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The Role of Religions in Preventing World Wars

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Abstract

This text examines the complex and ambivalent role of religion in historical and contemporary global conflicts, particularly focusing on the mechanisms through which religions have influenced the prevention of world wars and promoted peace. The global landscape features over 4,500 religions, with Christianity and Islam as the largest. Religions shape moral norms, communal behavior, and both positive and negative social outcomes. While religion is often linked with violence, the relationship is multifaceted. Statistical analyses show religious conflicts may initially appear more intense, but deeper integration of the religious context often diminishes this correlation. Religion can be both a divider and connector in conflicts. Religious leaders and institutions are recognized as "religious diplomats," offering spirituality-based mediation and reconciliation. The text explores interreligious dialogue (IRD) as a transformative tool, emphasizing pluralism, meaningful conversations, restorative justice, and the importance of listening. Examples include

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cooperation after the 2011 tsunami in Japan and ecumenical initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Clergy and lay believers can mitigate conflict and aid reconciliation. Their spiritual authority, ability to mobilize, and unique resources (prayer, forgiveness, scriptural legitimacy) are highlighted, though their impact is difficult to quantify. Faith-based diplomacy is presented as a distinct field, emphasizing the necessity of integrating political and theological approaches. The document acknowledges issues such as the difficulty of measuring religious peacebuilding, the slow pace of change, and the influence of populism, nationalism, and fundamentalism.

Keywords

Religion, War, Peace.

Introduction

Today, there are numerous religions, more than 4500 in some estimates, some of which are stronger and some less influential in society. Dominant religions include Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. The largest number of members in the group of religions is Christianity (31% of the world's population), followed by the number of members of Islam (23%), no denomination (16%), Hinduism (15%) Buddhism (7%), while the number of members of Judaism is 0.2% of the world's population. The above religions are based on the distinction between religious norms, rules, beliefs, between good and evil, and on the basis of people's behavior and moral provisions.

Religion has always been at the center of many sociologists who have dealt with its definition and its impact on society, and this has led to two basic sociological approaches to religion, the substantive approach and the functionalist approach. The substantive approach seeks to find a common and distinctive element of all religions, that is, it finds everything that religion is, which no other social phenomenon can contain – namely, people's belief in supernatural beings and gaining a sense of power associated with this supernatural being. It is believed that the substantive approach to religion is characteristic of Western societies because it interprets the elements of religion from a dominantly Christian perspective, while it is difficult to conceptualize the same for contemporary Eastern societies (for religions such as Buddhism).

The functionalist approach studies the functions of religion in society (how it affects individuals, social groups) which are more significant in analyzing the content of religious beliefs and practices than the consequences. Religious consequences are defined beneficial and/or harmful to humans and society, so this approach focuses on

understanding religious events, which result in the interference of politics with religion, the interference of religion with interpersonal relationships, the influence of religion on life views, etc.

It is essential to understand what we mean by religion. There are many approaches and aspects of religion, but for the broader approach, religion can be seen as a set of teachings and holy scripts; religious institutions and clergy; and a set of customs, rites, and beliefs. These three do not necessarily match each other. The pan-European comparative research project the European Values Survey defines religion in five elements: religious belief; religiosity; ecclesial dimension; ritual dimension; and public role of the Church.

Religion and religious beliefs have a positive and negative impact on the entire society. Its goal is to create something good, however, its potential negativity arises from human actions due to strong beliefs "that God wants it that way", that is, they do things "in the name of God". It is believed that every religion preaches goodness, harmonious life among people, respect, unity, love, but there are always groups that do the opposite of the above with the aim of emphasizing their religion as more valuable, and then spread hatred, kill, create discord and violence, and as a justification they find disagreement in religious views that cause religious conflicts, often in the form of wars in which the innocent and powerless suffer.

Religion can be misused in society, and the main cause is cited as negative socio-political influences, which refers to the interference of religious communities in politics and vice versa, especially in countries where there is unrest, wars, conflicts and discrimination against other religious minorities. Religion and religious beliefs also have an impact on society in terms of morality, affecting our views on the world, the upbringing of children in religious families, health, and more. Positive influences relate to good behavior, appreciation of

positive moral values, can have a positive impact on upbringing in families and again in accordance with moral values and recognition of good and evil, or on our health, as believers must adhere to religious rules relating to prohibitions on the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, maintaining hygiene, consuming certain foods or even prohibiting certain food products, especially during holy holidays.

