. On his search for universalization, Hammarskjöld draws from his personal mystic, with its basic concepts of love, patience, justice, and prudence, to concrete political activity. At the same time Hammarskjöld was well aware of the classical mystical dictum, which can already be found in the John of the Cross’s *Imitatio Christi*: “‘If you rely on yourself alone, nothing is accomplished; but if you rely on God, heaven’s grace redeems you.’”  

This is also reflected in Hammarskjöld’s *Markings*: “‘Treat others as ends, never as means.’ And myself as an end only in the capacity as a means: to shift the dividing line in my being between subject and object to a position where the subject, even if it is in me, is outside and above me—so that my *whole* being may become an instrument for that which is greater than I.”

Lyon Alynna comprehensively summarizes Hammarskjöld’s ethical framework which is formed by the triangular construction of his own spirituality with God, the spirituality in his private life, and, finally, his spirituality regarding the perception of his public service:

The first involves his own spiritual relationship with God (*coram Deo*). Spirituality in his private life (*coram hominibus*) provides the second pillar. Spirituality in his public service
(coram mundo) provides the third. Within this triad there are several layers, beginning with his personal convictions and broadening out to the public sphere. Faith, receptivity, and acceptance are the core principles that set a foundation for all other engagements. His ethical framework, then, holds public service, self-sacrifice, and neutrality as more public manifestations of the first stratum. From here his personal convictions broaden out to include more community-oriented values. [...] The final dimension really takes shape through his service as secretary-general. The values of peaceful resolution of conflict, economic opportunity, political equality, and international justice are manifestations of his more personal operational code.  

It is thus only consequent to approach Hammarskjöld’s political ethic as a consequence of his mysticism. There are several baselines of Hammarskjöld’s practical ethic: to serve in awe of life; integrity, which is essential for the identification process; universality, which is the consequence in his belief of the unity of humankind and thus results in his belief for solidarity (and consequently in the emphasis on the UN); cooperation, which for Hammarskjöld, was the overall political imperative facing the threat of the world and based on the experience of two World Wars; fierce optimism, just because of the experience of the World Wars; and, finally, the importance of comprehensive standards in culture, literature and politics. What is remarkable while having a closer look at the basic lines of Hammarskjöld’s ethic is that, despite the often claimed pessimism of mysticism, he was quite an optimistic realist. This aspect becomes especially significant in considering Hammarskjöld’s accomplishments in the office as the secretary-general of the UN.

Hammarskjöld’s political efforts during his duty as the secretary-general of the UN illustrate his realistic long distance perception as it is recommended by ethical realism. Still, as a former politician, he was also aware of the “temporal perspective” in ethics. Moreover,
Hammarskjöld’s ethical framework clearly influenced his administrative duties (e.g. in his reaction to McCarthyism) as well as his diplomatic efforts in several international crises (e.g. the U.S.-Chinese dispute in 1954, the Suez Canal crisis, and the peace-keeping mission in the Congo). Hammarskjöld was neither a pure idealist nor a pure realist. For him, mystical belief always was characterized by practical political engagement. Due to his unconditional neutral engagement in political crises during the Cold War, he caused rejections by governments in the East and in the West alike.26

One of his most prominent legacies is the “silent” or “private” and preventive diplomacy as well as the UN-presence (“blue-helmet missions”). Hammarskjöld’s legacy includes tools of statecraft which are widely missed nowadays. The moral but not moralistic—meaning the rather arrogant blaming of others—life and legacy of Hammarskjöld concerning the lessons learned from a practical mystical, international civil servant, and his spiritual roots become guidelines or—at least—suggestions to anticipate the future.

