

Inclusion of Religious Actors in Peace and National Dialogue Processes

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Conflict resolution scholars and practitioners are increasingly focused on possibilities for broader representation of unofficial stakeholders within peace and national dialogue processes, an idea referred to as “inclusion of civil society” actors. Religious actors are among those eligible to participate, according to those contributing to the discourse on inclusion of civil society. This article considers possibilities for inclusion of religious actors as stakeholder-participants in peace and national dialogue processes, arguing that there are contexts in which religious actors should be involved in ways that differ from those in which others are involved.

Keywords: religious actors, conflict, peace progress, national dialogue, inclusion, civil society, religious peacebuilding

Within the academic field of religious peacebuilding that has emerged over the past two decades, much attention has focused on two topics.¹ The first is contributions religious actors² can make to conflict mitigation or resolution efforts by serving as mediators or through provision of good offices or similar third-party roles, most typically in others’ conflicts.³ The second is contributions to peacebuilding made by religious actors at a grassroots level, often through forms of nonviolent resistance or advocacy.⁴ Scant attention has been given to another mode in which religious actors can—and, at least in some contexts, likely must—contribute to peacebuilding, which is their participation in peace and national dialogue processes as stakeholder-parties to a conflict.⁵

¹ For general overviews of the religious peacebuilding field, see Katrien Hertog, *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); and Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby and David Little, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

² This term is used in various ways. For example, the United Nations uses it to mean “those who work in/with legally registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in interreligious affairs, or religious development and humanitarian entities; and those who teach religion in academic contexts.” United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes* (July 2017). Others use the term more broadly to include both informal collectives and individuals acting without a formal institutional mandate. Duncan McDuie-Ra and John A. Rees, “Religious Actors, Civil Society, and the Development Agenda: The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion,” *Journal of International Development* 22, no. 1 (2010), 20–36. The term is used in this broader sense in this article.

³ For some examples and discussion of these types of peacemaking contributions by religious actors, see Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Douglas Johnston, ed., *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 2011); and Nukhet A. Sandal and Jonathan Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory: Interactions and Possibilities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 105–8.

⁴ For some examples and discussion of these types of peacemaking contributions by religious actors, see R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall, eds., *Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding: Illuminating the Unseen* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2015); and Atalia Omer, “When ‘Good Religion’ is Good,” *Journal of Religion and Political Practice* 4, no. 1 (2018), 122–36.

⁵ David Little and Scott Appleby identify other modes of religious peacebuilding work beyond the two that have received most attention, but not participation as stakeholders. “[R]eligious peacebuilding includes not only conflict

This article takes up this topic in hope of bringing more attention to it and the conceptual and practical challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding that it exposes.⁶ The focus of this article is not interreligious dialogue, which has a long and rich history about which much has been written,⁷ but, rather, possible modes of dialogue and action that overtly attend to the major issues in a conflict and to ways in which religion may influence the conflict and possibilities for its resolution. This article considers modes of dialogue involving religious actors that are part of a more expansive, formal peace or national dialogue process, or that have some intended, plausible connection to it. Its aim is to contribute to the development of practically useful ways of thinking about involvement of religious actors in peace and national dialogue processes, by stimulating thought and discussion about occasions and possibilities for doing so.

The most obvious scenario in which religious actors are stakeholder-parties to a conflict, and perhaps the only one some see,⁸ is when religion provides a primary fault line along which conflict occurs.⁹ The conflict in Northern Ireland, which is discussed briefly below, is regarded by many as an example of this scenario. Inclusion of religious actors in conflict resolution processes is inevitable in these conflicts, though much of our thinking about who it is desirable to involve, when, and how has been too constrained. In other scenarios, religion does not provide a primary fault line along which conflict occurs, or at least is not uniformly regarded as providing a primary fault line, but it may be entangled in the conflict in less obvious, or more isolated, ways or religious actors may have unique potential to contribute to a resolution of the conflict, or at least to specific dimensions of it. This article briefly considers the conflicts in Israel-Palestine, Nepal, and South Sudan when discussing these types of scenarios.

The religious peacebuilding literature exists alongside (and mostly apart from) a considerably more developed, and largely social scientific, conflict resolution literature that began

management and resolution efforts on the ground, but also the efforts of people working at a distance from actual sites of deadly conflict, such as legal advocates of religious human rights, scholars conducting research relevant to crosscultural and interreligious dialogue, and theologians and ethicists within the religious communities who are probing and strengthening their traditions of nonviolence.” David Little and Scott Appleby, “A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict,” in Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, eds., *Religion and Peacebuilding* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 5.

⁶ This topic also has received attention in the development context. See McDuire-Ra and Rees, “Religious Actors, Civil Society, and the Development Agenda.”

⁷ For recent examples of approaches to interreligious dialogue, see Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives (Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). For discussion of the potential usefulness of interfaith dialogue in peacebuilding, see David R. Smock, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002).

⁸ Mark Owen and Anna King have observed that one obstacle to inclusion of religious actors in peacebuilding in the Nepal conflict has been “[t]he misapprehension by many agencies and organisations that religious groups need only be engaged when overtly part of the conflict; and the lack of appreciation of the potential religious actors have for preventing or resolving conflict in situations where they are not an obvious part of the problems or violence.” Mark Owen and Anna King, *Religious Peacebuilding and Development in Nepal: Report and Recommendations for The Nepal Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction* (Winchester, UK: Winchester Centre of Religions for Reconciliation and Peace, 2013), 10.

⁹ There is much debate about whether religion is ever a cause of conflict or whether there otherwise is a phenomenon that might appropriately be called “religious conflict.” I believe the same underlying dynamics that fuel conflicts among ethnic groups and other identity group are responsible for most conflicts in which religion is entangled. Jeffrey R. Seul, “Religion in Cooperation and Conflict,” in Andrea Kupfer Schneider and Christopher Honeyman, eds., *The Negotiator’s Desk Reference* (St. Paul, MN: DRI Press, 2018), 545–64; Jeffrey R. Seul, ““Ours is the Way of God: Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 5 (1999), 553–69.

to emerge after, and in response to, World War II.¹⁰ As explained in the first section below, this literature, which informs much governmental and unofficial conflict resolution activity worldwide, has focused predominantly upon the behavior and interactions of political elites, particularly elected and appointed representatives of states, and, to a lesser extent, other elites who have access to and who influence them, such as policy advisors, journalists, and academics. More recently, however, mainstream conflict resolution scholars and practitioners have become increasingly concerned about the possibilities for, and even the necessity of, formal involvement in peace and national dialogue processes of actors who previously had received relatively little attention. This is partially because some of these actors have been asserting themselves with increasing determination and partially because of a growing belief (for which there now is some empirical support)¹¹ that peace processes are more likely to succeed, and resulting peace accords will be more durable, if representatives of more stakeholder groups are meaningfully involved in efforts to resolve a conflict. This trend toward varying forms of broader representation of unofficial stakeholders within peace and national dialogue processes generally is referred to by conflict resolution scholars and practitioners as “inclusion of civil society” actors.¹²

As discussed below, religious actors are among those who should be eligible to participate in peace and national dialogue processes, according to the emerging discourse on inclusion of civil society.¹³ While religious actors often may welcome opportunities for participation in conflict resolution processes,¹⁴ there so far has been relatively little indication from religious actors about the extent to which they regard themselves as part of civil society (as the term is being used in peacemaking) and accept the developing constructs for inclusion of civil society actors in these processes.¹⁵ This article is less concerned with resolving the question of whether religious actors

¹⁰ For a general history and overview of the field, see Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Christopher Mitchell, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016); and John Burton, “History of conflict resolution,” in *World Encyclopedia of Peace* (Seoul, Korea: Institute for Peace Studies, 1998), available at <http://www.natsoc.org.au/resources/news-publications/papers/6.-history-of-conflict-resolution>.

¹¹ Desirée Nilsson, “Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace,” *International Interactions* 38, no. 2 (2012), 243–66.

¹² Because some prominent international mediators and official negotiators for combatants often would prefer to exclude other conflict stakeholders from negotiations, a body of practice and literature is developing regarding a range of modes for involving other stakeholders in peace processes. Thania Paffenholz, “Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Beyond the Inclusion-Exclusion Dichotomy,” *Negotiation Journal* 30, no. 1 (2014), 69–91.

¹³ The term and concept of civil society often are traced to Aristotle’s *Politics*, while understandings of what is within the sphere of civil society and how it functions and should function have shifted throughout history. For general overviews of the concept that touch upon its historical and contemporary relationships to religion, see Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); and John R. Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). Major international institutions today typically include religious actors within the realm of civil society. For example, the World Bank defines civil society organizations as “the wide array of non-governmental and not for profit organizations that have a presence in public life, express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations,” as indicated here:

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/partners/civil-society#2>.

¹⁴ Religious actors sometimes have been excluded altogether from peace processes in which other nongovernmental actors had a voice. For example, many religious actors in Nepal believe they have been systematically excluded from that country’s peace process. Owen and King, *Religious Peacebuilding and Development in Nepal*, 6.

¹⁵ Some religious peacebuilders may regard religious actors as part of civil society, while still remaining critical of those who believe it always “is adequate to interact with religious groups and individuals in the same way as other members of civil society,” effectively recognizing the need to analyze the existing and potential roles of religious actors separately. Owen and King, *Religious Peacebuilding and Development in Nepal*, 10. Others, like The Network for Religious and

should be regarded as part of civil society than it is with demonstrating why religious actors sometimes should be involved in peace and national dialogue processes in ways that differ from those in which other nongovernmental actors are involved. Uniformly thinking about religious actors' involvement in peace and national dialogue processes in the ways in which we think about the involvement of other nongovernmental actors is problematic. Our approaches to engaging religious actors must be more attuned to the reality that religion is central to the meaning-making and lived experience of the vast majority of people the world over;¹⁶ to the internal diversity of, and the conflicts within, religious communities; and to the contingency and fluidity of our conceptions of "religion," the "secular" sphere, and "politics," and of the relationships among them.¹⁷ A reflexive default mode of making room for religion at negotiation and dialogue tables only in those ways in which elite representatives of other "civil society" actors are included is inadvisable.¹⁸

The first section below briefly summarizes the development of contemporary conflict resolution theory and practice, in order to set the stage for what follows. It focuses particularly on the evolution of approaches to inclusion of actors who previously had been ignored or relatively neglected in theory and practice. The second section of this article draws upon the emerging literature regarding integration of religion into the field of international relations, to explain why religious perspectives and religious actors became features of social and political life that too often are excluded from or marginalized in conflict resolution processes, and why it may be important in many contemporary conflicts that we find ways to include them—not peripherally, but more centrally, and not necessarily within the currently prevailing rubric of "inclusion of civil society." As we will see, there are contemporary conflicts that invite a different approach to engagement with religious actors. This can be true for a range of reasons, as the third, and final, section of this article attempts to illustrate, with reference to specific conflicts.