1. Historical Context of Religion and Warfare

Religion has been recognised as a potent tool of peacebuilding efforts by many international peacebuilding organisations. The reason for it is simply understood as more than 80 per cent of the world's population believe in some supernatural being, i.e., they describe themselves as religious (Cox & Alhaji, 2017, p. 1). This self-identification is connected to religious creeds, ideas, institutions, and actors who furthermore shaped societies in history and continue to shape them today. History records multiple religious calls for wars and violence, as "cohesion and identity in contemporary conflict tend to form within increasingly narrower lines than those that encompass national citizenship" (Lederach, 1998, p. 13). Instead of legitimising violent conflicts and atrocities, religion has an ambivalent role as it may offer a tremendously vital resource for peacebuilding. It is indeed "typical in all major systems of religious belief that a specific ethical doctrine on the relationship with the other explicitly or implicitly evolves in relation to values like peace, justice, mercy and forgiveness" (Bokern et al., 2009, p. 1).

In many historical conflicts, religion has been seen as a marker, contributor, or factor of violent conflict. The significance of religious identification has been equally accentuated. However, there is a small number of conflict analysis that go deeper by analysing how religion matters in a given conflict and integrating specific considerations, challenges, and questions pertaining to religion. As a

statistical analysis of 278 interstate and intrastate territorial conflicts between 1946 and 2001 shows, “conflicts involving religion are significantly more intense than other types of conflicts (but) when the relevance of religion to the conflict is incorporated to address the limits of the identity-oriented definition of a religious conflict. the relationship between the involvement of religion and conflict intensity weakens below an accepted level of significance” (Pearce, 2005, p. 349). Pearce explains how religious identity is incorporated for political aims in conflicts, although religious dogmas differ in comparison to the religious narrative in conflicts. International religious organisations and peace institutes have developed such conflict analysis. However, almost every conflict in the world is so specific that generalisation may not only be void of any help, it may even hinder the peacebuilding process. A potent tool for analysing religion’s role in the conflict is proposed by Owen Frazer and Richard Friedli from the Center for Security Studies (CSS) in Zürich (Frazer & Friedli, 2015). They propose to determine whether a particular role of religion in a society is seen through religion as a community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, or as discourse and ask critical questions where they determine whether religion acts as a divider or connector in the peacebuilding process.

While the official state supports at least passive secularism, this study considers contemporary time and space as post-secular. Post-secular is “the factual blurring of the boundary between the secular and the religious وincludes a fundamental dimension of power that has often been neglected in recent scholarship (with the) emergence of new forms of community, where the issue is not just the inclusion of the other, but a more complex set of questions concerning the secular and religious sources of authority, legitimacy, and power” (Mavelli & Petito, 2014, p.7).

2. The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peace

Peacebuilding is a holistic approach to positive peace, using many tools and techniques of practitioners in the field. Political science and peace studies stress the differences between conflict management, conflict settlement, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. Conflict management is a limitation, mitigation, and containment of conflict and is ineffective for the durable elimination of causes of conflict. Conflict settlement concerns an agreement reached by the conflicting parties through negotiations, compromises, and concessions from both sides.

Conflict resolution is more comprehensive and mutual problem-solving. The overall peacebuilding process is called conflict transformation, as it transforms conflict from a violent and destructive one to a positive change. Connecting forces are increasingly visible in this process, while dividing forces decline. Here, the study follows the understanding of John Paul Lederach (2003), who sees conflict transformation as the result of conflict resolution. However, there is still a definitional debate over what these terms mean in the field. This study does not recognise clerics or religious institutions per se as drivers of conflict resolution and transformation, but more as a potential contribution to a positive change. They are seen, according to William Ury's (1981) third side preventing role as providers, teachers, and bridge-builders and resolving the role of healer and sometimes mediator. Interchangeably, the study calls these clerics also religious diplomats, but they do differ from Track I diplomacy, which includes top leaders from the UN, international and regional organisations, governments, and international financial institutions; they are middle-level leaders in Track II diplomacy that includes religious institutions as well as international NGOs, academics and private business. Their role is to hold good offices and offer

conciliation, pure mediation, and problem-solving. However, they can also affect the processes in Track III or the grassroots, where common ground and local initiatives are to be found. Of course, none of these processes is void of political organisation. Many political parties and institutions strictly follow the separation of religion and state, and seldom do they have a formal framework for cooperation. On the level of the European Union, for instance, the European People's Party is "the only political force on the stage of European politics that has a collective sensibility for the religious dimension of society and that has thus developed an official approach for engaging dialogue with religious actors" (Bokern et al., 2009, p. 25), while somewhat the same position of religious dimension may be found in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which is an intergovernmental organisation of Islamic states. John Paul Lederach (1998) distinguishes three levels of leadership, which are important for the peace process. On the first level is top leadership, comprised of military, political and religious leaders with high visibility. The focus here is on high-level negotiations led by the highly visible and often single mediator. Track I diplomacy is a formal process that should end in a framework agreement and roadmap for understanding between conflicting parties. This top-down approach is often employed when a ceasefire emerges and when negative peace is reached. The second level is middle-range leadership with leaders respected in various sectors, ethnic and religious leaders, academics and intellectuals, humanitarian leaders, and non-governmental organisations, all of them instrumental for problem-solving workshops (often including facilitation and third-party consultation), training in conflict resolution (which broadens internal skills for reflection on the conflict, dealing with psychological dimension and alternative solutions for conflict resolution), peace commissions and insider-partial teams. They form Track II diplomacy