Concerning the political position of the secretary-general of the UN, it seems nearly impossible to adopt any of the classical concepts or definitions of power. The secretary-general holds, in a realistic sense, no “hard” power. Rather, he represents the quintessence, “abstraction of the international community.”27 It is thus that the UN secretary-general can justifiable be viewed as a “needed voice” who speaks out moral principles on the international stage.28 Nevertheless, the various efforts and diplomatic actions of the secretary-general can have considerable influence and political outcomes. Therefore, it makes sense to use the definition of power of Hannah Arendt, as Manuel Fröhlich suggests.29 Arendt stresses the importance of the notion of power as a group phenomenon: One single person can never hold power; only the community can. Power, therefore, is always power-potential and defined as communicative power notion.30 Adapted to the position of the secretary-general, it can be concluded, that Arendt’s emphasis on the necessity of “legitimacy for power,” the possibility
of “power which lies on the street,” “power as bounded to an authority,” and Arendt’s notion that power can quickly “disappear” if the backing structures disappear are noteworthy.

It is an important task of the secretary-general to preserve the charter of the UN (“legitimacy of power”). In the most times blocked system of the UN it is also possible and even necessary to use power of internal structures (that is where the “power lies on the street” which means that power is potentially there, for example within the agency of the secretary-general). Every secretary-general is aware of the fact that his power can suddenly disappear. The constraint of power upon authorities is also evident concerning the agency of the secretary-general who can find innovative ways in blocked situations such as Hammarskjöld did. Just like Arendt’s emphasis upon the “legitimacy of power” Hammarskjöld holds in Markings: “Only he deserves power who every day justifies it.”

The legacy of Hammarskjöld: “from international to world society”

“He bore failure without self-pity, and success without self-admiration. Provided he knew he had paid his uttermost farthing, what did it matter to him how others judged the result.

A Pharisee? Lord, thou knowest he has never been righteous in his own eyes.”

Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings.

Overall, Hammarskjöld was an old-style diplomat, always keen not to force issues. He saw the UN as a “means to an end, and not an end in itself [which] might be superseded.” His notion upon the UN comes thus close to the concept of world society in terms of the English School. This parallel to the English School theory of international relations is particularly evident in observing Hammarskjöld’s view of the UN as a “venture in progress towards an international community living in peace under the laws of justice.” Similarly, the early English School scholar Herbert Butterfield put forward his idea of diplomacy as way of
civilizing influence: “[A] system of diplomacy incorporating the virtues of charity and self-restraint constituted an element of civilization which made it easier for people to be good in their relations with those whom they saw as others, outside their own society or community of shared rules, understandings and outlook.”35 For Butterfield, diplomacy thus lies at the heart of international relations. Paul Sharp captures Butterfield’s understanding of diplomacy in two basic propositions. First, one must acknowledge “the differences, rather than the similarities, between ourselves and those who are distant from us in either time or space.” Second, it is important to note that “people’s understandings of their own circumstances are necessarily incomplete and wilfully partial, especially in their disputes with one another.”36 Third, as Butterfield himself argues, “we shall find at the heart of everything a kernel of difficulty which is essentially a problem of diplomacy as such.”37

In this sense, Hammarskjöld bridged the dichotomy between the two discourses of peace and justice. Some scholars argue that the UN is basically a Christo-centric organization. The argument therefore is that the discourse of peace—an originally Christian legacy (“Jesus as the prince of peace”)—, rather than the one of justice, is predominant—whereas Islam and Judaism discourses appear more concerned with justice and not adequately represented in the UN.38 Still, the gravity supporting, for example, Catholic social teaching, is its aim toward social justice. Justice thus is a Christian discourse that is at least as important as peace. Moreover, in Roman Catholic teaching there is “no peace without justice.”39 Only two years after Hammarskjöld’s death, Pope John Paul’s encyclical Pacem in Terris linked the quest for peace to human rights and the pursuit of justice, addressing all people, not merely Catholics. In the light of Hammarskjöld’s ethical framework, it can justifiably be argued that this particular Catholic concern of the interdependence between peace and justice also reflects Hammarskjöld’s concerns. This mainly includes bridging the gap between the notion of the
UN as an organization dominated by the discourse of peace and the notion of the discourse of justice as of secondary importance.