Throughout, this article examines and, to varying degrees at various times, contests the widely assumed normativity of two notions. The first is the secularist bent in conflict resolution theory and practice generally, and with respect to the concept of "inclusion" specifically, which aligns with the secular orientation that dominates the field of international relations (and, indeed, all of the social sciences). The second is the statist perspective that negotiations among government

Traditional Peacemakers and The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, see themselves as distinct from civil society actors, even maintaining that "[i]n spite of the trend of secularization seen in the global west, religions and religious actors are durable and resilient actors compared to, for example, civil society," as stated here:

<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/peacemakers-network-finn-church-aid-partner-pard/>.

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050* (2015), available at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

¹⁷ Political scientist Michael Desch has outlined some of the definitional and methodological challenges of studying religion's role in international affairs from competing theoretical perspectives. Michael C. Desch, "The Coming Reformation of Religion in International Affairs? The Demise of the Secularization Thesis and the Rise of New Thinking About Religion," in *Religion and International Relations: A Primer for Research (The Report of the Working Group on International Relations and Religion of the Mellon Initiative on Religion Across the Disciplines, University of Notre Dame)*, available at: http://rmellon.nd.edu/assets/101872/religion_and_international_relations_report.pdf.

¹⁸ Political scientist Thania Paffenholz provides one taxonomy of modes for including civil society in peace processes that afford it varying degrees of direct access to negotiations among the high-level representatives of combatants. While she does not address the question of whether religious actors sometimes should participate in ways distinct from those in which others participate, she does discuss possibilities like use of subgroups, with different "civil society groups focusing on issues most important to their constituencies." See Paffenholz, "Civil Society and Peace Negotiations," 78.

officials and leaders of rebel groups is the form of conflict resolution activity on which our attention primarily should be focused. These two normative orientations—secularism and statism—are, of course, two sides of the same coin, and the very notion of “inclusion” of religious actors implicitly reinforces the normativity of both notions. The state will remain a key political and social organizing principle for the foreseeable future, and we certainly should maintain norms, institutions, and social and political processes that help promote harmonious relations among people with different worldviews (including secular worldviews). At this point in history, however, it seems clear that the secularist ideal has much greater sway in some parts of the world than others, and is itself dying or being revised,¹⁹ and also that religious affinities often transcend national boundaries, inclining people toward forms of collective thought and action that are in tension with expectations that the state should be the primary locus of one’s social identity and loyalty, an expectation that is strongly associated with some mainstream theories of international relations.²⁰

The Push for Greater Inclusion of Unofficial Actors in Conflict Resolution Processes

The image of peacemaking that dominated the scene until the middle of the twentieth century—heads of state and top diplomats engaged in direct negotiations that take place out of public view until the announcement of a peace accord—is just one feature of today’s more varied and complex peacemaking landscape. In the decades following World War II, some diplomats and pioneering peace studies scholars began to experiment with unofficial approaches to conflict resolution intended to spark official negotiations or provide useful inputs into official negotiations that were stalled or stuck.²¹ At the time, these scholars and practitioners were concerned primarily about the potential for certain seemingly intractable conflicts, like the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the conflict among Greek and Turkish Cypriots, to reignite regional, or even global, wars.

Official negotiations tend to focus on near-term achievement of agreements or other outcomes, but these new, unofficial approaches to conflict resolution sought to lay the groundwork for future agreements or outcomes by seeking little more than greater understanding of the parties’ respective perspectives, needs, fears, and concerns; greater clarity about the obstacles to resolution of the conflict; new ideas about how to overcome obstacles; and fresh ideas about the possible contours of a future resolution.²² These types of methods collectively became known as “Track II

¹⁹ Rodney Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.,” *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999), 251; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁰ Sandal and Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory*, 20–28.

²¹ The late Australian diplomat and scholar-practitioner John Burton arguably was the most influential of the early conflict resolution pioneers. Burton was the first to convene unofficial problem-solving workshops among members of conflicting groups who were politically influential, but who were not current officeholders. Some other peace studies and conflict resolution pioneers, like social psychologist Herbert Kelman, who already had begun to make his own foundational contributions to the field, acknowledge the major influence Burton had on their work. Herbert C. Kelman, “The Development of Interactive Problem-Solving: In John Burton’s Footsteps,” *Political Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2015), 243–62. For a history and overview of the domain of unofficial diplomacy (aka “Track II diplomacy”), see Peter Jones, *Track Two Diplomacy in Theory and Practice* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015). For a history of the broader, interdisciplinary domain of peace research, which is a taproot of the field of conflict resolution, see Herbert C. Kelman, “Reflections on the History and Status of Peace Research,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 5, no. 2 (1985), 95–110.

²² Herbert C. Kelman, “Interactive Problem-solving: Informal Mediation by the Scholar-Practitioner,” in Jacob Bercovitch, ed., *Studies in International Mediation: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Z. Rubin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 167–93.

diplomacy,” a term that distinguished them from official negotiation, or “Track I diplomacy.”²³ Senior elected and appointed officials sometimes are reluctant to engage in candid discussions with their adversaries, even behind-the-scenes, in part because they fear political fallout for negotiating over issues their constituents may consider nonnegotiable or not yet ripe for negotiation. This fear tends to stifle candid interaction and creativity, which are requirements for successful negotiation. For this and other reasons, Track II efforts typically involve people who have the ear, or otherwise can command the attention, of elected officials, such as advisors and prominent friends not in government, former officials, academics, and journalists.²⁴

While those who facilitate Track II processes naturally hope to influence Track I processes, most Track II work historically has proceeded without formalized procedures for transferring information and ideas into official political deliberations and discourse. It generally has been thought that overt, structured links to officials and official processes would turn a process intended to be informal and unofficial into something more like a formal, political negotiation, potentially hampering creativity and other benefits informal, nonbinding processes can yield. Track II practitioners have not left the practical consequences of their work completely to chance, but their ability to influence the thinking and conduct of senior officials has been dependent primarily upon the influence of those they recruit to participate in their processes, how a process affects its participants, and how participants subsequently choose to use their own influence.²⁵

Early Track II processes, which represented a small, but significant, step toward greater inclusion of unofficial actors in peacemaking, were developed during the Cold War, when diplomats and conflict resolution professionals were concerned primarily with conflicts between states. Following the Cold War, intrastate conflicts became more prevalent, and doubts about foreign intervention as a strategy for achieving political stability in unstable states grew, so the focus of conflict resolution scholarship and practice has shifted over the past twenty-five years.²⁶ Intrastate conflicts typically revolve around the grievances of one or more groups that seek greater representation and rights, or that contest the legitimacy of the state altogether, perhaps wishing to overthrow or separate from it. Diplomats and conflict resolution practitioners have adapted Track I and Track II approaches to the intrastate conflict context,²⁷ but there are obvious differences between civil wars and other types of intrastate conflicts, on the one hand, and conflicts between states, on the other hand. Perhaps most significantly, even though many intrastate conflicts manifest most visibly as a confrontation between those currently in power and an organized, armed resistance group, in reality there typically are multiple stakeholder groups within a society that aspires for change. Any hope for a measure of “positive peace” (a just political, social, and economic order that enables individuals and communities to flourish), as opposed to simply “negative peace” (an end to the violence), depends upon surfacing and fairly responding to the concerns and aspirations of a broad range of stakeholders. In addition, mechanisms to ensure that

²³ Jones, *Track Two Diplomacy*.

²⁴ Jones, *Track Two Diplomacy*; Kelman, “Interactive Problem-solving.”

²⁵ Cynthia Chataway, “The Problem of Transfer from Confidential Interactive Problem Solving: What is the Role of the Facilitator?” *Political Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2002), 165–91; Jones, *Track Two Diplomacy*.

²⁶ “The onus of conflict resolution has therefore recently shifted from the international to the national level. . . . This has placed an emphasis on political solutions with more robust national ownership.” *National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners* (Berlin, Germany: Berghof Foundation, 2017), 1. See also Michael Lund, “Intrastate Conflicts and the Problem of Political Will,” in Michael Lund and Steve McDonald, eds., *Across the Lines of Conflict: Facilitating Cooperation to Build Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 3–21.

²⁷ Lund, *Intrastate Conflicts and the Problem of Political Will*.

this continues to happen after the violence has ceased must be established or strengthened, and citizens must develop the capacity to use them effectively. A conflict resolution process devised to end a period of violent conflict itself presents an opportunity to enhance a society’s capacity to deal with conflict constructively, and that opportunity will be missed with too much emphasis upon negotiations among state officials and the principals of the most dominant groups and too much reliance upon external mediators or facilitators.

In response to these realities, particularly as they manifested through political transitions in Eastern and Central Europe, Africa, and Latin America in the late 1980s and the 1990s, numerous peace processes have taken on the characteristics of what is now often called a “national dialogue.”²⁸ While no two national dialogues look quite the same, an emphasis on local ownership of the process and inclusion of a very broad range of stakeholders are among the hallmarks of any legitimate national dialogue.

Most recently, the turbulent developments in the MENA region, often referred to as the Arab Spring, reflected a profound questioning of the legitimacy of governing institutions by an increasingly emancipated population. This pressure from below pushed narratives of “inclusivity” and “participation” centre stage and National Dialogue (re-)emerged as a suitable format in this context. In addition, the increasingly complex nature of conflicts calls for formats of dialogue that involve a broad range of stakeholders to address the multi-dimensional causes of conflict.²⁹

National dialogues “include a broader range of national stakeholders and address a broader range of issues” and present “the promise of a transition away from elite deal-making toward more inclusive and participatory politics.”³⁰

The changes in conflict resolution theory and practice brought about by the increase in intrastate conflicts following the Cold War also have influenced theory and practice concerning conflicts among two states or politically distinct communities, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. There is a growing recognition that, even in these conflicts, the needs, fears, and concerns of diverse stakeholders within each community must inform and influence both the process and substance of conflict resolution efforts. Indeed, some of the greatest barriers to resolution of any intercommunal conflict, including an interstate conflict, may be internal conflicts within one or both communities.³¹

²⁸ *National Dialogue Handbook*, 19. Hannes Siebert, “Beyond Mediation: Promoting Change and Resolving Conflict through Authentic National Dialogues,” in Rami G. Khouri, Karim Makdissi, and Martin Wälisch, *Interventions in Conflict: International Peacemaking in the Middle East* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 151–62. The national dialogue idea probably has a much longer history, but the arc of recent activity contributing to the emerging national dialogue paradigm extends over the past twenty-five years or so. Several West African countries, including Benin, Congo, Mali, Niger, Togo, and Zaire, held national conferences in the early 1990s during processes of democratization. In this same timeframe, we saw the emergence of forms of national dialogue in several Latin American countries, including Bolivia, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. Attempts at national dialogues in Afghanistan and Iraq were made in the early part of this century. Several national dialogue processes currently are underway or emerging in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

²⁹ *National Dialogue Handbook*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

³¹ Herbert C. Kelman, “Coalitions Across Conflict Lines: The Interplay of Conflicts Within and Between the Israel and Palestinian Communities,” in Stephen Worchel and Jeffrey A. Simpson, eds., *Conflict Between People and Groups:*