that provides support and safety and generates ideas for compromises in a vast area of activities with Track I, including interim agreement, unilateral steps for trust-building, comprehensive agreement, implications and follow-ups, decision-making rules and procedures, monitoring mechanisms, and sanctions, but foremost these are actors who have authority to discuss and engage in transitional justice, dealing with the past and reconciliation, and humanitarian issues. The third level is grassroots leadership, i.e., local leaders, leaders of indigenous NGOs, and community developers. They empower the civil society, form local peace commissions, make grassroots training, reduce prejudice, do psychosocial work and deal with post-war trauma. In novel peace studies development, between Track I and Track II, there is Track 1.5, where a focused relationship between the two levels occurs. For the whole system to be two-tyre successful top-down and bottoms-up interplay, there should be a compromise between Track II and Track III with Track I practitioners. Lederach distinguishes top religious leaders and religious practitioners, whereby the former is in Track/Level I and the latter in Track/Level II. Religious leaders have visibility and profile, and "by virtue of their high public office, these leaders are generally locked into positions taken with regard to the perspectives and issues in conflict" (Lederach, 1998, p. 40), which lessens their freedom of activity as "these leaders are perceived and characterised as having significant, if not exclusive, power and influence." Lederach accentuates the word "perceived" because both domestic and international communities look at their hierarchies as if they would have exclusive power, which is often not the case at hand. However, Lederach finds that key actors in Track/Level II are "positioned so that they are likely to know and be known by the top-level leadership, yet they have significant connections to the broader context and the constituency that the top

leaders claim to represent" (Lederach, 1998, p. 41).

Historical and theological frameworks of peace and active peace-making are strongly accentuated, as these frameworks are often cited among the clerics themselves. Religious leaders on international, national, and local levels are recognised as potent peacebuilders based on their spiritual authority and legitimacy, the capability to reach out to the local population through a broad network, moral and religious teachings, and the aura of the sacredness of peace, as professed by all religions. In the sense of peacebuilding, the role of religion and tools like interreligious dialogue is "a new concept that provides the subfield of the study of interreligious dialogue with a way to link itself both theoretically and practically with the fields of peace and conflict resolution studies" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009, p. 32). More and more peace practitioners globally turn to "a range of action-oriented, religious institutions (such as) Fellowship of Reconciliation, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Rabbis for Human Rights, World Council of Religions for Peace, American Friends Service Committee, the Sikh Coalition, the Mennonite Central Committee, United Religions Initiative, the Salam Institute, Interfaith Encounter Association, Pax Christi International, and the Community of Sant' Egidio" (Dubensky, 2016, p. 4). In the complex web of peacebuilding, religious actors may help in healing, and inner peace, forge a path to reconciliation, prevent new violent conflicts from occurring, or at least decrease the role of religion and misuse of religion for that goal. Following Howard Zehr's model of comparison of justice systems, clergy may help establish restorative justice (Zehr, 2002).

Religious peacebuilding is specific as it directly aims at religious actors and institutions, uses religious ideas and beliefs as resources to answer and transform religious factors or a broader array of factors that contribute to violent conflict, but also to transform

negative peace situations in a society driven by divisions, prejudices, hatred, exclusion, etc. If it is founded on interreligious dialogue, it denotes "all forms of interreligious dialogue activities that foster an ethos of tolerance, nonviolence, and trust" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009, p. 25), where the accent is on dialogue. Specific to religious peacebuilding is also symbolism: "For example, when the public sees religious authorities in a given situation as actually united, peacefully sharing platforms, for instance in the media or public, shaking hands, sitting and laughing together, jointly leading rituals, their behaviour join with their words to send messages of tolerance and peaceful coexistence" (Chiwetalu Ossai, 2019, p. 268). Namely, even the smallest gestures are significant to the public, particularly if the religious leaders have substantial authority in local society (Gopin, 1997, p. 9). Religious peacebuilding practitioners must be aware of this area's subtleness and nuances, where almost nothing is monolithic but pluralistic and lived religion, with its system of logic, experiences, and views on religion and its specific teachings. This makes religious peacebuilding a particular area of peace studies and requires additional theological and mediatory knowledge (Dubensky, 2016, p. 5). Namely, doctrine and holy scripts are only part of religious tradition. For many laities, it is not a very known or essential part of their religion; it is more religious rituals and practices that change over time and adapt to the circumstances in which people live. Moreover, while religious leaders known nationally or globally are essential for messages of peace, genuine religious peacebuilding is important to grassroots actors or non-elites.