Hammarskjöld’s actions can be illustrated as a quest for a political philosophy of the UN. He realistically acknowledged the fact that the nation state is the “highest fully organized form of life of peoples” but he did not stand still at this notion. He accepted that the UN is dependent on the will of its members. At the same time, he saw the organization as an absolutely new element in international affairs; especially due to its principles anchored in the charter like justice and equal political and economic opportunities. Being aware of the fact of the still lasting primacy of the will of its members, and the possibility of accumulating the already existing general principles in a world organization, while not dreaming of a world state, Hammarskjöld developed himself, unknowingly, towards an agent of the English School approach, which acknowledges both realistic and idealistic tendencies in international affairs.

Hammarskjöld’s realistic view on the world organization UN can best be classified as the development of the UN as a constitutive tool on the way “from international to world society.” Due to the historical circumstances, Hammarskjöld’s notion of international affairs has to be described in terms of international (the primacy of nation states) rather than in terms of world society (the primacy of individuals). Nevertheless, in analyzing Hammarskjöld’s policies, thoughts, and inventions while in office, it is only fair to say that he and his legacy were on the way “from international to world society.” International society mainly “is about the institutionalisation of shared interest and identity amongst states, and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions ... This position has some parallels to regime theory, but is much deeper, having constitutive rather than merely instrumental implications.” This comes close to Hammarskjöld’s approach of the UN within the structure of international relations. This is mainly reflected in Hammarskjöld’s deep conviction in the
charter. He was convinced that the UN, with its chance of the “institutionalization of shared interest and identity amongst states” is a new element in international affairs. It is thus not surprising that Hammarskjöld viewed (the position of) the secretary-general as a “secular pope.” Just like the Roman Catholic Church refers to the Pope as *Pontifex Maximus*–the (neutral) master bridge builder between the sacred and the profane–Hammarskjöld’s legacy and way of handling the office of the secretary-general can indeed be illustrated as the one of a neutral “secular pope.” On the other side, Hammarskjöld’s legacy can justifiable be characterized as on the way to world society. World society in terms of the English School “takes individuals, non-state organizations and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and puts transcendence of the states-system at the centre of IR theory. Revolutionism is mostly about forms of universalist cosmopolitanism. … It clearly does not rest on an ontology of states, but given the transnational element neither does it rest entirely on one of individuals.”

Hammarskjöld’s efforts while in office indeed put “transcendence of the states-system at the centre of IR theory,” which “does not rest on an ontology of states” but put the focus on “global societal identities and arrangements.” At the same time, realistically acknowledging the transnational element, Hammarskjöld was, particularly due to the then bi-polar structure of international relations, aware that any society in international affairs does not entirely relies on individuals. The secretary-general Hammarskjöld was, in other words, indeed a part of the global elite. This is particularly the case due to the “rules of conduct” are made, to a large degree, by this very global elite, which consists of political leadership and policy makers. Given the fact of the rising importance and acceptance of cosmopolitanism in international affairs, Hammarskjöld’s life is indeed an example of a lived cosmopolitanism as an international civil servant.
Hammarskjöld’s political and diplomatic innovations have especially been the introduction of the so-called quiet or private diplomacy, preventive diplomacy, and the UN presence in conflict areas (the so-called “blue-helmet missions”). Understanding the UN as a “front line of a moral force,” Hammarskjöld focused on preventive diplomacy. In 1955, for example, he obtained the release of American airmen imprisoned in the People’s Republic of China by extensive silent diplomacy. This experience is illustrative reflected in *Markings*: “He broke fresh ground—because, and only because, he had the courage to go ahead without asking whether other were following or even understood ... he had been granted a faith which required no confirmation—a contact with reality, light and intense like the touch of a loving hand: a union in self-surrender without destruction, where his heart was lucid and his mind loving.”

Although Hammarskjöld viewed the UN also in an idealistic manner, he always remained realistic in his actions. As Kurt Waldheim, one of his successors put it “Hammarskjöld did not, I think, regard the secretary-general primarily as ‘force’ in world politics but rather as an honest broker, a catalyst, and someone to whom governments could go for help in critical situations.” Hammarskjöld’s diplomatic actions with the aim of reconciliation most are characterized by his realistic face-saving approach. Realism stresses that every international actor should avoid situations where he cannot pull himself out of a situation without saving his face. Due to his idea of diplomacy, Hammarskjöld was of course strongly engaged in multilateral diplomacy through which he sought to transcript the world towards a true world society that will not be overridden by “sovereign national states in armed competition.”