Contemporary peace processes, whether between or within states, often have elements of all of the modes of conflict resolution discussed in this section. To achieve the objective of greater inclusiveness while keeping a process reasonably manageable, large-scale peace and national dialogues processes typically combine Track I- and Track II-oriented concepts and activities, and even so-called Track III, or grassroots peacemaking, ideas. Official negotiations among the most powerful, opposed political or social groups (Track I) may be informed by unofficial dialogues among small groups of elites who have access to the most influential leaders (Track II), and each of these may be connected to and informed by dialogues among and/or consultations with an even broader group of stakeholders,³² often referred to as representatives of civil society. As Thania Paffenholz explains,

Civil society is understood to comprise organizations that take voluntary collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values that are distinct from those of the state, family, and the market. It consists of a large and diverse set of organizations such as trade unions, professional associations, human rights groups, *faith-based organizations*, research institutions, social movements, and peace-building NGOs, as well as traditional and community groups.³³

In practice, it now is common not only to involve representatives of advocacy, civic, trade, and other types of organizations in peace and national dialogue processes, but also to include representatives of some major social groups (sometimes through organizations focused on their interests). In the current peace process in Cyprus, for example, the Cyprus Dialogue Forum has been established as a structure for participation by representatives of a broad range of organizations and social groups, including women and youth.³⁴ Some Track I efforts to resolve the war in Syria have been surrounded by a penumbra of unofficial dialogue tables designed to enable other stakeholders to provide inputs into the official process, including women (who, as discussed below, it likewise is unacceptable to regard simply as another contingent of “civil society” to be included in peace and national dialogue processes in peripheral ways).³⁵

The scale and structure of peace and national dialogue processes vary greatly, as do the mechanisms that link “tracks” or “layers” of the process.³⁶ Some are quite small and tightly linked, like the national dialogue process that has proceeded in fits and starts in Lebanon both before and

Causes, Processes, and Resolutions (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1993), 236–58; Jay Rothman and Michal Alberstein, “Individuals, Groups and Intergroups: Theorizing About the Role of Identity in Conflict and its Creative Engagement,” *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution* 28, no. 3 (2013), 631–58; Jay Rothman, “From Intragroup Pre-Negotiation to Intergroup Peace,” paper submitted for Transforming Identities: Methods and Processes for Conflict Transformation panel at International Political Science Association 22nd World Congress, Madrid, Spain, July 2012 (on file with author).

³² The possibilities and challenges of linking elite negotiation and dialogue processes to grassroots activities are explored in Christopher R. Mitchell and Landon E. Hancock, eds., *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction between Grassroots and Elite Processes* (London: Continuum, 2012).

³³ Paffenholz, “Civil Society and Peace Negotiations,” 78. Emphasis added.

³⁴ See https://www.facebook.com/cydialogue/?hc_ref=ARTiv2CF3As3Il3OXMPKy_Z67W3lN622vNT9Bp-7g7Mmj9IK9HREs7w2A0Ts4QPiu0c&fref=nf.

³⁵ See Catherine Moore and Tarsila Talarico, “Inclusion to Exclusion: Women in Syria,” *Emory International Law Review* 30, no. 2 (2015), 213–60.

³⁶ For a general discussion of approaches, see *National Dialogue Handbook*, 18–65.

after the 2008 Doha Agreement that averted another civil war in that country.³⁷ At the opposite end of the spectrum, in Myanmar, a negotiation process in which the military government, the main nationwide opposition party, and a majority of the regional ethnic armed groups participated resulted (in March 2015) in a ceasefire agreement that calls for a much more inclusive national dialogue process intended to produce a new constitution.³⁸ While the design of that national dialogue process presently is in flux, the basic idea is to create concentric circles of participation around teams of principal negotiator-representatives of each major political and social group, ultimately involving thousands of people in the process.³⁹ Participants in the outer rings, which would include not only many additional representatives of those groups, but also representatives of civil society organizations, would engage in research and dialogue around the major issues to be addressed in the new constitution, and the learning and outputs from their activities would inform the negotiations among the core teams. Many prominent Track I and Track II advisors and facilitators are ambivalent about this trend toward more inclusive, and, therefore, larger and more complicated, peace processes. They know how difficult it is to make progress toward the resolution of a protracted conflict, even with fewer stakeholders participating in a less elaborate process.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the trend toward greater inclusiveness is strong, and it is likely to persist.⁴¹

In sum, peacemaking practice has evolved since World War II from backroom diplomacy among high-ranking officials to forms of negotiation and dialogue that have become increasingly inclusive and participatory. It is not uncommon today for a peace process to consist of channels of formal interaction and complementary informal interaction that engage and connect a broad range of official and unofficial stakeholders. The next section examines how religious perspectives and actors currently figure in this inclusion trend, and it considers some of the problems, or perhaps missed opportunities, associated with viewing religious actors solely as another element of civil society.

Religious Actors as Civil Society Actors?

Both the notion of “civil society” and the notion of inclusion of religious actors within it imply and convey the statist and secularist normative orientations noted at the beginning of this article. The concept of civil society has a long and fluid history, and the contemporary contours of civil society are contested.⁴² In general, however, it consists of actors who are not agents of the state, but who are recognized by it. The involvement of civil society actors in a peace or national dialogue process typically is desired by agents of the state because they have something positive to contribute to the process (including, in some contexts, the possibility of conferring greater legitimacy upon it), because they otherwise might become spoilers of the process, or both.

³⁷ See United Nations Peacemaker, “Doha Agreement on the Results of the Lebanese National Dialogue Conference,” available at <http://peacemaker.un.org/lebanon-dohaagreement2008>.

³⁸ Institute for Security & Development Policy, *Myanmar’s Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Background* (October 2015), available at <http://isdpc.eu/content/uploads/publications/2015-isdpc-background-myanmar-nca.pdf>.

³⁹ Sai Latt, “Burma’s National Dialogue: Where Now?,” *The Irrawaddy* (March 21, 2017), available at <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/burmas-national-dialogue-now.html>.

⁴⁰ Paffenholz, “Civil Society and Peace Negotiations,” 72.

⁴¹ The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet in 2015 and the well-attended National Dialogues Conferences hosted by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2014 (see <http://nationaldialogues.fi>) are evidence of the strength of this trend.

⁴² See generally, Edwards, *Civil Society*; Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*.

Inclusion of religious actors within the category of civil society actors reflects the liberal ideal of separation between the realm of religion and the concerns of the state. This aligns with the “secularization thesis”—the notion that religion should and will diminish, and perhaps eventually disappear, as the world modernizes within the context of an international order defined by relations among states—which has become a bedrock tenet of mainstream international relations theory and, indeed, of all the other social sciences.⁴³ International relations and other social science disciplines (including economics, psychology, and sociology) are the taproot from which the emerging, interdisciplinary field of conflict resolution draws,⁴⁴ so it seems fair to say that the secularization thesis also is part of the fiber of mainstream conflict resolution/peacebuilding theory and practice.⁴⁵

The secularization thesis went largely unquestioned among scholars of international relations and cognate disciplines until relatively recently, so religion consequently has received relatively little attention in these fields.⁴⁶ The 1967 Six Day War between Israelis and Palestinians, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the war in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.,⁴⁷ and other violent events with which religion was visibly associated, combined with data indicating that the world’s population is becoming more, not less, religious,⁴⁸ ultimately led some international relations scholars to begin contesting the secularization thesis (to the extent they ever embraced it) and to begin to attempt to account for the influence of religion in international affairs. These efforts to integrate religion into international relations theory, while arguably still on the periphery of the field, have taken various forms.⁴⁹ Some see modern state and international norms and institutions as having been shaped by, and therefore as expressing, precursor religious ideas.⁵⁰ Others are demonstrating how religion and its influence can be integrated into mainstream, competing theories of international relations, including realism and neoliberalism, to whatever extent a given theory initially was or was not heavily influenced by religious ideas and/or religion’s perceived role in premodern social and political life.⁵¹ Another group approaches the topic from

⁴³ Desch, “The Coming Reformation of Religion in International Affairs?,” 17–25.

⁴⁴ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Mitchell, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 3–34. Several pioneers in the field of conflict resolution were experts in international affairs, like John Burton (diplomacy), Kenneth Boulding (international political economy), and Roger Fisher (international law).

⁴⁵ In fact, this may partially explain why the even younger subfield of religious peacebuilding has developed largely in its own silo, drawing much more from the fields of theology and religious studies, and related disciplines like the history of religion and sociology of religion—fields in which the secularization thesis has long been contested—than from the mainstream conflict resolution field, to the detriment of both disciplines. See, for example, José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Peter Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

⁴⁶ Jonathan Fox, “Religion as an Overlooked Element in International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (2001), 53–74.

⁴⁷ Daniel Philpott, “The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations,” *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (October 2002), 66–95.

⁴⁸ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*.

⁴⁹ See generally, Desch, “The Coming Reformation of Religion in International Affairs?,” 25–40.

⁵⁰ Daniel Philpott, “The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations,” *World Politics* 52, no. 2 (2000), 213. Sandal and Fox also see the foundational influence of religion in some mainstream theories of international relations. Sandal and Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory*.

⁵¹ Sandal and Fox do so systematically for five mainstream theories (realism, neorealism, neoliberalism, the English School, and constructivism), while also surveying others’ work within a given paradigm to address the role of religion in international affairs. Sandal and Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory*.

diverse critical perspectives, many of which question whether we even can locate “religion” in relation to a distinct sphere of the “state” in which “politics” happens⁵² (as opposed to merely acknowledging the lack of consensus about how to define religion while using positivistic social science methods to study religion as one happens to define it).⁵³ Scholars working in varied ways along this trajectory, which some have come to refer to as post-secularism, generally do not regard religion as resurgent in politics and international affairs, as do many mainstream international relations theorists. Most see the secularization thesis as an aspirational construct that never has had the descriptive and predictive force its proponents maintain.⁵⁴

Whatever their differences in orientations and methods, and whether or not they see religion as in tension with liberal ideals and institutions to some degree, all of these scholars accept that religion (however one may think about it) is here to stay. They accept that religion—however blurry, and ultimately undefinable, its contours may be—is a feature of social life that must be accounted for and integrated into international relations theory. They see engagement between religion and politics either as inevitable, on the one hand, or necessary or desirable, on the other hand: inevitable, because any lines we might attempt to draw between these domains are bound to be too artificial, rendering suspect any normative aspirations or descriptive claims regarding the supposedly receding influence of religion in international affairs; or necessary or desirable, because religion must be recognized as a potent force in the world that cannot, and perhaps even should not, be subdued or quarantined to the extent envisioned by some proponents of the secularization thesis. Whether one accepts and engages with religious perspectives and actors primarily with a focus on preserving and enhancing the function of states—as would many who embrace a neoliberal perspective, for example—or one simply regards any discussion of engagement or nonengagement between religion and politics as questionable, given the lack of clear boundaries between these supposed domains, these orientations suggest that the current meme of “inclusion of civil society” actors within the peacebuilding field may not always map well to the landscape of religious actors and their relationships with prevailing norms and institutions of statehood.