Finally, one must acknowledge that evaluating any peacebuilding process and even less religious peacebuilding efforts is tough. These are not quantitatively measurable and fail to address evaluation questions from major donors. Lederach suggests evaluation be

understood as “a circular mix of design, feedback, and systematisation of learning that emerges from and returns to the work, rather than a tool oriented toward measuring final results” (Lederach, 1998, pp. 147-148).

Mediation is one of the historically most used ways of conflict resolution worldwide and still impacts settling disputes and violent conflicts. It is the “intervention of a third party unfamiliar to the conflict, trustable, unbiased and intending to be neutral” (Horowitz, 2007, p. 51). Mediation is a process where a third party intervenes, helps solve a conflict, and acts as a facilitator, educator, and communicator. Its concretisation depends again on the history of a conflict. However, there are some crucial characteristics of mediation: “It is an extension and continuation of peaceful conflict management; involves the intervention of an outsider into a conflict between two or more states or other actors; is a non-coercive, nonviolent and, ultimately, nonbinding form of intervention; mediators enter a conflict, whether internal or international, in order to affect it, change it, resolve it, modify it, or influence it in some other way; mediators bring with them, consciously or otherwise, ideas, knowledge, resources, and interests of their own or of the group or organisation they represent. Mediators often have their own assumptions and agendas about the conflict in question; mediation is a voluntary form of conflict management. The actors involved retain control over the outcome (if not always over the process) of their conflict, as well as the freedom to accept or reject mediation or mediators’ proposals; mediation is usually an ad hoc procedure only” (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997, p. 127).

In conflicts containing ethnoreligious identity, mediators might be religious institutions: “Faith-based actors are increasingly becoming involved in ethnoreligious and other conflicts as mediators, and not without success” (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p. 176). There is evidence for religious mediators far in the past: “In the Bible,

Moses is referred to as the mediator between God and men; since the origin of catholic religions, members of the congregations have turned to priests or preachers for intercession as mediators, Puritans, Quakers and other religious communities or sects (in American colonies) usually resorted to these procedures" (Horowitz, 2007, pp. 51-52). Religious mediation is a situation where a religious actor is a mediator, or a religious system of beliefs and teachings is used as a mediating tool. It is mainly seen as a third-party role of a single cleric or a religious organisation. In this sense, the Vatican was a very potent mediator in the 20th century, but history is full of religiously motivated peacemakers and mediators, whether they are clergy, laity, or organisations. Failure to recognise their activity is indeed due to "epistemological perspectives developed by conflict resolution scholars (who) viewed religion either as an instigator of conflict or ignored it altogether because religious issues involved in conflicts cannot be addressed from an empirical or positivist perspective" (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2002, p. 177).

Mediation has a strong presence in major religions. In Christianity, the Holy See has been an essential ally of peace efforts in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and beyond. Protestant denominations have also contributed to religious peacebuilding, particularly Quakers, Mennonites, and Puritans. In Islam, there is a practice of Wisata, where disputes are solved based on the model explained in Hadiths, following Prophet Mohammad's ways of problem-solving within Muslim communities and with other religious groups. Traditional Jewish laws evoke compromise and justice (P'shara), following the Levite tradition of Aaron, brother of Moses. Their mediations are characterised by: "explicit emphasis on spirituality and/or religious identity; use of religious texts; use of religious values and vocabulary; utilisation of religious or spiritual

rituals during the process; involvement of faith-based actors as third-parties" (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p. 185).

Religious actors should decide how much religious/theological content they should use when meditating. This decision is made according to how much religion contributes to the conflict or how potent religious teachings are for peacebuilding in a divided society. In some cases, mediators would explicitly use spirituality and religious identities, or they may evoke religious creeds or scripts as a basis for mediation. In other cases, only general religious values or symbolic rituals and ceremonies may be used. Applying a religious actor as a mediator is successful only if all sides consider him decent, fair, and trustworthy and if the mediator has enough resources and the right motivation. In multi-religious societies, this presents a challenge, and thus, mediation is done by several clerics from different faiths working as one mediating body. We should examine the reasons why a priest or an imam would do mediation, whether he has an internal motif or was he called by ecclesial or political authorities to act as a mediator, due to their possibilities of secret diplomacy or through regional and global religious dynamics that may impact local peacebuilding efforts. The background driving motif might be important in determining success or reasons for failure in religious mediation. In a novel form of mediation, the religious mediator may introduce a larger amount of spiritual work. In the transformative theory of conflict (TRANSCEND), Johan Galtung suggests the mediator be ignorant of the culture and customs in the local settings, only to foster a dialogue; additionally, he calls for empathy as "the capacity to deeply understand the other at a cognitive and emotional level (as) the mediators' basic skill" (Horowitz, 2007, p. 61). In that way, a mediator will have less chance to dehumanise the conflicting parties.

