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**Religion and Conflict Resolution:**

**An Introduction**

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At first glance the term religion and conflict resolution might seem an oxymoron and indeed to many social scientists will remain so. It does not seem too long ago that the secularisation thesis, which asserted that the significance of religion in a globalized world would diminish in direct relation to increases in education and prosperity, was common currency across the social sciences. The triumph of modernity could be linked to the separation of church and state, which secularised the public sphere while enabling religion to wither (Western Europe) or flourish (the United States) in the private sphere. The Iranian revolution in 1979 together with the role of the mujahedeen in driving Soviet forces from Afghanistan signalled that what might be true of the ‘West’ was not true for the rest and that, secularisation thesis notwithstanding, religion remained a significant and arguably increasing force in most of the world.

Even within the secular heartlands of Western Europe and the United States religion began to force its way into the political agenda with the emergence of the American Christian Right as a new force in social conservatism in the late 1970s and in the UK fatwas issued calling for the death of British author Salman Rushdie for his book *The Satanic Verses,* declared blasphemous by Ayatollah Khomeini the Supreme Leader of Iran in 1989. The riots, book burning, and bombing of British bookshops which ensued confirmed for many secularists that religion represented an anti-modern tendency which, although in its death throes, still posed a threat to modernity. This negative perception in the West of religion’s contribution to international and domestic order was reinforced by iconic images of religious conflict in India with the siege of the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar in June 1984, and a Hindu attack on the Babri Mosque at Ajodhya in 1992, both resulting in riots and tit for tat killings. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 at the hands of Yigal Amir, a Jewish fundamentalist, for his attempt to broker a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians, and the descent into war seemingly across religious lines in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s served to remind academics, policy makers and publics in the West of the continuing relevance of religion as a largely negative force and potential source of conflict. In the remainder of this chapter we first consider the re-emergence of religion as a significant actor in international security and how the discipline has responded to this. Second, the development of religion and conflict resolution as a field of study within international security and conflict resolution is explored. Third, we examine how the United States as the predominant global power, has responded to the religious turn in its foreign policy before outlining the succeeding chapters.

**Religion and international security**

The discipline of international relations and sub disciplines of security and strategic studies have been dominated by a positivist social scientific approach that reifies rational actors and has been largely unable to accommodate religion as a variable factor in the development and application of theory. The strict separation of church and state in both *de facto* and *de jure* secular states had enabled a state centric international relations discipline to ignore religion despite its centrality to the lives of most of the world’s inhabitants. The end of the Cold War signalled the end of this neglect as scholars speculated on the shape and defining characteristics of what would come to be known as the post-Cold War era. For Charles Krauthammer (1990) it would be the opportunity for the United States to assert hegemony over a unipolar international order. For John Mearsheimer (1990) the prospect of an unstable Europe prone to war loomed in a multipolar world. Francis Fukuyama (1989, 1992) posited an increasingly pacific world order in which a capitalist liberal democratic order was the final word in ideological progress. While Krauthammer and Mearsheimer failed to mention religion and Fukuyama largely dismisses it, with the exception of suggesting that Islam held little attraction for those in the West, Samuel Huntington (1993, 1996) outlines a world order in which civilizations, religio-ethnically defined, would lead to increased conflict, principally between the Muslim majority world and the West.

Huntington’s thesis was a realist response to Fukuyama’s triumphalism and represented an early attempt to analyse how the end of bipolarity and the Cold War might affect international politics. Religion was identified as an impediment to a pacific world order. The old fault lines between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, Christianity and Islam would play out in violent conflict as the 1990s unfurled with the violent break up of the former Yugoslavia into Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnia-Herzogovnian, Serbian-Montenegrin, and Macedonian components based substantially on religious identity. The Chechen Wars (1994-96, 1999-2009) and Kosovo (1999) along with on going conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria and Sudan, Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians in India, Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka seemed to point to religion’s capacity to antagonise and lead to conflict. The increasing radicalisation of Muslim youth in the Middle East and the appeal of Islamism, the emergence of real existing Islam in Afghanistan under the Taliban, and the emergence of Al Qaeda as an international actor with attacks on the World Trade Center (1993), US embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi (1998) and USS Cole (2000) increased awareness of the increasing significance of religion as a wholly negative force.

Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis resonated with a Western audience that rushed out to buy his book in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001. International security and international relations specialists who had steadfastly ignored religion suddenly came to the realisation that they could no longer afford to do so and the discipline began a new engagement with religion. Martin Marty and Scott Appleby produced a four volume analysis of the increased relevance of religious fundamentalism in the world. (Marty and Appleby 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996). Most of the new engagement, however, emphasised the dangers of radical Islam, Islamism or jihadism and centred on a revived interest in terrorism studies. Mark Juergensmeyer’s (2001) *Terror in the Mind of God* spawned a host of imitators emphasising that terror, violence, God and his followers were inextricably linked (see McTernan 2003; Stern 2004; Juergensmeyer 2009). David Rappaport (2004) and Bruce Hoffman (2006) described a fourth wave of religious terrorism which was qualitatively different from its predecessors in possessing a religious rationale or (ir)rationale which made prospects of compromise or reconciliation anathema. Other scholars approached religion and conflict, in particular its Islamist variant, with greater circumspection to provide a more nuanced view of the religion-conflict nexus (see Esposito 1995, 2003; Halliday 2003; Kepel 2002, 2004). A further group positively welcomed this renewed focus on religion but rather than focus on the propensity for religious actors towards conflict saw opportunities for religion to be used in resolving conflict. It is to this latter group that we now turn.

**Religion and conflict resolution**

As western-centric disciplines international relations and security studies have been dominated by a secular mind-set that discouraged the incorporation of religion within its theoretical frameworks (the English School for a period was the exception to this rule). A new emphasis on religion following the end of the Cold War has enabled religiously committed scholars to comport their private faith into the public sphere without facing the opprobrium that might have been anticipated prior to this changed emphasis. R. Scott Appleby (2000), Scott Thomas (2005), Jonathon Fox (2006), Douglas Johnson (1994, 2003), Cynthia Sampson (1994, 1997, 2000), Marc Gopin 2002, 2004 ), Robert Seiple and Dennis Hoover (1994) are among an increasing number of faith-based scholars encouraging the involvement of religious actors in the delivery of foreign policy, development, diplomacy and conflict resolution. Religious conflict resolution began to emerge in the 1990s with an increasing awareness that if religious tradition and teaching could encourage violence and conflict so the same traditions could be appealed to bring about resolution of conflict. After all, religious traditions have scriptures, teaching and historical memory of peacebuilding, peacemaking, peacekeeping and conflict resolution. In a very real sense religious actors – either as individuals, movements or organizations have always been involved in resolving conflicts (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

This alternative view was most clearly expressed in the publication in 1994 of seminal texts by Douglas Johnson and Cynthia Sampson *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* and Robert Seiple and Dennis Hoover *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations*. Both books advocated a positive role for religious actors in reaching out to other religious actors and using religious principles and traditions to resolve conflict. Positivist, empirical and secular bias within international relations were identified as problematic in dealing with real world situations where religion plays a vital role in the lives of the actors involved. Rather than exclusively secular solutions being sought policy makers should turn to religious actors to solve problems. R. Scott Appleby (2000) described religious ambivalence to violence but nonetheless argued persuasively that religious actors were essential to peace processes and deserved greater international support. Religious actors may have exacerbated conflict in Northern Ireland, with prominent Protestant clergy equating nationalist aspirations with a Papist plot. In South Africa the Dutch Reformed Church underpinned the apartheid system and in the former Yugoslavia the Serbian Orthodox church provided legitimation for the quest for a greater Serbia. And yet in all three instances a relatively peaceful resolution to conflict was brought about through the active involvement of religious actors in peacemaking and reconciliation. Such examples paved the way for a more serious engagement with religion’s capacity to heal rather than divide.