Hammarskjöld’s view of the UN was not a simple structural or mechanical one, of which the foremost task is applying pressure or maintaining a balance, but rather a process-oriented, and thus forward looking one. Just as he interpreted his position as secretary-general, Hammarskjöld believed that the “United Nations stands outside—necessarily outside—all
confessions but it is, nevertheless, and instrument of faith.” But just because he was aware of the ambivalence of the UN in the eyes of its members who seek to maintain their own power, he was able to manage conflicts at the international stage. Hammarskjöld is thus an illustrative example of realistically acknowledging the structure of the international society (the primacy of states), while, at the same time, being forward-looking about realistic chances of a world society. This is also obvious in *Markings*: “Dare he, for whom circumstances make it possible to realize his true destiny, refuse it simply because he is not prepared to give up everything else?” To say yes, to leave everything behind, was his approach to the position of the secretary general. In this sense, Hammarskjöld’s notion of the international civil servant gets clearer as he outlined it at a lecture delivered at Oxford University in 1961:

The international civil servant must keep himself under strictest observation. He is not requested to be a neuter in the sense that he has to have no sympathies or antipathies, that there are to be no interest which are close to him in personal capacity or that he is to have no ideas or ideals that matter for him. However, he is requested to be fully aware of those human reactions and meticulously check himself so that they are not permitted to influence his actions. ... If the international civil servant knows himself to be free from such personal influences in his actions and guided solely by the common aims and rules laid down for, and by the Organization he serves and by recognized legal principles, then he has done his duty ... this is a question of integrity, and if integrity in the sense of respect for law and respect for the truth were to drive him into positions of conflict with this or that interest, then that conflict is a sign of his neutrality and not of his failure to observe neutrality - then it is in line, not in conflict, with his duties as an international civil servant.
While in office, Hammarskjöld pursued five primary goals: “economic opportunity, political equality, the prevention of violence, the preemption of conflict through negotiation, and international justice.”54 His statement before the Security Council in the course of the Suez Canal crisis 1956 further testifies his commitment to international justice and peace, comparable to the world society concept, which is also bound by the attempt of pursuing international justice. Moreover, the statement comprehensively illustrates Hammarskjöld’s image of the world organization and its secretary-general:

The principles of the Charter are, by far, greater than the Organization in which they are embodied, and the aims which they are to safeguard are holier than the policies of any single nation or people. As a servant of the Organization, the Secretary-General has the duty to maintain his usefulness by avoiding public stands on conflicts between Member Nations unless and until such an action might help to resolve the conflict. However, the discretion and impartiality required of the Secretary-General cannot serve of any other assumption than that within the necessary limits of human frailty and honest differences of opinion—all Member nations honour their pledge to observe all Articles of the Charter … Where the Members to consider that another view of the duties of the Secretary-General than the one here stated would better serve the interests of the Organization, it is their obvious right to act accordingly.55

A realistic concept of the other and positive mimesis

“‘The Army of Misfortune.’ Why should we always think of this as meaning ‘The Others’?”

Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings.
The life of Dag Hammarskjöld is indeed a remarkable one – an international civil servant, perceived almost as a mechanical person by the public while in office. Nevertheless, he tried to remain neutral in his political efforts and a mystic in his private life. His “value system, which upheld public service guided by morality, found a firm footing in the role of international servant.” The outstanding insight about this posthumous Nobel Peace Prize winner is that his political actions were mainly guided by his deep mystical worldview. The mystic Hammarskjöld saw his belief not as a kind of request for inner immigration, but rather as demand acting according to his belief. This is most obvious while having a closer look at the civic component of his ethical framework, which “was his personal sacrifice to public service.” This “personal sacrifice to public service” also illustrates the importance of personal qualities and virtues of the office holders. “Often it was the personal qualities and persistence of the secretary-general that were the key to successful implementation of the chosen means. … Good faith, honesty, truth telling—all the old-fashioned virtues–can become tools of peacemaking in the hands of the secretaries-general, especially if they are perceived as using those qualities in the service of some greater good.”