Empathy is expected from the clerics, who are educated to identify themselves with particular human beings.

3. Case Studies of Religious Influence in Major Conflicts

During the World War I, religious narratives were often justifying war. Religious leaders in many countries framed the war as a righteous cause supported by God. The clergy in the United Kingdom often portrayed the war as a battle between Christian civilization and German militarism, which they characterized as barbaric and godless. In Germany, some Protestant and Catholic leaders depicted the war as a divine mission to defend German culture and values, aligning it with their understanding of a providential destiny. Both sides used the language of Crusades, comparing their struggles to holy wars, and invoked religious zeal among soldiers and civilians, calling for sacrifices as part of a higher moral purpose. Chaplains played a critical role in providing spiritual comfort to soldiers, often conducting prayers, sermons, and last rites in the trenches. These religious rituals helped many soldiers -cope with the horrors of war and find solace in their faith.

One of the most striking examples of religious influence was the spontaneous Christmas Truce in 1914, where soldiers on both sides celebrated Christmas together, sang carols, and exchanged gifts. This event highlighted the unifying power of shared religious traditions, even amid conflict. Some religious leaders and groups opposed the war, condemning it as contrary to Christian teachings on peace and love. For instance, the Quakers or the Religious Society of Friends) were vocal in their pacifist stance, advocating for nonviolence and offering humanitarian aid instead of supporting the war effort. Pope Benedict XV repeatedly called for peace, referring to the war as a senseless slaughter and proposing peace plans, though

they were largely ignored by the warring nations.

In the World War II, religious narratives in Germany were manipulated to align with the regime's ideology. Although the Nazis were largely secular, they co-opted Christian symbols and rhetoric to appeal to German cultural identity. Some Protestant churches supported the regime, while others resisted (e.g., the Confessing Church). In Japan, Shintoism was used to sanctify the war effort. The emperor was presented as a divine figure, and soldiers were taught to see their sacrifices as acts of devotion to the nation and its divine destiny.

The Allies framed their struggle as a fight for Christian values of justice, freedom, and human dignity against the tyranny of the Axis powers. For instance, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt often used religious language to rally support, describing the war as a defense of "God's will" for freedom and democracy. Many religious leaders and institutions actively resisted totalitarian regimes, drawing on their faith as a moral imperative. Figures like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, opposed the Nazi regime, emphasizing the Christian duty to resist evil. Catholic leaders, such as Maximilian Kolbe, opposed Nazi ideology and were martyred for their actions. The Vatican, under Pope Pius XII, provided refuge for Jews, though its role remains debated. In Japanese-occupied territories, some Buddhist monks resisted imperial policies, though others collaborated with the regime. Jewish communities under Nazi persecution clung to their faith as a source of strength. Despite the horrors of the Holocaust, religious practices and beliefs provided hope, and some observed rituals even in concentration camps. Religious services, prayers, and scripture readings provided comfort to families coping with the loss of loved ones.mIndian soldiers, recruited for the British army, were allowed to maintain their religious practices during the

war, which helped them endure the challenges of battle. During the war, Pope Pius XII advocated for peace and humanitarian efforts, urging nations to avoid targeting civilians. After the war, the Vatican played a role in supporting post-war reconciliation efforts in Europe. The devastation of WWII inspired greater cooperation among religious communities to promote peace, leading to the establishment of organizations like the World Council of Churches in 1948.

4. Mechanisms Through Which Religion Promotes Peace

While spirituality and religion may be used interchangeably in this chapter, the focus is on religion/spirituality/worldview as a set of beliefs, teachings, institutional frameworks, customs, and behaviours. It is essential to consider and include these traits in any peacebuilding process. Traditionally, it has been done through the concept of intercultural, inter-worldview, and interreligious dialogue (IRD). The dialogue itself is "a way of taking the energy of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinate power of groups of people" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 19).

IRD is defined as a dialogue where "the participants come from different religious backgrounds and gather to talk from their explicitly stated cultural identity lenses to create a better understanding of certain challenges" (Abu Nimer & Alabbadi, 2017, p. 40). The IRD is part of conflict transformation as it aims to transform the conflict from a competitive relationship into a cooperative one based on religious concepts and values (Galtung, 2007; Graf, Kramer, and Nicolescou, 2007; Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009). It goes beyond secular ideas of societal progress. It allows stakeholders to learn about their and others' deepest beliefs and fears at the level where a genuine reconciliation

may occur. The focus on IRD is essential because dialogue is a transformative peacebuilding method. It is a safe space for people to surface their assumptions and question their previous viewpoints. The potential of IRD is to build relationships, raise awareness, and contribute to resolving conflicts without advocacy, consultation, debate, or negotiation. Applying this to the classroom is helpful because it teaches teachers and students how to distinguish between dialogue as an engaging learning process and various other kinds of communication with different aims.