Huntington’s clash of civilization thesis was responded to by Iranian Prime Minister Sayyid Mohammed Khatami’s Dialogue Among Civilizations emphasising what religions held in common. The United Nations declared 2001, ironically the year of the attack on the Twin Towers, to be the Year of ‘A Dialogue Among Civilizations’. Four years later Spanish and Turkish Prime Ministers Jose Zapatero and Recep Erdogan cosponsored the development of an Alliance of Civilizations at the United Nations General Assembly. Notwithstanding the tenuous conception of ‘civilizations’ such debates have elevated the importance of religion as a key factor in increasing understanding and reconciling differences in international relations and security. Douglas Johnson and Cynthia Sampson argue that traditional measures of dealing with conflict are becoming increasingly obsolete in an uncertain world where identity plays a central role:

Such disputes tend to occur at the fault lines between rival nationalities or in situations where societies are suffering from the strains of economic competition and rising expectations. These are the most intractable sources of conflicts, and they are the sources with which conventional diplomacy is least suited to deal (Johnson and Sampson 2003: 3).

What is needed for Johnson and Sampson and others urging a religious dimension to diplomacy and conflict resolution is for religion to be taken seriously by governments and to use religious actors in bringing about peace and reconciliation. The religious approach differs from a secular approach in several essentials based on moral legitimacy, established reputation and influence within local and international communities. Jacob Bercovitch and Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana set out some of these differences:

There are a number of characteristics that distinguish these faith-based interventions from secular ones. These include: a) explicit emphasis on spirituality and/or religious identity; b) use of religious texts; c) use of religious values and vocabulary; d) utilization of religious or spiritual rituals during the process; e) involvement off faith-based actors as third parties (2009: 185).

The value of faith-based interventions relies on religious actors being perceived as legitimate by all parties involved in conflict. The appeal to shared religious values and sense of a higher calling based on the desire for peace and reconciliation manifest in religious texts and tradition enables as will be seen in subsequent chapters has been effective in leading to successful conflict resolution. The advantage of utilising the peace and reconciliation capacities of faith-based actors includes the ability to appeal to the peaceful tenets of religions. The ability to access strong ethical norms inherent in religions and appeal to these in order to influence the actions of followers is a valuable resource. The extensive local, national and international networks and communications developed by religious organizations can be used to help with the logistics of conflict resolution. Religious actors tend to be firmly entrenched within civil society and as such can lead the way in countries emerging from conflict being able to transform into sustainable, peaceful democracies (Shore 2009: 24-6).

There are considerable challenges to religious engagement in conflict resolution not least because of the ambivalence to violence. However, as David Smock suggests: ‘Improving relations among significant elements of religious communities in conflict is certainly a worthy goal, even when this does not end violent conflict’ (Smock 2006: 35). Smock argues that it is crucial to link faith-based peacemaking to secular and political processes because without this linkage it ‘almost never creates peace’ (2006: 36). Religious conflict resolution is not a panacea but an underutilised aid in the desire to make and sustain peaceful solution to conflict. The bravery and heroism of countless individual and organizational religious actors in the pursuit of peaceful is reflected in succeeding chapters as the authors take Marc Gopin’s injunction to take religious conflict resolution seriously:

The most hopeful and heroic stories of peacemaking emerge from a combination of deeply authentic expressions of religiosity with unconditional respect for non-believers. This is a relatively rare combination inside the religious personality, but it bears serious analysis in terms of how such a psychological and ideological disposition could be fostered among religious adherents around the world (Gopin 1997: 24).