Like one of his favourite philosophers, Martin Buber, Hammarskjöld shared the Jewish emphasis of the attitudes toward the Other, reflecting “the tension between realism and idealism and exclusiveness versus inclusiveness.” This tension is mirrored in Hammarskjöld’s efforts as he optimistically acknowledged the UN as an idealistic enterprise but, at the same time, was always aware of its realistic constraints. Considering Hammarskjöld’s conception of the UN, it becomes clear that he saw them, and particularly the principles of the Charter, as the way to reconcile the differences of single nation states. “The Charter was the foundation stone of his public self, as his religious faith was the foundation stone for the private man.” It is thus indeed the case that Hammarskjöld’s ethical convictions fused with the Charter of the UN. Hammarskjöld is also an illustrative example of
an international civil servant who acted according to the guidelines of ethical realism. The secretary-general Hammarskjöld, just as every other secretary-general, had to balance different contextual and personal interests and values: interests between the UN members (particularly between the East and West but also within the West) as well as personal values in relation to the contextual interests. The secretary-general can thus indeed be viewed as a “normative negotiator” seeking balance and one who considered the international body as a “collection of possibilities.”

In every monotheistic world religion, the tradition can be found that through the adjustment toward the Holy, “evil”, or, in other words, destructive tendencies can be banned from human life. “Evil” in this sense refers to the mimetic desire that the French philosopher René Girard accounts for as the source of violence. Plato and St. Augustine already pointed out the interdependence between imitation and religion: we always imitate what we admire. For Girad, mimetic rivalry is the main cause of interpersonal violence. We therefore have to recognize the Decalogue, particularly its first commandment, addressing God as our highest good. This enables us to reach mimetically out for him without being at the same time forced into envious destruction. Hammarskjöld acknowledged this insight into mimetic rivalry in his thoughts about Lucifer in Markings: “It was when Lucifer first congratulated himself upon his angelic behavior that he became the tool of evil.” The acknowledgement of the first commandment leads to a life that does not end up in the deadlock of mimetic rivalry. The sacred, the Holy, is both sensitive toward violence arising out of mimetic rivalry and takes it seriously. Taking the Decalogue seriously and keeping to the religious rituals transforms the violent scapegoat mechanism – meaning the spontaneous psychological mechanism when we, by mistake, accuse one to be guilty – to a ritual one. This positive mimesis is practically founded in the tradition of Imitatio Christi which obviously impressed Hammarskjöld.
Monotheism challenges the inner life of man. Because God is a personal God—“A vision in which God is”67 as Hammarskjöld put it in Markings—it is the inner life which counts for him. He therefore denies forced agreements and actions. A personal God is the true source for human freedom. Knowing our Maker, knowing God, can only be achieved by acknowledging freedom and free will of man in acknowledging the presence of God and his personal relationship with man, as the prologue of the Gospel of John holds. Hammarskjöld, it seems, was well aware of this insight. Due to these biblical roots upon the notion of religion, it also becomes clear that introspective abilities, which Hammarskjöld so admired, illustrate how peace is its highest implementation and realization of being, existing due to the free operation of love. It is thus, as Miroslav Volf argues, that peace can only be achieved by an appeal for the practice of (social and political) reconciliation that reflects the love of God.68 Religion therefore cannot be distinguished from the political sphere. Eric Voegelin acknowledged this fact by recognizing that man lives in a political community with all his traits. If the political community lost its sumnum bonum—an orientation towards the transcendental instead of a sumnum malum—only passionate fear for a violent death will control human action and ends in aggressive overcoming of the other.69 Hammarskjöld, as well, acknowledged this fact in his mystic ethical framework as well as in the perception of the office of the secretary-general. It is thus not surprising that Hammarskjöld thought about the understanding of Original Sin and of how to overcome it in a living relation with God in Markings:

_We can reach the point where_ it becomes possible for us to recognize and understand Original Sin, that dark counter-center of evil in our nature—that is to say, though it is not our nature, it is of it—that something within us which rejoices when disaster befalls the very cause we are trying to serve, or misfortune overtakes even those whom we love. Life in God is not an escape from this, but the way to gain full insight
concerning it. It is not our depravity which forces a fictitious religious explanation upon us, but the experience of religious reality which forces the ‘Night Side’ out into the light. It is when we stand in the righteous all-seeing light of love that we can dare to look at, admit, and *consciously* suffer under this something in us which wills disaster, misfortune, defeat to everything outside the sphere of our narrowest self-interest. So in a living relation to God it is the necessary precondition for the self-knowledge which enables us to follow a straight path, and so be victorious over ourselves, forgiven by ourselves.70

In relating to Christian mystics, particularly in the tradition of the *Imitatio Christi*, Hammarskjöld, the “secular pope” was, unknowingly, well aware of the strong force of the positive mimesis which overcomes human conditioned violence through relating oneself towards Christ. The secretary-general Hammarskjöld is thus an outstanding example how faith can influence political structures in international affairs—in this case, even the world organization UN. It is thus in fact “possible to generalize that Hammarskjöld’s ethical framework also influenced both his international political agenda and his method of administration.” At the same time it is important to note that Hammarskjöld’s “ethical framework never revealed itself as a public crusade.”71 Therefore, “Hammarskjöld, more than anyone else, gave the UN a focus of moral authority that would attract an international loyalty, and used it in the cause of peace and justice.”72 Hammarskjöld’s emphasis towards the Other can and must be understood as the secretary-general’s understanding of God’s fraternalism. At the same time—with his emphasis towards the Other—Hammarskjöld’s life and legacy gives a positive answer to the question of whether we are “willing to innovate with and politicise discourses that reflect on the spiritual dimension of Otherness and its value in knowing the Self?”73
Conclusion

“We carry our nemesis within us:
yesterday’s self-admiration is the legitimate father of today’s feeling of guilt.”

Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings.*

In the whole text of *Markings* not a single reference to actual politics, people etc. can be found. But in knowing Hammarskjöld’s mystical influenced ethical framework and belief-system, his main thought is obvious. One has to let his ego—and thus the negative mimesis—go and act as an instrument of God: “Not I, but God in me!” as he put it in *Markings.* For Hammarskjöld personally it was certain that his task would lead to the ultimate sacrifice. As he put in *Markings,* it is the responsibility for, not to God which is essentially telling oneself: “If you fail, it is God, thanks to your having betrayed Him, who will fail mankind. You fancy you can be responsible to God: can you carry the responsibility for God?” It is thus certainly no coincidence that Hammarskjöld realistically took up the responsibility for a political community—the United Nations—and consequently perceiving it as an “instrument of faith” in saying “yes” to oneself, to God, and to every fate one may face.

Some see in Hammarskjöld a kind of political martyr who died in the course of action that he took up for the international society. Although Hammarskjöld have been killed under rather dubious circumstances 1961 in Africa, he is certainly not what is traditionally known as a (most often religious) martyr. However, Hammarskjöld’s life illustrates some features which are characteristic for Christian martyrs, particularly the revealing of the more often than not destructive structures of power within international relations but also in interpersonal relations. His statements as secretary-general during the Cold War illustrate this, as well as his personal, inner struggle between “I” and “you” in the interpersonal sphere.
The international civil servant Hammarskjöld united mystics and realistic diplomatic engagement in a unique manner. Not because he held the position of the secretary-general of the United Nations, but rather because he amalgamated his personal convictions, which never have been static, and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, always knowing that the destructive powers of our world are here to stay. Attaching once more to the English School, we can summarize Hammarskjöld’s concerns in the question verbalized by Herbert Butterfield: “All we can ask--while the military force heaps itself up around us--is the question: Can the world be made more tolerable in spite of this power which solidifies in great masses amongst nations and empires?”76

The author would like to thank Costas M. Constantinou for comments and suggestions on earlier versions of the article.


2 For a basic overview of the life and work of Dag Hammarskjöld see the UN homepage http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/dag/index.html and Brian Urquhart, Hammarskjöld (New York: Norton, 1994). Hammarskjöld earned the respect for his work already during his period at the OEEC.