This recent questioning of the secularization thesis within the field of international relations has yet to have much influence upon mainstream conflict resolution scholarship and practice. The developing scholarly literature on inclusion of civil society actors in peace and national dialogue processes generally lists religious actors among the members of civil society eligible to participate,⁵⁵

⁵² Brian Goldstone, “Secularism, ‘Religious Violence,’ and the Liberal Imaginary,” in Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, eds., *Secularism and Religion-Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 104–24; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “International Politics after Secularism,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 5 (2012), 943–61; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Erin K. Wilson, “Theorizing Religion as Politics in Postsecular International Relations,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 15, no. 3 (2014), 347–65. For an overview of the range of post-secularist perspectives, see Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, “The Postsecular in International Relations: An Overview,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 5 (2012), 931–42.

⁵³ Philpott, “The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations,” 67; Monica Duffy Toft, “Religion, Terrorism, and Civil Wars,” in Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, and Monica Duffy Toft, eds., *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 133.

⁵⁴ Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, 136.

⁵⁵ Paffenholz, “Civil Society and Peace Negotiations,” 78. Christoph Spurk includes religious actors within the realm of civil society, but he notes that “religion also has the potential to create more tensions between the state and civil society actors.” Christoph Spurk, “Understanding Civil Society,” in Thania Paffenholz, ed., *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 14. Some see a necessary degree of cultural variability in the question of whether religion should be considered part of civil society. Darren Kew and

as does the developing practitioner literature.⁵⁶ For purposes of this article, we need not decide whether religious actors are or are not properly regarded as part of civil society. As noted earlier, I am concerned primarily about demonstrating that religious actors should not always be involved in peace and national dialogue processes in the same ways that other nongovernmental actors are engaged, whether or not religious actors are considered part of civil society.

If one believes there is an inevitable, necessary, and/or desirable association between religion and politics, then one must ask whether the current thinking about inclusion of religious actors within a broader category of civil society actors eligible for participation in peace and national dialogue processes always is the most productive way to frame the possibilities for inclusion of religious actors. The scholarly literature on inclusion tends to envision various modes of engagement of civil society actors on a collective basis.⁵⁷ There likely are many situations in which it is appropriate and sufficient to involve religious actors in peace and national dialogue processes on the same basis that NGOs, trade unions, advocacy groups, and other types of nongovernmental actors are involved. I simply maintain that the emerging “inclusion of civil society” conceptual paradigm should not be allowed to orient us reflexively toward this result, because religion sometimes influences conflict and possibilities for its resolution in ways that the primary concerns of these other actors may not. The next, and final, section of this article attempts to identify some of the types of situations in which it may be productive to think differently about inclusion of religious actors.

Before turning to that task, however, I want to emphasize that we also need to think differently about how to involve other groups that commonly are regarded as civil society actors in at least some conflict contexts, as I already have made clear with respect to women. Many international relations scholars and others approaching their fields from diverse theoretical perspectives, including neoliberalism (which emphasizes transnational market and cultural dynamics) and feminist and other critical perspectives, would rightly maintain that the current “inclusion of civil society” meme within the conflict resolution field should not lead us to think in cookie cutter ways about involvement of others in peace and national dialogue processes. Religion is a pervasive feature of social life that cuts across other types of affinities in many contexts, and it often influences a conflict and possibilities for its resolution in unique ways. Accordingly, a broad range of options for involving religious actors in a peace process should be developed and receive thoughtful consideration from context to context, but similarly thoughtful consideration should be given to the development of options for inclusion of members of other stakeholder groups.⁵⁸

Some Scenarios in which Religious Actors Potentially Should be Included Differently than Other Actors

Modupe Oshikoya, “Escape from Tyranny: Civil Society and Democratic Struggles in Africa,” in Ebenezer Obadare, ed., *The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa* (New York: Springer, 2014), 7–24. Sandal and Fox refer to “religious civil society.” Sandal and Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory*, 178.

⁵⁶ See, for example, *National Dialogue Handbook*, 27.

⁵⁷ For example, Paffenholz offers a palate of nine “models of inclusion” of civil society in peace processes that generally seem to include different types of actors identically. Paffenholz, “Civil Society and Peace Negotiations,” 76–89.

⁵⁸ Nor should we think solely in terms of affording supposedly unitary groups access to peace and dialogue processes through a handful of formal representatives, needless to say. For example, to continue the focus on inclusion of women, women should be leaders, facilitators, and participants, and otherwise integral to a process at every level and in every phase of it, totally apart from more structured participation by representatives of women’s advocacy groups.

Each of the following three scenarios seems to me to be among those in which we should carefully consider possibilities for including religious actors in peace and national dialogue processes in ways that are different than those in which other nongovernmental actors are included:

- religion is widely regarded as providing a key fault line in a conflict;
- religion influences key issues in the conflict, whether or not the conflict is widely regarded as occurring along a religious fault line; or
- religious actors have a special status and/or special resources that can contribute to resolution of the conflict or dimensions of it.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list; there no doubt are other scenarios that demand increased attention on the role of religious actors. The remainder of this section briefly explores each of these scenarios in turn, with reference to specific conflicts. These conflicts deserve much more attention than it is possible to give them within the scope of this article; each of them is extraordinarily complex.⁵⁹ Each of these cases likely also could be used to illustrate multiple religion-conflict entanglement scenarios, even though each is used here to illustrate just one of the three scenarios identified above.

Before proceeding, it must be emphasized that religion very often is entangled in the dominant national and/or international power dynamics that contribute to a conflict and possibilities for its resolution, as many of those contributing to the post-secularist discourse in international relations (and also, increasingly, within the religious peacebuilding field) tend to remind us.⁶⁰ For example, where political and military power are tightly aligned with a dominant religion and its dominant institutions, religion may influence the conflict pervasively, and in ways that may be rather hidden in plain sight to some stakeholders and observers. In Myanmar, for instance, the tight, historical alignment between dominant Buddhist institutions and the political-military establishment presents issues and complexities that generally have received too little attention in the ongoing conflict resolution processes there, with the exception of the (so far mostly ineffectual) international attention focused on the plight of the largely Muslim and Hindu Rohingya people. These include the extent to which constitutional protections for members of all minority religious groups will be realized in practice and the prospects for reform-minded Buddhists who are contesting existing political and religious structures to have a meaningful influence. Much of the post-secularist discourse in general should serve as a reminder that dominant religious perspectives may be influencing a conflict, and official and unofficial approaches to its resolution, in ways that occlude or obscure other perspectives (whether religious, ethnic, gender based, etc.). Approaches to inclusion of religious actors in peace and dialogue

⁵⁹ I have worked as a conflict resolution practitioner in two of the contexts I discuss (Israel-Palestine and Nepal), but I am acutely aware that I remain an outsider with respect to them, no less than with respect to the other contexts I discuss.

⁶⁰ For example, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd argues that the prevailing discourse around the right to religious freedom shoehorns people and issues into the category “religious,” which tends to disqualify them as “political” actors and issues, so that ethnicity, race, economic disparities, and other factors that do not fit neatly within notions of religion often receive insufficient attention. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “Politics of Religious Freedom in the Asia-Pacific: An Introduction,” *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 4, no. 1 (2018), 9–26.

processes ideally should help elevate nondominant perspectives, whether or not religion influences a conflict in any of the focused ways considered in this section.⁶¹

Scenario 1: Religion Provides a Key Fault Line along which Conflict Occurs

It is obvious enough that religious actors must be included in conflict resolution processes when religion provides a key fault line along which conflict occurs, as is the case when religious groups are engaged in conflict with one another or when a religious group is at war with the government. As noted above, this is so obvious that some people may regard it as the only scenario in which religious actors should be involved in peacemaking. Yet, we too often try to involve religious actors only in the most obvious way in this most obvious scenario: by bringing the leaders of militant “bad actors” to the table, where they will negotiate with other elites, often very late in the day, while ignoring ways in which other religious actors potentially could hasten peacebuilding or have a positive influence on negotiations among social and political elites.

While there is much debate about religion’s role in producing the conflict in Northern Ireland, it arguably provides us with one example of a scenario in which conflict occurred along a religious fault line.⁶² The relationship between religion, violence, and peacebuilding in the Northern Ireland context was (and remains) complex. According to one typical account,

[t]he conflict was not a religious war; most religious leaders on both sides consistently opposed violence; the political views of many leaders and all of the major parties were grounded in economic and political calculations; and religious doctrine was never really at stake. Instead, religion served primarily as a marker of national identity. . . . While faith communities and their leaders contributed to the successful completion of the 1998 Belfast Agreement (commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement) that put an end to major hostilities, domestic, international, and deeper socioeconomic forces played a more decisive role.⁶³

Patrick Grant, an English professor at the University of Victoria who is a student of the conflict in Northern Ireland, where he was raised, offers a nuanced analysis of religion’s entanglement in the conflict that avoids an either/or characterization of it. On the one hand, Grant sees it as a conflict in which Catholics, as the historical minority population in Northern Ireland and historical majority in the Republic of Ireland to the south, had a “just grievance” for their mistreatment by a majority Protestant population loyal to the British government, while the Protestant majority had

⁶¹ Much of Atalia Omer’s work does just this, helping, among other things, to elevate the voices of grassroots religious actors who contest and seek to reinterpret elements of their own traditions in order to advance new visions of just peace. See, for example, Omer, “When ‘Good Religion’ is Good,” 130–31.

⁶² For a historical perspective on religious dynamics in Northern Ireland, see David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72–116.

⁶³ Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, “Northern Ireland: Religion in War and Peace,” Religion and Conflict Case Study Series (August 2013), 4, available at http://mrsleaversclass.weebly.com/uploads/2/2/9/2/22927178/northern_ireland_case_study.pdf. There are many other thoughtful analyses of the complex ways in which religion and ethnicity combine in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, such as John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins, and Francis Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Landon E. Hancock, “Narratives of Identity in the Northern Irish Troubles,” *Peace & Change* 39, no. 4 (2014), 443–67.

a “just apprehension” about Catholic Church interference with their civil liberties (for example, freedom to use contraception and to divorce).⁶⁴ On the other hand, it is a conflict in which, consistent with left-liberal readings, “England’s colonial interests in Ireland” make it misleading to portray religion as the dominant factor.⁶⁵ As Grant puts it, “history conspired to produce a situation where a complex ‘double minority’ problem has emerged, with two main opposed political groups defined by their religious identities.”⁶⁶ Despite the Good Friday Agreement and other moderating factors, such as the receding influence of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland, Grant nonetheless maintains that “old resentments have died hard, and sectarianism is alive and well in Northern Ireland today.”⁶⁷

Whatever one might think about religion’s role in producing the violence, religious actors certainly had opportunities to become involved concretely in peacemaking efforts. Some did so and made significant contributions. The highest-level leadership of the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland and the three main Protestant denominations (the Presbyterians, Church of Ireland, and Methodists) initially denied any association between religion and the Troubles.⁶⁸ They eventually acknowledged a connection and supported “extensive ecumenical initiatives and cross-community Christian agencies” that engaged in various interfaith dialogue and mediation efforts, which were complimented by some additional, “[i]ndividual efforts by clergy and religiously motivated laypeople . . . both among the paramilitary factions and between the paramilitaries and the government.”⁶⁹ Perhaps most significantly, in 1994 the Catholic priest Alec Reid and Presbyterian minister Roy Magee each played decisive roles in mediating the first ceasefire among the IRA and Unionist paramilitaries.