In a post-conflict society, traumas run deep. Realization of loss frequently leads to suppression of grief and opens the door to anger, need for justice, and revenge, ending in a Good versus Evil narrative. Albeit challenging, we must strive to accept the loss's reality and reflect so we can find the root causes while acknowledging the enemy's story and facing our own shortcomings. When we, as teachers and students, can memorialize and commit to taking risks by starting a dialogue from tolerance and engagement, we have the opportunity to forgive and establish restorative justice that gives a possibility of reconciliation. When such an approach is applied to the religious background, a lot more commonalities among people of different faiths come up than when the comparison is made on ethnic or national differences. In the IRD case, we do not talk only about reaching an ethnic/national/political goal. Still, we are opening space for personal feelings that make up our religious identities, such as compassion, trust, hope, healing, a sense of community and diversity, and a will to reach out to the other side. IRD has become a spiritual exercise in itself, and active participants have a strong motive for such dialogue based on their religious identity and deeper understanding of it. For example, the Women Believers Association, part of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, gathers believers

from all three sides of the 1990s conflict (Orthodox/Serb, Catholic/ Croat, Muslim/Bosniak) and emphasizes their traumas and perseverance during and after the war. By employing understanding and compassion for women who were raped or whose families were killed, they overcame the ethnic and religious divides and formed a safe space where they could trust each other and heal their traumas. Based on their work, the Interreligious Council made the first-ever guidebook for clerics to approach and support women victims of war crimes.

When approaching IRD in practice, there are a few points where this dialogue seizes to be a dialogue and becomes a debate or discussion. One is the exclusion tendency, where participants in the "dialogue" believe that only their belief is true and other beliefs are wrong or misleading. Participation in the IRD is motivated by the wish to proselytize and convert. On the other pole of exclusivism is syncretism, where the primary approach is to focus on similarities and unify them into one new religion. Both exclusivism and syncretism are the main ways some stakeholders spoil the IRD. As an antidote to them, pluralism emerges as a method to go beyond listening to others' doctrine. It considers the importance of faith by focusing on ethical concepts between religions and within religions. Pluralism is not just the diversity of beliefs and/or tolerance of different religions, but rather it is the commitment to engage in meaningful conversations and respond to what is being said in the form of action. For example, after a devastating tsunami hit Japan in 2011, a will to cooperate between Buddhist monks and Christian priests and to help the victims led to substantial theological and dialogical consequences. Many of the clergy who came to help had never previously interacted with those outside their own tradition, and they were trained more to talk than to listen. So they tended to proselytize, even if unintentionally. Listening

is a critical part of chaplaincy and more of a skill than most originally assumed (Michon, 2019, p. 6). The Japanese case shows how crucial constant learning is, even for the clergy and monks. Essential listening skills are unavoidable in the dialogue process, as we learn and understand through listening.

Religion often appears as the identity basis of Middle Eastern parties and movements. It is enough today to look at the entire range of movements that characterize the religious party systems of majority-Islamic countries; Most social science efforts are in determining the role of religion in these conflicts and controversies and the use of religion as the backbone of political and armed struggle. However, such an approach often overlooks the clergy's role in strengthening or weakening such tendencies. Indeed, religion plays a major mobilizing role in many populist movements, but precisely what that role is has not been critically studied in detail within political science. It is recognized as an important response to the perceived threat to traditional values threatened by economic globalization and the uncertainties of rapid technological changes. However, religion has come to be seen as an engine of conflict. The action of the clergy in such political parties, movements, and policies are sometimes of crucial importance because the direct or indirect support of the clergy can strengthen or weaken populism - at all levels. At the same time, religion is usually viewed through three dimensions: "affiliation, measured by church membership; behavior, measured by attendance at liturgies; and belief, measured by commitment to religious values" (McAllister & White, 2007, p. 204).

It is necessary to look at the role of the clergy and lay believers, which will reduce the importance of religion in conflicts, increase the activity of the clergy in peace-making processes; improve the abilities of religious peacemakers and increase the awareness of

political decision-makers about the potential contribution of clergy and religiously oriented peacemakers. Realpolitik decisions often shy away from religious imperatives and view the world in the reductionist political and economic paradigm that existed during the Cold War. For example, the attack on Afghanistan during Eid al-Fitr was an indicator of the lack of interest of the Western powers in the role of religion in political and armed struggles.