**A new role for religion in US foreign policy**

One part of the world which is taking religious conflict resolution increasingly seriously, at least at the rhetorical level, is the United States. Religion has always played a role in US foreign policy being indivisible from American values and perceptions of its role in the world. During the Cold War America’s self-identification as ‘leader of the free world’ included the idea of being a religious (Christian) nation against the forces of the godless atheism represented by the Soviet bloc. In contrasting the human rights records of the bipolar powers Christian leaders emphasised the plight of the underground church behind the iron or bamboo curtains. After the Cold War concern for religious persecution continued with religious organizations and congressmen agitating for protection for religious minorities around the world and the implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act 1998, which mandates the State Department to provide a religious health appraisal for all countries around the world and special reports to be produced on countries of concern.

The Act established a Commission on International Religious Freedom and appointed an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and a Special Advisor to the National Security Council. Foreign Service personnel were to receive training on religious freedom and the President was required to explain actions taken against countries violating the religious freedom of its citizens (State Department 1998). While highlighting the importance of religion within the US polity it was not until George W. Bush’s introduction of an Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) that religious organizations were viewed as a vital resource in delivering services at home and through the Department of US Agency for International development (USAID) abroad. Barack Obama has strengthened this initiative through expanding the OFBCI initiative, renaming it the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and expanding its reach across most cabinet departments. Joshua DuBois its executive director envisaged four primary areas of focus including connecting faith-based and community groups to economic recovery; promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation; encouraging responsible fatherhood and healthy families; and reducing unintended pregnancies and the need for abortions, strengthening maternal and child health, and encouraging adoptions. In addition a 25-member Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships would produce reports on Economic Recovery and Fighting Poverty; Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation; Fatherhood and Healthy Families; Reforming the Faith-Based Office; Environment and Climate Change; and Global Poverty, Health and Development. No longer would religious actors be marginalised but instead encouraged to be at the heart of policy making and delivery within the parameters of the Constitutional separation of church and state.

The increased emphasis on involving religious actors in political processes and policy delivery has expanded to include direct involvement in US foreign policy not only through lobbying but for becoming important actors in delivering US foreign policy objectives through the distribution of developmental assistance and military chaplains having responsibility to liaise with local communities in areas where US troops are deployed on active service. In 2010 the Chicago Council on Global Affairs reported back on the work of a 32-scholar task force co-chaired by Scott Appleby and Richard Cizik examining the role religious actors could play in advancing US foreign policy. The task force which included Douglas Johnston, Jose Casanova and Jean Bethke Elshtain urged increased religious literacy:

… religious actors … [will] provide enormous opportunities to create new alliances and forge new paths to peace and prosperity in many troubled areas of the world. This means that the United States government will not only need to develop a far greater understanding of religion’s role in politics and society around the globe – including a detailed knowledge of religious communities, leaders, and trends – but it must move beyond traditional state-to-state relations to develop effective policies for engaging religious communities within and across nations (Chicago Council 2010: 5).

The report urged the US foreign policy establishment to build on the example set by Barack Obama’s Cairo speech of 4 June 2009 in seeking to build better relations between the United States and the Muslim majority world. They observed that the influence of religious groups around the world is growing and that changing patterns of religious identification has significant political implications. While religion has benefitted from globalization it is also a catalyst for opposition to it and so has to be reckoned with. Religion plays an important role where governments either lack capacity and/or legitimacy in times of economic and political difficulties. Religion can be hijacked by extremists to exacerbate or promote conflict between religious communities. As the political salience of religion increases then issues surrounding religious freedom as a universal human right and as a source of social and political stability takes on greater significance (Chicago Council 2010: 6-7).