Some analysts, such as sociologist John Brewer and his research colleagues, give religious institutions and their leadership credit for these contributions and generally see the churches’ peacemaking efforts as substantial and underappreciated.⁷⁰ Others do not. For example, economist and sociologist Denis O’Hearn, who is from Northern Ireland and has written a widely read biography of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, says of Brewer’s perspective,

[y]es, priests often played key roles in the peace process, but I would propose that . . . [p]riests were trusted by Republicans not as priests, but as individuals. Arguably, most Republicans had little respect for most priests but a few men who happened to be priests were truly “saint-like,” in a secular sense, and won the trust of key Republicans (remember: priests were the only outsiders who could regularly visit

⁶⁴ Patrick Grant, “Northern Ireland: Religion in the Peace Process,” in Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, eds., *Religion and Peacebuilding* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 266.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Nonetheless, conflict resolution scholar Landon E. Hancock’s survey research indicates that Protestants’ and Catholics’ expectations that religion always would make a difference in social relations in Northern Ireland declined significantly after the Good Friday Agreement was signed. Landon E. Hancock, “Peace from the People: Identity Salience and the Northern Irish Peace Process,” in Timothy J. White and Martin Mansergh, eds., *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 67–68.

⁶⁸ Grant, “Northern Ireland,” 261.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 268.

⁷⁰ Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland*; John D. Brewer, David Mitchell, and Gerard Leavey, *Ex-Combatants, Religion, and Peace in Northern Ireland: The Role of Religion in Transitional Justice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

prisoners). Their usefulness as priests was that British state representatives were willing to talk to them because of their religious status but, more importantly . . . because they were considered to have moral standing in the Catholic community. Republicans pragmatically (often cynically) used this for publicity reasons while British officials and spies found in certain priests a deniable way of gaining silent entry to a community of combatants with whom they could not publicly admit to be negotiating.⁷¹

Within the paramilitary groups, the depth of genuine religious commitment among members, and the motivations behind their engagement with pro-peace coreligionists, undoubtedly varied. Still, cynicism (both within the paramilitary groups and among government officials) about the potential of religious institutions and their leaders to make genuine, distinctive contributions to peacemaking surely was one factor that conspired with many others to impose real and perceived constraints upon the churches' sense of their own agency with respect to the situation. Brewer and his colleagues also believe political actors purposefully marginalized religious actors in the peace process.⁷²

Whatever one concludes about the contributions to peacemaking by religious actors, it seems there also were missed opportunities. One of the few features of religious actors' peacemaking efforts that seems to generate something approaching a consensus view is the considerable extent to which pro-peace preaching by many Catholic and Protestant clerics outweighed decisive action that effectively advanced the peace process. There was a preponderance of what Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney call "passive," as opposed to "active," peacemaking.⁷³

Official efforts to resolve the conflict focused on reaching a power-sharing agreement among the main political parties, including those connected, however tightly or loosely, to the Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups that were responsible for most of the violence. According to Grant, despite some church efforts to promote peace and reconciliation through dialogue and mediation in local communities, the political negotiations that eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement "occurred, by and large, independently of initiatives taken by people whose main concern is religion."⁷⁴ Over the thirty-year arc of the phase of the conflict known as the Troubles, political actors in Dublin, London, and the United States ultimately did the most to mediate among the belligerents. "At a number of critical junctures in the Troubles, religious individuals provided important calls for dialogue between political parties, the British government, and militant organizations, but [they] were rarely key protagonists in the conflict or the primary leaders in the peace."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Denis O'Hearn, "Review of Ex-Combatants, Religion, and Peace in Northern Ireland: The Role of Religion in Transitional Justice, by John D. Brewer, David Mitchell, and Gerard Leavey," *Contemporary Sociology* 44, no. 2 (2015), 178–80. Brewer and his colleagues also maintain that "[t]here is an unfortunate tendency in these casual asides [about religious actors' contributions to the peace process] to isolate the charismatic few who are already accorded public recognition and ignore the unsung many." Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 7.

⁷² Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 119.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴ Grant, "Northern Ireland," 275.

⁷⁵ Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, "Northern Ireland," 6.

As Grant sees it, despite “much good will among many Christians . . . the wisdom of many church leaders has made insufficient inroads into the culture of sectarianism among the population at large.”⁷⁶ As discussed below, this may be because religious leaders engaged in relatively more passive than active peacemaking, and because the active peacemaking that did occur was not always focused on the most important problems, and was not as bold or as skillful, as it might have been. Grant speculates that the limited influence of church leaders’ declared opposition to violence and the various ecumenical activities they sponsored, which mostly remained too distant from political processes to have much effect, is attributable to two factors. One factor is the “key difference . . . between those who aspire to live by religious principles and those for whom religion is mainly a mark of group identity.”⁷⁷ Indeed, social psychologists Jeremy Ginges, Ian Hansen, and Ara Norenzayan have demonstrated empirically that there is a strong correlation between support for violence, on the one hand, and relating to one’s religion primarily as a marker of group identity, on the other hand, but they found no correlation between support for violence and a deep and genuine commitment to religious beliefs and values.⁷⁸ In the Northern Ireland context, Grant notes a

difference between liberal principles and hard-line attitudes [that] is reproduced in various ways throughout Northern Irish life and culture. It is reflected, for instance, in the fact that clergy can easily find themselves having to rein in liberal aspirations that are opposed by their congregations. In such a situation, anxieties and prejudices harbored at the grass roots can quickly rebuke church leaders who might be judged too idealistic in their approach to the gospel’s radical teachings about forgiveness and reconciliation.⁷⁹

The other, related factor to which Grant attributes the churches’ inability to make sufficient “inroads into the culture of sectarianism” is that, in reality, many rank-and-file clergy privately are among those for whom religion is embraced “mainly as a mark of group identity,” rather than as principles by which to live. Grant cites empirical evidence that around 90 percent of Catholic priests privately support nationalist parties, including a minority that supported Sinn Fein,⁸⁰ and that a “good deal of anti-Catholic sentiment persists among Protestant clergy,” with only about one third “actively working with Catholic clergy.”⁸¹ In other words, across all Christian denominations, “there are varying degrees of willingness to participate in ecumenical ventures, which often are conducted in relatively safe, non-inflammatory ways that avoid dealing with the main divisive issues.”⁸²

⁷⁶ Grant, “Northern Ireland,” 268.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁷⁸ Jeremy Ginges, Ian Hansen, and Ara Norenzayan, “Religion and Support for Suicide Attacks,” *Psychological Science* 20, no. 2 (2009), 224–30. Their studies included subjects representing six different religions (Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox Christianity; Hinduism; Islam; and Judaism) in six different countries (Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Israel, Mexico, and Russia). This important research discredits the religious belief hypothesis regarding the link between religion and conflict and suggests that “religious violence” is more attributable to the general human phenomenon of solidarity within a group that competes with other groups (as do many other types of groups), rather than to religious belief itself.

⁷⁹ Grant, “Northern Ireland,” 271.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Senior church leaders obviously faced a dilemma. There is some evidence that amplifying positive, pro-peace religious perspectives—the standard fare offered by the literature on religious peacebuilding⁸³—can contribute to perspective change, at least in the moment,⁸⁴ but it alone seems insufficient. Interfaith encounters intuitively seem to be another top priority in these situations. There certainly is evidence that positive interactions among members of opposing groups may be helpful.⁸⁵ Relatively more dovish members of groups likely self-select for ecumenical encounters, however, which may limit their value even if “the main divisive issues” are addressed in a serious and sustained way.⁸⁶ What was truly needed—much more determined, community-wide action within the churches by religious actors at all levels, starting with those that were officially espousing pro-peace values all along—might have helped advance the cause of peace, but more purposeful action also might have fractured their communities and diminished the leaders’ influence.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, a failure to accept greater risk by taking bolder action might fairly be regarded as a tacit capitulation to the notion of religion “mainly as a marker of group identity” and a factor that contributed to a festering of the conflict and the slow progress toward a fuller transformation of it.

⁸³ Emphasizing pro-peace religious resources is one of the main prescriptive contributions from the religious peacebuilding literature. For example, summarizing his approach, religious peacebuilding scholar Scott Appleby writes, “[i]n sum, the inculcation of nonviolence as a religious norm is the *sin qua non* for the internal development of religious resources to cultivate tolerance and build peace.” Ableby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 284.

⁸⁴ Zachary K. Rothschild, Abdolhossein Abdollahi, and Tom Pyszczynski, “Does Peace Have a Prayer? The Effects of Morality Salience, Compassionate Values, and Religious Fundamentalism on Hostility Toward Out-groups,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2009), 816–27.

⁸⁵ Gunnar Lemmer and Ulrich Wagner, “Can We Really Reduce Ethnic Prejudice Outside the Lab? A Meta-analysis of Direct and Indirect Contact Interventions,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 45, no. 2 (2015), 152–68; Ulrike Niens and Ed Cairns, “Conflict, Contact, and Education in Northern Ireland,” *Theory Into Practice* 44, no. 4 (2005), 337–44.

⁸⁶ Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney maintain that the ecumenists were willing to confront the main issues, but their encounters suffered from this very problem. “This was the strength of the ecumenists, they were not afraid to deal with difficult issues; their weakness was that they attracted audiences only of other ecumenists.” Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 85. One key to conflict resolution is to build what Herbert Kelman calls “coalitions across conflict lines.” This is done by maintaining a simultaneous focus on intraparty and interparty relationships and dynamics. Doves in each group must build an “uneasy coalition” with one another without losing credibility with the hawks in their own group, who they must maintain the ability to influence. Kelman, “Coalitions Across Conflict Lines,” 241–54. Early in peacebuilding efforts in an especially protracted conflict between large groups, it may suffice to begin this sort of work by thinking about each group from a “macro” perspective, as “Catholics and Protestants,” for instance, or “Israelis and Palestinians.” In my experience, however, there eventually will be a need to begin doing this sort of work with “groups within the groups”—that is, with relatively more hawkish groups within each community. This may sound counterintuitive or improbable, but most hawkish groups are not monolithic. There often are relatively more moderate, and more open and flexible, members of subgroups that generally are perceived as more ideological than other subgroups. It often becomes necessary to identify and begin working with these people, applying Kelman’s logic on a subgroup basis and/or including these “moderate hawks” in conflict resolution activities that include relatively more dovish members of both “macro” groups.