The same determinant is needed in ecumenical and interreligious conversations in numerous other areas of the world where populism, nationalism, extremism, and fundamentalism have influenced the development of conflicts and where religion is taken as one of the forms of the identity basis of the warring parties and the war process. Such a basis of conflict can be seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, Kenya, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, Thailand, and many other places. Responsible clergy can play a crucial role in maintaining peace and coexistence there. Faith-based diplomacy (which, in addition to the clergy, includes government officials, civil servants, military officers, and diplomats) may be conceptually new in international relations. However, it is already part of international peacekeeping missions in unofficial diplomacy, and it speaks primarily about reconciliation and conflict transformation, not conflict resolution. In this form of diplomatic effort, peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the restoration of healthy relations between previously warring parties. Namely, the international diplomacy system, although it has a moral foundation, also understands the need for pragmatism in finding reconciliation, while unofficial religious diplomacy is far more demanding in this regard. So far, this branch of international relations and diplomacy is underdeveloped to its potential because it would require a proper integration of transcendent

aspects of religious diplomacies, such as the Islamic notion of hospitality, the Buddhist principle of critical tolerance (giving the other side the right of doubt), the Hindu emphasis on tolerance and inclusiveness as in Gandhi's approach of accepting the enemy, and Christian commands to kiss the enemy, all with the imperative of non-violent response to conflict. The difficulty is then found in the many determinants of canon law in the world religions that justify someone's death, or at least it is interpreted that way.

A religious diplomat must approach such a form of diplomatic action based on spiritual principles and resources. It is the most significant difference between a cleric and a rational diplomat. Their ways of making decisions differ precisely because of the spiritual-rational contradiction. Clerics can pray together, fast, forgive, repent, and find inspiration in the holy scriptures. Such actions are not common even among those diplomats who are practical believers because, in the system of official diplomacy, the spiritual approach does not play a meaningful role. In addition, clerics have a certain spiritual authority that gives them separate legitimacy without necessarily belonging to one of the conflicting parties. A cleric can obtain such legitimacy simply by belonging to a certain religious institution or through the trust instilled by his personal spiritual charisma. To be able to approach the resolution of the religious side of the conflict, such a diplomat must have a pluralistic approach. It means that he must be firmly rooted in his religious tradition, but at the same time, he must know, understand and respect the core of other traditions. A common language cannot be found through pragmatism, as in rational diplomacy, because a religious view cannot be reduced to a common thesis, but a common point of belief in separate theologies must be found and a relationship built based on the acceptance of these positions. An important component of such an

approach is the acceptance of significant and irreparable differences between religions and their theologies; the religious diplomat who cannot accept these differences is unlikely to be able to contribute much. At the same time, those diplomats who accept the approaches of all religious traditions risk the failure of their negotiations. A transcendental approach to conflict resolution is another form lacking in secular diplomacy. Despite their possible suitable mediation and negotiation skills, religious diplomats understand the limitations of human understanding; given their excellent knowledge of the scriptures, they are familiar with human nature and behavior within the spiritual dimensions of human existence. This knowledge can be used exceptionally well in crucial moments of negotiations. For example, the lack of knowledge about the spiritual categories of human existence and the world led in the distant and recent past to the collapse of negotiations between Western diplomats and Eastern stakeholders. Sometimes diplomats made proposals or initiated actions that were deeply opposed to the feelings and worldviews of Muslims. They may not have made these missteps on purpose, but they were undoubtedly unprepared for the spiritual realms of Islam, which in Muslim societies are often as important as rational, secular diplomacy. And finally, religious diplomats have time. Transcendentalism does not include the world's time because the motivation for diplomatic activities and building peace comes from a deep sense of religious calling and is eternal in its essence. All believers are called in the scriptures to follow the same call.

Given that we are rooted in the tradition of secular and rational diplomacy, this approach may seem utopian. Still, today's geopolitical picture of the world is largely marked by religious issues. Therefore, political scientists need increased knowledge about religious structures and laws and the role of the clergy in religious diplomacy.

There are many conflicts in which religion is a significant factor in the identity of one or more communities. For example, the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is one example where religion is a critical component of nationalist identities. In this particular case, religious diplomacy accepts a crucial element of Muslim identity, which is that religion and politics are inseparable from the principles of Islam, and with the new Hindu nationalism, a similar thing is happening on the Indian side. Therefore, all participants in peace initiatives must act within a religious framework and must be able to integrate political and theological concepts. In many cases, including that of the Middle East, the will of the national religious elites and their local representatives is not enough to achieve lasting peace; they must be trained in the process of reconciliation, united in independent inter-religious councils, and establish independent observation missions that will primarily monitor the implementation of human rights and quickly warn of difficulties arising at the local level.

In such a process, religious leaders will not only be a significant factor in reconciliation but will feel their genuine involvement in reducing social conflicts, which will rightfully be called the success of religious diplomacy. Considering the longevity of ecclesiastical institutions and the transcendental conception of time, reconciliation between religious institutions and their followers or their influence on social peace may have a more far-reaching perspective than political agreements. As a basic political precondition for this form of diplomatic activity, it is necessary to provide freedom of movement and protection to religious leaders in conflict zones or war zones, i.e., in the public space of society, and to provide protection to shrines, churches, and areas of special religious significance so that they are not destroyed, looted and/or desecrated.