3 There are many editions and translations of Markings now. See, for example, Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings: Transl. from the Swedish by Leif Sjöberg & W. H. Auden (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006). Hammarskjöld once mentioned about Markings that it is his “white book concerning my negotiations with myself--and with God.” And that it [Markings] is “the only true profile that can be drawn.” Seven Stolpe, Dag Hammarskjöld: A Spiritual Portrait (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966); K. G. Hammar, "Dag Hammarskjöld and Markings," in The Adventure of Peace. Dag Hammarskjöld and the Future of the UN, ed. Sten Ask, and Anna Mark-Jungkoist (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966).


7 Hammarskjöld, Markings, 122.


11 Kille, "Moral Authority and the UN Secretary-General’s Ethical Framework," 20.


19 This is an obvious parallel to the particular concern of Pope Benedict XVI. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion*, 7th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 2005).
20 Richard P. Hardy, "Hammarskjöld, the Mystic," *Ephemerides Carmelitiae* 29 (1978), 271.
32 Lash, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, 211.
36 Paul Sharp, "Herbert Butterfield, the English School and the Civilizing Virtues of Diplomacy," 862.
40 Fröhlich, *Dag Hammarskjöld und die Vereinten Nationen*, 132–133.
41 Buzan, *From International to World Society?*
42 Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, 7.
44 Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, 7.
Hammarskjöld saw the United Nations as "a symbol of ideas, and [...] an attempt to translate into action a faith—the faith which one inspired a Beethoven [...] to his great profession of freedom, the brotherhood of man. And a world of harmony." Fröhlich, *Dag Hammarskjöld und die Vereinten Nationen*, 343. It may be this very notion of the UN which comes close to a characterization of religious institution, which persuaded Hammarskjöld in his belief of the necessity of the UN. In a certain sense, the UN can justifiably be described, "in essence [not in language ... as] a religious institution" Connor Cruise O'Brien, "Common Sense and Unjust Wars," in *Religion and International Affairs*, ed. Jeffrey Rose, and Michael Ignatieff (Toronto: Anansi, 1968), 21.


Foote, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, 348.


Foote, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, 124.


Thus, Hammarskjöld comes close to the concept of Emanuel Levinas who "developed a thought in which there is no allergy to otherness. At the same time he [Levinas] realistically appreciated the modern state. He recognized that ethics demand politics but situated ethics above politics. His nuanced position is both realistic, taking into account human violence, and normative in describing a person's infinite responsibility. His thought combines the call of the other with a realistic approach that also guarantees the rights of the same." Ben Mollov, Ephraim Meir and Chaim Lavie, "An Integrated Strategy for Peacebuilding: Judaic Approaches," 154.

Dorothy V. Jones, "The Example of Dag Hammarskjöld: Style and Effectiveness at the UN," 1050. Moreover, there is a "deep connection officeholders felt with the charter. They often engaged the charter with an almost religious reverence as a sacred text and perceived themselves as the embodiment of the charter and its ethical code. Individual officeholders may have interpreted the exact dictates of the charter in the light of their own ethical framework ... Yet, in many ways, from the perspective of the secretaries-general the charter already provides a global ethic for the international community, and they have done their best to uphold the document accordingly." Kille, "The Secular Pope: Insights on the UN Secretary-General and Moral Authority," 352.


Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 140.

"For Girard ... violence and the sacred are one and the same thing whose appearance goes alongside institutional collapse, the eclipse of culture and the social order. This eclipse of culture is reflected in myths that in effect describe (and conceal) the mechanism of mimetic desire and in the primary religious act of sacrifice. While there is a diversity of causes of great social crises, the experience of social disruption is uniform: as shown by examples of descriptions of particular crises throughout history. The eclipse of culture, says Girard, means that it becomes less differentiated, and this inddifferentiation results in great confusion. To account for such social confusion people have looked to moral causes located in others, either in society as a whole or in particular people and groups who are easily blameable within the logic of the scapegoat mechanism.” Gavin Flood,


70 Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 149.


73 Costas M. Constantinou, "Human Diplomacy and Spirituality," 17.

74 Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 90.

75 Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, 156.