⁸⁷ Social historian of religion David Hempton, who grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, notes that the “churches sometimes have vested interests in issues that perpetuate conflict. Segregated and denominationally controlled education is an obvious example, as is Protestantism’s relationship to the Orange Order and other loyal orders with ‘Christian’ dimensions to them. Hence, church leaders are sometimes neutered in their peacebuilding ambitions because they actually benefit from structures and demographics that do not promote inclusion and reconciliation. In that sense, religious actors have constraints that are deeper than mere lack of engagement, including deep cultural characteristics that need more sophisticated historical understanding” (email communication on file with author).

What might have been done differently, in light of this extraordinarily difficult reality? It is worth asking this question, not to pass judgment or lament possible opportunities lost in Northern Ireland, but because there are numerous other conflicts today in which religion and ethnicity mix in similar ways, as Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney observe.⁸⁸ Furthermore, recent empirical research suggests that armed conflict between two groups is more likely when both their ethnicities and their religions differ.⁸⁹ One of the most valuable lessons from the Northern Ireland experience may be about the critical need for *intraparty* peacemaking work in contexts that bear some similarity to it. It appears there was very little sustained effort to address this need during the Troubles, to whatever extent there even was awareness of it.

Naming and squarely, persistently, and skillfully confronting tendencies to privilege “religion as a marker of group identity” over “religion as principles by which to live” *inside one’s own group* is among the most important things religious leaders can do in conflicts in which each group is defined by an ethnicity and a religion that differs from the other group’s ethnicity and religion. This means not only trying to engage with the combatants within one’s community, but also supporting riskier and more uncomfortable reflection, dialogue, and action among all members of the community, including noncombatants. Where contradictions exist between an espoused commitment to pro-peace values and a group’s embrace of religion as a marker of group identity, these contradictions must be teased apart. This is not to say that religion cannot or should not contribute to a positively distinctive sense of individual and group identity; it surely can and should.⁹⁰ It is simply to say that one goal of such intraparty work is to help members of a group see more clearly that they value two things—religion-as-identity and religious ideals—and to help them recognize any ways in which they are serving the former commitment that tend to undermine the latter commitment.

There is much useful research and practice know-how about how to go about this work.⁹¹ Needless to say, this sort of work inside a community can create cognitive and emotional dissonance that can feel risky and unsettling; this is necessary to some degree and, in a sense, it is the point of such work. In order for work of this nature to be accepted, be effective, and ultimately contribute to *interparty* peacemaking, however, it cannot only expose and begin to upset contradictions among competing attachments and value commitments. It also must help people find ways to revise and/or find new ways to honor all of their legitimate value commitments, including a commitment to one’s group, its heritage, security, and well-being. To borrow a line from Rilke, those supporting others in this work must help them “span the chasm between two contradictions;”⁹² they must help

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁹ Matthias Basedau, Birte Pfeiffer, and Johannes Vüllers, “Bad Religion? Religion, Collective Action, and the Onset of Armed Conflict in Developing Countries,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 60, no. 2 (2016), 226–55.

⁹⁰ Seul, “Ours is the Way of God: Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,” 556, n. 1.

⁹¹ One important approach for dealing with individual and group immunity to change due to tensions among competing value commitments comes from the research of Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, adult development psychologists who are among the leading contemporary researchers on the topic. Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2009). I discuss application of Kegan and Lahey’s research to mediation practice in Jeffrey R. Seul, “How Transformative Is Transformative Mediation?: A Constructive-Developments Assessment,” *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution* 15, no. 1 (1999).

⁹² Rainer Maria Rilke, “As Once the Winged Energy of Delight,” available at <http://www.poetry.net/poem/29640>.

build conceptual, emotional, and relational bridges that are secure on both sides of the chasm between two contradictions, as adult developmental psychologist Robert Kegan puts it.⁹³

To accomplish this in contexts like Northern Ireland, where communities divided along religious identity lines have disputes about social and economic grievances and power sharing, religious leaders may need to emphasize nonviolent social activism and peacemaking equally, doggedly insisting that justice and peace are two sides of the same coin, not just in theory, but in practice. For Catholics in Northern Ireland, perhaps this might have meant (among other possible activities) an *increased* emphasis on nonviolent social and economic justice initiatives—not only for Catholics, who have long experienced systemic social, political, and economic discrimination, but also for racial minorities, all women, all working-class people, and other groups with cross-cutting religious affiliations—complemented by and explicitly associated with new reflection (including creative theological reflection), dialogue, and other activities designed to raise awareness of any unfortunate contradictions between how some Catholics embraced religion-as-identity and the tradition's pro-peace religious ideals. The Catholic Church had long been involved in civil rights efforts, and the Troubles escalated as a result of events like the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1972, when British soldiers killed fourteen participants in a demonstration for Catholic citizens' civil rights. For Protestants, perhaps this might have meant—alongside similar intra-denominational activities designed to raise awareness of any unfortunate contradictions between how members of their groups were expressing religion-as-identity and pro-peace religious ideals they espoused—increased, coordinated intra- and interdenominational Protestant involvement in advocacy to influence public policy, both at home and nearby, with respect to the set of complex issues about which Protestants were insecure, due to their receding majority status in an “island within an island” on which they are a minority and doubts about whether their loyalty to Britain was fully reciprocal. To take just one example, the legal right to divorce, it is notable that the Catholic Church assured voters in the Republic of Ireland that they were free to vote their consciences in a 1995 referendum to legalize divorce, and that a vote in favor would not be a sin, even though the church strenuously opposed divorce.⁹⁴ Although this significant development in the Republic of Ireland occurred only three years before the Good Friday Agreement, the movement to alter the divorce law began many years earlier. In England and Wales, where the Catholic hierarchy had condemned the IRA as far back as the time of the 1939 Coventry bombings, divorce laws had been liberalizing since 1857. In other words, among the three territories implicated in the conflict—Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Britain—there seem to have been some counterintuitive, cross-cutting alignments among political and religious actors that were little appreciated as potential assets for peacebuilding. Perhaps better use might have been made of these alignments by religious actors, however thin some of them may have been, or perhaps more “peace assets”⁹⁵ on this issue and others existed throughout the course of the conflict than most people enmeshed in its polarizing vortex managed to see. Perhaps Catholic Church leaders in all three

⁹³ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 37.

⁹⁴ James F. Clarity, “Premier Urges Irish to Vote for Legalizing of Divorce,” *New York Times* (November 20, 1995), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/20/world/premier-urges-irish-to-vote-for-legalizing-of-divorce.html?pagewanted=2&src=pm>.

⁹⁵ For discussions of how peacemaking work can (and must) start with an assessment of existing resources and opportunities and wise decisions about use of them, see Luc Reyckler, “Peace Architecture,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9, no. 1 (2002); Peter Coleman, *The Five Percent: Finding Solutions to Seemingly Impossible Conflicts* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011); Rob Ricigliano, *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peacebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2015).

places might have agreed to affirm simultaneously, at an earlier point in time, the right of citizens to enact civil divorce laws, despite the church’s opposition to divorce, to provide some small, symbolic measure of reassurance to Protestants in Northern Ireland. At any rate, conflicts like Northern Ireland experienced present religious leaders with an opportunity to advocate and act forcefully, inside and outside their institutions, for nonviolence *and* for justice. Intraparty work that endeavors to bridge, and simultaneously elevate, pro-peace religious ideals and positive expressions of religion-as-identity requires equal attention to both.

One easily can marshal reasons why these sorts of efforts should be considered fanciful and unlikely to succeed: politically sensitive divisions within the Catholic Church hierarchy; the diverse temperaments of the various Protestant churches and the comparative lack of hierarchical authority structures within some of them; fears of accelerating declines in churchgoing; ambivalence among both politicians and religious leaders about mixing religion and politics; cynicism about religious actors’ ability to contribute to peacemaking; and so forth. Still, the Troubles persisted for thirty years, and the different sorts of contributions to peacemaking the churches *did* endeavor to make during this time were, by most accounts, suboptimal. Research conducted by John Brewer and his colleagues, who are the most systematic, and among the most appreciative, analysts of religious actors’ contributions to peacemaking in Northern Ireland, seems to confirm this unmet need for intraparty peacemaking work. Among their long list of the churches’ failures and missed opportunities, over half (those reproduced here) reveal the need for intraparty work:

- The churches have often reflected and not challenged a highly sectarian community, making them indistinguishable from society at large.
- At their worst, churches amplified the fears of the community and did not present a theology of reconciliation and peacebuilding as a normal part of what it means to be a Christian.
- Lack of analysis/risk-taking amongst church leaders.
- There were rarely, if ever, sizeable clusters engaged in active peace work, or of the kind that people could be recruited to as a movement for change in everyday life.
- A vision of the purpose of religion that could transcend political division was made secondary to pastoral care to one’s tribe.
- Denial, passivity, by-standing, sometimes as a result of fear of engagement.
- Focus on individual piety and internal church politics at the expense of underemphasizing sectarianism, neglecting local social issues and forging senses of identity that were inclusive.
- Church structures were not adapted to the requirements of the sociopolitical crisis.
- Churches did not equip clergy and church members to respond to the situation.
- Engaging in high-level or political elite—and elitist—activities not grassroots activism.
- Not challenging congregations to act beyond their self-interest or working with their congregations to encourage personal commitments to peacemaking.
- No development of a radical movement for peace.
- Equating the conflict with broken relationships alone led to misdiagnosing the problem, so interchurch worship was used far too often as a bandage on conflicts that were far deeper than can be resolved through ecumenism.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 173–74.

Brewer and his colleagues ultimately conclude that

[w]hat was missing therefore was leadership of a peace movement inside the churches that could be projected outwards into society generally. . . . Emphasizing only the relational dimensions of the conflict, ecumenical worship services were overstated as potential peacemaking solutions by bringing (some) people together. While “proper relationships” are important to positive peace, the conflict was also about social injustice, economic disparity, and unequal life chances (for working-class Protestants as much as Catholics). Social transformation is part of the solution as much as relational togetherness. Positive peace, as far as the churches were concerned, would have involved them messing about in local communities with hands dirty from practicing social witness. Their neglect of this dimension goes hand in hand with church leaders avoiding grass-roots activism in preference for high-level and elite engagements.⁹⁷

This sort of peace movement inside the churches could not have commenced without first engaging in effective intraparty work of the sort described above. Amplifying pro-peace values within Christianity—a primary, standard prescription of most religious peacebuilding scholars and practitioners—alone was not enough. People generally lack genuine will to change, and to promote change, when they are stuck between two contradictions. Peaceful change requires skillful confrontation and resolution of such contradictions not just between groups, but also within them.