The Chicago Council echoed the analysis and recommendations of faith-based proponents of greater involvement of religious actors in political processes, in particular that of conflict resolution. Recommendations include establishing religious engagement as apriority within the governmental bureaucracy, providing mandatory training for officials on the role of religion in world affairs. Religious actors should be engaged at all levels, not just at governmental or diplomatic level, and regardless of whether they are supportive of US foreign policy. There should be a reaffirmation of the government‘s commitment to religious freedom and a comprehensive approach to human rights and democracy promotion which accommodates the legitimate aspirations of religious communities. The US government should also take the lead on encouraging international institutions including the United Nations, World Bank and G-20 to ‘expand and deepen their engagement with religious actors’ (Chicago Council 2010: 11). There is clear evidence in training programmes established and the increased engagement between religious actors and international institutions that the advice is being applied and is part of an increasing trend that sees religion as being simultaneously an essential component in resolving conflict and in the United States of being able to advance foreign policy interests. Secular conflict resolution in situations involving a religious component is increasingly seen by faith-based scholars and the governments they seek to influence as anathema:

Indeed, pushing an uncompromising secular alternative can have the unintended effect of feeding extremism by further threatening traditional sources of personal, culture, and religious identity. The challenge before us is to marginalize religious extremists, not religion’ (Chicago Council 2010: 14).

**The Research Companion on Religion and Conflict Resolution**

The handbook is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the latest research in religion and conflict resolution. This collection of twenty three essays brings together leading scholars in the field and comprises five thematic sections, each with between four and five chapters on vital and mainly contemporary topics in the field of religion and conflict resolution. The principal themes include Religious Traditions and Conflict; Key Debates on Religious Conflict and Conflict Resolution; Religion, International Relations and Security; Religion and Conflict Resolution; and the final section on The Peacemakers.

The first section provides an analysis of each of the five major faiths’ teaching on, practice and attitudes towards conflict and conflict resolution over time, providing an historical and contemporary overview. The chapters provide analyses of scriptural teaching and practice in Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism and how these have been manifest over time. The second section comprises four key debates occupying academics, politicians and practitioners working on religion and conflict resolution, including relations between church and state; the religious dimensions of armed conflict; gender, religion and conflict; and religious fundamentalism.

The third section on Religion, International Relations and Security; seeks to provide a theoretical underpinning for debates surrounding the efficacy of religious peacemaking. Chapters on Just War Theory, pacifism, religious idealism and inter-civilizational dialogue, and promoting religious freedom are included. The fourth section on religion and conflict resolution provides a stirring call from Johan Galtung for soft religionists to overcome the intolerance of hard religion, typified by fundamentalism, as an essential component of contemporary conflict resolution. This is followed by four case studies of religious attempts at peacemaking around the world including the work of the Clonard-Fitzroy Fellowship in bringing about reconciliation within the divided communities of Northern Ireland. Further chapters on the churches’ role in truth and reconciliation in South Africa, faith-based peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and a case study involving mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians in Kaduna, Nigeria follow. The final section on the peacemakers provides examples of individuals and organizations that have embarked on successful conflict resolution. These include individual peacemakers Mohandas Gandhi and Jimmy Carter, and two non-governmental peacemaking organisations –Partners in Humanity, which seeks to break down barriers between the West and the Muslim majority world, and Pax Christi, the Roman Catholic peace organisation.

The collection is a contribution to increasing understanding of the positive role religious actors can play in bringing about a more peaceful world order. The contributors come from a range of religious and nonreligious backgrounds but have in common that they are acknowledged experts in the field and are committed to the peaceful resolution of conflict. My own inspiration for the project came from spending time in Belfast talking with people on both sides of the peace walls that remain to this day about the capacity for a peaceful transformation of society built on mutual respect, understanding and reconciliation. Church leaders such as Alex Reed and Roy Magee (Little 2007: 53-96) and Ken Newell and Gerry Reynolds (Wells 2005, 2010) may have received the lion’s share of attention but what struck me most was the (extra) ordinary people who bought into their vision and embraced the transforming influence of faith in their own lives to reach out to the ‘other’ community believing that their society could also be transformed. People like Sandra and James Rutherford and Ed Petersen. What role religion should play in society and in resolving conflict will quite rightly continue to be contested and my hope is that this research companion will contribute positively to that debate.

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