The Northern Ireland case tests the statist and secularist presumptions in contemporary international relations and conflict resolution theory. In retrospect, perhaps the most important peacemaking work to be done could not have been done by state actors working solely with political and social elites. At least initially, perhaps the most important work that could have been done, or at least one extraordinarily important type of work that could have been done, was intraparty peacebuilding within religious communities, coupled with even more nonviolent social activism. If this sort of peace-and-justice-minded work had been done and succeeded in Northern Ireland, perhaps the churches would have had more institutional credibility with the combatants, the political parties, and the governments, ultimately enabling them to play a more decisive role, as happened in South Africa, where “progressive churches . . . earned considerable legitimacy from their anti-apartheid activities that carried over into acceptance of their mediating role (as well as into their post-conflict activities).”⁹⁸

Scenario 2: Religion Influences Key Issues in the Conflict

Sometimes religion heavily influences one or more key issues in a conflict, whatever people think about the character of the conflict overall. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a leading current example of this scenario. The conflict is waged on and over territory that is historically and spiritually significant to all three Abrahamic religions, and the dominant eschatological perspectives in Judaism and Islam, grounded in each tradition’s primary texts, revolve to a great extent around control of and life on this land. Nonetheless, many inside and outside the region regard the conflict primarily as a political struggle, even when the significance of its religious

⁹⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 200.

dimension is acknowledged. The perspective of historians Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner, as expressed in the few pages focused on religion in their widely read history of the broader Arab–Israeli conflict, is typical:

Much of the Arab–Israeli conflict is secular, involving issues of territory, security, and ethnic and cultural differences. In many respects, the sources of tension are nonreligious, resembling those of any other conflict, but religious identification is a central element in the conflict and adds an extra dimension Despite the fact that only a minority of Arabs and Jews are strictly observant religiously, religion has been, and continues to be, a focal point for the peoples involved in this conflict.⁹⁹

While this rather tepid assessment of the influence of religion on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict likely is shared by most people in the West, there arguably is a growing recognition of specific ways in which religion affects prospects for resolution of the conflict.

The Oslo Accords left open a handful of issues for later resolution, including the legal status of Jerusalem, a city divided into eastern and western parts. Israel has controlled both since capturing East Jerusalem from the Palestinians in the 1967 Six-Day War, though its claim to sovereignty over East Jerusalem has never been accepted by the international community, let alone the Palestinians. The Old City of Jerusalem is situated in at the border of the eastern and western parts of greater Jerusalem, and within it lies the site known to Jews as *Har HaBáyit* (Mount of My (God’s) House, aka Temple Mount, in English) and to Muslims as *al-Haram al-Sharīf* (Noble Sanctuary in English). This is where the First Temple and Second Temple stood and where, according to Jewish prophecy, the Third Temple will be situated, making it the holiest ground in Judaism. It is the third holiest site in Islam, the location of the al-Aqsa Mosque, where the Prophet Muhammad stopped to lead other prophets in prayer on his Night Journey, before he ascended from the nearby Dome of the Rock through the heavens and met and spoke with God.

The status of Jerusalem, which both Israel and the Palestinians want as their capital, is considered by many to be the most challenging issue in the conflict, yet there is an especially challenging issue within this issue: the claims of religious Jews and Muslims, not only in the region, but the world over, to the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary and the areas surrounding it. Indeed, many blame this issue-within-an-issue for the collapse of the Camp David peace process, the post-*Oslo* process that came closest to producing a resolution of the complete set of so-called final status issues. As political scientist Ron Hassner observes,

[t]he failure of Israelis and Palestinians to agree on the status of the sacred site in Jerusalem was by most accounts a principal cause, if not the primary cause, for the failure of the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations in Camp David in July 2000. Although records of what precisely happened at Camp David remain contentious, there is broad consensus among participants and analysts on the Israeli side about the singular importance of this issue in preventing agreement at Camp David.¹⁰⁰

Hassner continues:

⁹⁹ Ian J. Bickerton and Carla L. Klausner, *A History of the Arab–Israeli Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6.

¹⁰⁰ Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 80.

Both parties seem to have assumed that the religious dimensions of the dispute could be ignored. As a result, neither party had prepared seriously for the possibility that the Temple Mount issue would come to stand at the heart of the negotiations. . . . Insofar as religious issues were discussed in preparations for the conference, they were treated as standard political problems, to be addressed by conventional political tools. Jerusalem was handled as a demographic, administrative, municipal, and legal problem, not as a religious problem. . . . A small number of meetings dealt with the religious issue and few religious leaders participated in those. . . . The failure to incorporate religious actors and experts in preparing for the negotiations had two direct consequences: both parties were caught off guard by the demands concerning sacred space raised by their opponents, and the religious leaders excluded from the process succeeded in hampering progress from without.¹⁰¹

Hassner's close study of the Camp David process and its aftermath led him to conclude that "any solution to the Temple Mount dispute that seeks to separate political from religious sovereignty seems divorced from reality."¹⁰²

The largely nonreligious negotiating teams at Camp David, which reportedly considered scores of option sets for resolving the key issues at play in the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary dispute (control, access, who may worship and pray, security, etc.), apparently discounted the fact that significant numbers of Jews and Muslims assert that their claims to the holy site are nonnegotiable and did little to probe and peel back the layers beneath these assertions, trying to understand, so that they could try to address, the different ways in which religious actors make meaning regarding the site. For any future peace process to succeed, the nuances of religious perspectives and claims regarding the site and its surroundings must be given careful consideration, and an eventual resolution of this aspect of the conflict must align with these perspectives and claims, or versions of them that have been altered through patient, joint dialogue and reflection involving key religious stakeholders. Finding an acceptable compromise may seem impossible to some, since the most ardent religious voices say there can be no negotiation over the site and, on the surface, their perspectives and claims seem mutually exclusive.¹⁰³ Without a serious effort to test this limiting assumption, however, we know from experience that negotiations are unlikely to be fruitful.

Religious actors must be deeply involved in future efforts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.¹⁰⁴ This is especially true in light of the Jewish religious right's growing influence in Israeli politics in recent years, as well as recent developments in the Muslim world (for example, the Arab uprisings and Turkish President Erdoğan's new focus on Jerusalem). The principal religious actors

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 81–82.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰³ Hillel Cohen, "The Temple Mount/al-Aqsa in Zionist and Palestinian National Consciousness: A Comparative View," *Israel Studies Review* 32, no. 1 (2017), 1–19, available at <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/israel-studies-review/32/1/isr320102.xml>.

¹⁰⁴ This is likely true for other final status issues, such as questions about one versus two states, borders, settlements, and the Palestinian right of return, not just for the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary dispute. Jewish and Muslim principles and prophecies also bear upon other issues, so political actors would be wise to involve religious actors in discussions on these issues, as well.

involved should be from the Israeli Jewish and Israeli and Palestinian Muslim communities, but a concerted effort also should be made to consult and engage with influential Muslims throughout the region, and even with Jews and Muslims globally. Major holy places have transnational significance.¹⁰⁵ Because the site also is significant to Christians in the region and worldwide, some (lesser) level of engagement with Christians may be advisable at some point in the process.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in the Camp David era, leaders of mainstream Christian traditions defeated a United States proposal to divide Old Jerusalem equally among the Jews and Muslims.¹⁰⁷ There are a number of ongoing interfaith dialogue efforts that touch upon the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary dispute, including periodic discussions among some high-level Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious leaders associated with the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Lands and a dialogue initiative sponsored by Search for Common Ground. However, the greatest promise may lie in an effort to engage politically influential religious actors representing a range of perspectives, including conservative religious nationalists, in extended Track II activities that surface and explore competing perspectives and claims in-depth, in hope of positively influencing theological discourse within the Jewish and Muslim communities regarding the conflict and possibilities for its resolution, developing practical options that work within the communities’ respective worldviews and the constraints they impose, and, of critical importance, linking outputs of the process to political negotiations.

Scenario 3: Religious Actors Have a Special Status and/or Special Resources

Sometimes religious actors have a special status, or possess material or symbolic resources, that enable them to contribute to peace and national dialogue processes as stakeholder-participants in ways that are different than the ways in which other nongovernmental actors can contribute.

In Nepal, for example, religious actors did not play a significant role in the peace process that ended the country’s civil war in 2006, but it is possible they could play a role in dislodging the stuck transitional justice and reconciliation process, which is one of the major reasons Nepal’s political culture has remained volatile and largely unproductive since the war’s end. Although a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons were established in early 2015, with over 58,000 cases now pending before the former and nearly 3,000 pending before the latter, there is little public confidence in these commissions of inquiry, and neither has begun investigations into any of the complaints registered with it. Prominent voices within the international human rights community, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and several major NGOs, regard the laws establishing the commissions as flawed, in part because they permit the commissions to grant amnesty for some crimes these organizations consider ineligible for amnesty under international law. Nepali human rights advocates versed in international legal norms and aligned with these external actors, as well as Nepal’s own Supreme Court, agree. As some prominent persons in government are former military or Maoist rebel leaders, and therefore potential targets of prosecution, they and other

¹⁰⁵ Sandal and Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Regarding the most charged Christian attachments and their implications, see Carlo Aldrovandi, *Apocalyptic Movements in Contemporary Politics: Christian and Jewish Zionism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, 83.

officials who are politically aligned with them have resisted amending the laws to fully meet the demands of human rights advocates.¹⁰⁸

There also are fundamental disagreements within Nepal about the relative degrees to which largely Western notions of retributive justice, which emphasize prosecution and punishment, and notions of restorative justice and reconciliation should be emphasized. Nepali and international human rights advocates have tended to see those on the restorative justice side of this debate mainly as advocates for impunity, with the possibility of amnesty justified only “ostensibly for the purpose of ‘reconciliation.’”¹⁰⁹ Current international law regarding the permissibility of amnesties arguably is more fluid and permissive than many human rights advocates wish to acknowledge.¹¹⁰ The end of each war presents a new opportunity to push global legal norms regarding amnesty and other matters in one direction or another, since international law evolves, in large part, through patterns of state practice. Though their concerns in Nepal are genuine, more is at stake in Nepal for the international human rights community than what ultimately happens there.

Justice and reconciliation are concepts that always must be brought to ground in local context. While some acts of violence and other injustices that occurred during Nepal’s civil war were perpetrated or ordered by top commanders and harmed many people at once (such as bombings) or many people cumulatively over time (for example, enforced disappearances and torture in prisons), a far greater number involved (often less senior) individual perpetrators and individual victims, and they occurred within specific communities. In a post-war context in which tens of thousands of alleged war crimes and human rights abuses have occurred, no criminal justice system can mount such a large number of investigations and potential prosecutions. Even if the people of Nepal ultimately were to embrace a completely retributive model of transitional justice, practical realities would require it to process less serious alleged crimes and/or crimes alleged to have been committed by less senior offenders in some more expedient manner. Beyond such practical concerns, many people of goodwill in Nepal no doubt have different conceptions of justice that are not wholly about retribution, and many also wish to promote individual and collective reconciliation, whatever notions of justice they may embrace. For some who believe prosecutions should occur, prosecutions alone may seem the surest path to healing personal and social wounds, but others likely see prosecutions as just one piece of the puzzle.

The vast majority of religious people in Nepal—over 80 percent—identify as Hindu. About half of the remaining 20 percent identifies as Buddhist, and the rest are affiliated with one of a half dozen other traditions, including Islam and Christianity. These demographics obscure a more diverse religious landscape. The Hindu world obviously is itself extremely diverse and only loosely affiliated; within the large Hindu contingent in Nepal there are many who practice syncretic blends of Hinduism and Buddhism; and, because Nepal’s roughly twenty-seven million citizens are ethnically diverse and highly distributed, with the vast majority of people living in small villages spread across the country, there is significant local variation in belief and practice within a given religious tradition.

¹⁰⁸ See generally International Commission of Jurists, *Nepal’s Transitional Justice Process: A Discussion Paper* (August 2017) (on file with author).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁰ University of Ulster Transitional Justice Institute, *Belfast Guidelines on Amnesty and Accountability* (2013), available at <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/institutes/transitional-justice-institute/research/current-projects/belfast-guidelines-on-amnesty-and-accountability>.

Nepali peacemakers and human rights advocates with whom I have worked say that many people throughout Nepal wish to promote individual and collective healing, and yet, at present, there is no consensus about how to do so. A primary obstacle, they report, is the lack even of a vaguely shared sense of what reconciliation is, and of how it is achieved, that could operate across the many distinct regional and cultural territories within Nepal. There is no single religious figure in Nepal who could play the role in its transitional justice process that Desmond Tutu played in South Africa, in part because there is no adequately shared normative backdrop regarding “reconciliation” that could produce a single person capable of playing such a role. While some influential individuals’ desire for impunity surely is hindering transitional justice initiatives at a political level, it also is true that a Western-influenced, unitary, and “top down” conception of justice is vying with a patchwork of other norms within a state that has little nationwide experience or “normative cohesion” with respect to these sorts of matters.

Furthermore, Nepal’s new constitution, adopted in 2015, declared the country to be a secular state, in recognition of Nepal’s religious diversity and to reassure religious minorities wary of dominance by majority Hindu elites. “Perhaps unsurprisingly within Hindu conservative circles ‘secularization’ has been interpreted as an attack on Nepal’s rich Hindu history and culture, and more extremist Hindu elements have resorted to violence to protest” the fact that Hinduism is no longer the state religion.¹¹¹ Although some religious actors in Nepal have attempted to become more assertive in national-level politics, and some “politicians are increasingly trying to gain support by courting specific ethnic or religious groupings,” survey research indicates that “participation in politics by overtly religious actors [is] consistently viewed as a negative development by religious groups and leaders, and there [is] a firm belief that religious leaders lost legitimacy if they became engaged in political activities.”¹¹² While the role of religion in politics at the national level is a volatile issue, however, “it is also apparent that many Nepalese people continue to believe that religious leaders retain the authority and capacity to assist in peacebuilding,” including “facilitating reconciliation and reintegration of combatants particularly at a grassroots level.”¹¹³

Nepal ultimately must find its own balance between the expectations of the international human rights community for broad prosecutions and diverse, local conceptions of justice and reconciliation, and also between national-level justice and reconciliation efforts and local efforts. While the authority and resources of religious leaders operating in villages are variable and should not be idealized, this is a domain in which they conceivably could collaborate in a semi-coordinated manner to contribute to Nepal’s post-conflict reconstruction process as stakeholder-participants, with a national-level mandate to do so, perhaps in conjunction with the Local Peace Committees that were established on the lead-up to the 2006 peace accord. As religious peacebuilding scholars Mark Owen and Anna King have observed,

John Paul Lederach’s assertion that the building of relationships both vertically and horizontally is fundamental to sustainable and effective peacebuilding is now widely acknowledged, and it is often assumed that religions have inherent structures and

¹¹¹ Mark Owen and Anna King, *Religious Peacebuilding and Development in Nepal*, 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

networks that can be drawn on to enhance peacebuilding initiatives. In the context of Nepal these assumptions are problematic. In a society as traditionally horizontally stratified as Nepal building vertical relationships represent [sic] significant cultural and religious challenges. . . . Furthermore given the negative associations with hierarchical domination and suppression of minority groups in Nepal it would be wrong to assume that association with national level organizations will automatically enhance peacebuilding work at district and local level, and linkages must be made with care and consideration to ensure it does not have an unforeseen detrimental impact. . . . However, a suitable and context sensitive network, through which knowledge, experience and resources on religious peacebuilding could be collected and disseminated, would prove invaluable.¹¹⁴

Village and regional religious actors in Nepal have the potential to articulate, develop, and implement context-specific principles and processes of justice and reconciliation that are accepted by their communities, in order to help address the thousands of complaints pending before the commission of inquiry that have no realistic prospect of ever being processed through the state criminal justice system, however the debate regarding parameters for grants of amnesty eventually may be resolved.

Another potential situation in which religious actors have a special status that may enable them to make a distinctive contribution to peace and national dialogue processes as stakeholder-participants is when a national government is perceived by large numbers of people to be corrupt or otherwise dysfunctional and the religious sector is perceived to be comparatively credible and stable. One current conflict context that may fit this description is South Sudan. The newest internationally recognized state, South Sudan was established in 2011 to help resolve a twenty-two-year civil war between the predominantly Muslim population in the north of Sudan and the predominantly Christian population in the south. While there are still tensions between the now-smaller Sudan and the new South Sudan, the latter has itself been embroiled in a complex civil war since 2013, and it is consistently ranked as the world's most fragile state.¹¹⁵

One fault line in the conflict is between forces loyal to president Salva Kiir, a member of the Dinka ethnic group, and his former rival, Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer who initially served as vice president. The civil war commenced in December 2013, less than a year after Machar was fired for publicly criticizing Kiir. A fragile peace accord was reached in August 2015, but Kiir soon stoked a conflict with another major ethnic group, the Equatorians, by redrawing the country's internal territorial boundaries to their perceived detriment. There are, in fact, over sixty different ethnic groups in South Sudan, with multiple, cross-cutting tensions among them. Every conceivable horror short of genocide—starvation, large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, sexual violence, rampant hate speech, torching of homes, abductions, extrajudicial killings and disappearances, and more—is occurring in South Sudan as the conflict escalates and spreads. The United Nations has warned of an imminent risk of genocide, if it even can be said that genocide has not yet begun (2016).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ See The Fund for Peace, "Fragile States Index," <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/>.

¹¹⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Statement by Yasmin Sooka, Chair of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan at the 26th Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council* (December 14, 2016), available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21028&LangID=E>.

Against this desperate backdrop, the church, “usually meaning the Christian community writ large, is repeatedly identified as the key institution charged with bringing about peace.”¹¹⁷ While it is difficult to compile accurate data in such an unstable environment, the most recent, reliable estimates indicate that over 60 percent of the people of South Sudan identify as Christian (mostly Roman Catholic and Anglican/Episcopal), nearly 33 percent practice an African traditional religion, and the small remainder are Muslim or practice another religion.¹¹⁸ Christian churches are “the institutions with the most legitimacy within a country where tribal conflict translates to unmitigated violence.”¹¹⁹

The reason for the church’s reputation as a prospective peace maker is its persistent presence during decades of conflict where millions of Sudanese, now South Sudanese, had been displaced. Even as thousands of Sudanese, mostly Christians, were uprooted, the church served as their only safety net and a kind of proxy government since there was no recognizable government or any other significant public or civil society institution to offer support. . . . The church was a pervasive influence in the lives of South Sudanese and thus is viewed today as the only credible institution available to them as the country submerged in civil warfare. A daunting challenge is whether the church has the stamina, credibility and the understanding needed to restore peace to a nation that is divided by intense tribalism. The first challenge seems to be embracing a Christian identity by those who are in conflict as they assert and protect their tribal identity. One repeatedly wonders why the Christian narrative of peacemaking and forgiveness has been so neglected in a country which boasts of its adherence to Christian teaching. . . . Questions about how the church delivers its message, and how its hearers are held accountable for accepting it are all worthy of serious examination.¹²⁰

It is not yet clear what role the Christian churches can and should play in peacebuilding in South Sudan, but they are being called upon to play a role. Some senior clerics there are beginning to take this call seriously. The United States Institute of Peace recently initiated a project to analyze the role religious actors and institutions can play in peacebuilding.¹²¹

One possible mode in which the churches potentially could contribute to peacebuilding, of course, is playing a mediating or convening role. One of the trends in the peacebuilding field that has developed alongside the national dialogue paradigm is the notion of “inside mediators”: trusted persons from inside the conflict context who serve as the main stewards of a peace process, often with outside advisory and technical support.¹²² In essence, stakeholder-participants in a peace

¹¹⁷ Richard Parkins, *Letter regarding the role of churches in peacemaking in South Sudan*, written on behalf of the American Friends of the Episcopal Church of the Sudans (September 25, 2017), 1 (on file with author).

¹¹⁸ See http://globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/south-sudan#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2015.

¹¹⁹ Parkins, *Letter*, 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ United States Institute of Peace, *Analyzing the Role of Religious Actors and Institutions in Conflict and Peacebuilding in South Sudan: Project Concept Note* (September 14, 2017) (on file with author).

¹²² *National Dialogue Handbook*, 29.

process function as facilitators for the benefit of all other stakeholder-participants. The possibility of religious leaders playing this role in South Sudan should, and undoubtedly will, be considered. There is, however, a long history in the Sudanese conflicts of mediation support provided by foreign governments, including the United States and a consortium of African nations known as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The IGAD currently is internally divided and conflicted, and some of its members are at odds with the United States regarding the arms embargo it wants the United Nations Security Council to impose upon South Sudan. It presently is unclear whether the IGAD or the United States will claim a prerogative to function as mediator—and, if so, whether either would prove capable of doing so—just as it is unclear whether the churches could serve that function independently of, or in partnership with, these or other external mediator candidates. Even if the churches are unable to serve in an inside mediation role, however, they likely must, at a minimum, become heavily involved in any emerging peace process and the development and implementation of post-conflict institutions, in light of their greater credibility relative to the leading political figures and the poor record of producing stable political agreements without their participation.

Conclusion

The recent trend toward greater inclusion of unofficial stakeholders in peace and national dialogue processes is one of the most important developments in contemporary peacebuilding practice. Recognition that religious actors are among those who should be included as stakeholder-participants in these processes also is important, though it may not be optimal in a given context to involve religious actors in precisely the same way others are involved. In contexts where religion provides a key fault line along which conflict occurs, religion influences key issues in the conflict, or religious actors have a special status and/or special resources that can contribute to resolution of the conflict or dimensions of it, those involved in shaping conflict resolution processes should think carefully and creatively about how best to involve religious actors, rather than simply defaulting to modes of inclusion used with respect to “civil society” actors generally. In these and other situations, we should seek context-appropriate ways to optimize the contributions religious actors can make as stakeholder-participants in peace and national dialogue processes.

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