At the global level, the need for religious diplomacy is stronger than ever, and there are already significant steps there through the UN's acceptance of the principle of Dialogue among Civilizations. As a clear counterpoint to Samuel Huntington's often misinterpreted Clash of Civilizations, this was the initiative of former Iranian President Mohamad Khatami in 1997. Instead of conflict, President Khatami recommended dialogue and exchange among academics, students, artists, and athletes to get to know religious traditions, " The other." First of all, this is about the contact between the Islamic world and the Christian West because these two civilizations make up more than half of the world's believers, and peace between religions and stability in the world mainly depend on long-term contact between Islam and Christianity. Most of today's conflicts involve these two religions, which rightly points to the need to discover and support the spiritual core of both religious traditions, which stem from the same source. Religious diplomacy also includes preventive action, although the effectiveness of prevention can never be fully understood, and strong political will is needed. One of the initiatives is the appointment of religious attachés in the regular diplomatic service. They would act as religious diplomats in the most critical areas of the world and thereby partially replace the work of military chaplains, who, in addition to caring for the spiritual well-being of soldiers, must also work on religious diplomacy.

5. Challenges to Religious Peacebuilding Efforts

Finally, one should consider the boundaries of religion-based peacebuilding and its shortcomings and challenges. This way of resolving violent conflicts or maintaining positive peace is a very long, time-consuming, and diverging path. There are many unrealistic expectations from it. There is a problem of agency, whereby it is

difficult to discern in whose name various faith-based organisations act or if the whole religious hierarchy fully supports such a worldview where their respective religious institution gets involved in very practical religion-based peacebuilding. The sincerity of religious actors is of particular concern. Even when peacebuilding efforts succeed, it is challenging to assess their direct impact. That is why the study of religion-based peacebuilding is so heavily tied to political science, peace studies, and sociology, and not only to theological exclamations about peace and conflict.

Approaching any peacebuilding effort should include a strong emphasis on spoilers, i.e., "leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it" (Stedman, 1997, p. 5). Spoilers may not be only high-ranking politicians or warring parties, but clergy too when they feel excluded from the peace process or think of it as a betrayal of key values. Some clerics are not spoilers per se but passive in peacebuilding because otherwise, they would be marginalised in their own community, both from religious hierarchy and from the people. Spoilers in religious institutions, furthermore, cannot act without political support or political bias, as partocracy is the leading idea of the political process in many post-conflict societies. International actors have developed a system that gives spoilers many places to act, further strengthening their resistance to positive peace trajectories. Spoilers act after peace has been reached when a comprehensive peace agreement is in place, and everything seems to be normal again. The reason for this is a functional one: "Even if all parties come to value peace, they rarely do so simultaneously, and they often strongly disagree over the terms of an acceptable peace" (Stedman, 1997, p. 7). In the typology of the spoiler, Stedman mentions: "(1) the goal of the spoiler; (2) the intent behind

acts of non-cooperation or aggression; (3) the degree of commitment of the spoiler; (4) the degree of leadership command and control of followers; (5) the degree of unity within the spoiler; and (6) the likely effects of custodian action on the spoiler's willingness to continue aggression, on the other parties to the peace process, and on interested external actors" (Stedman, 1997, p. 17).

Stedman differs between an inside spoiler who "signs a peace agreement, signals a willingness to implement a settlement, and yet fails to fulfil key obligations to the agreement" and uses stealth for that, and outside spoilers who are "parties who are excluded from the peace process or who exclude themselves, and use violence to attack the peace process" (Stedman, 1997, p. 8). In the case of religion-based peacebuilding, every major religious community harbours some spoilers in the process.

Spoilers may come about out of fear from the former adversary, who might take advantage of the peace process in their favour. Others seek power, which is a means to pursue other tangible goals. Stedman differs between limited, greedy, and total spoilers, whereby limited spoilers have "limited goals – for example, recognition and redress of a grievance, a share of power or the exercise of power-constrained by a constitution and opposition, and basic security of followers," total spoilers "pursue total power and exclusive recognition of authority and hold immutable preferences: that is, their goals are not subject to change," while the greedy spoilers are in between and hold "goals that expand or contract based on calculations of cost and risk" (Stedman, 1997, pp. 10-11). These types may change, mainly with political leaders leaving a position. Stedman's influential contribution was challenged by an equally influential proposal from Greenhill and Major, who introduced opportunity structure as a setting where spoilers exist and are rationally acted and

where their achievements are explainable mainly through material benefit rather than strong types of spoilers (Greenhill & Major, 2006). "legitimate" claims and ideas are often complementary with material opportunities, and these spoiler types are mainly complementary.

Conclusion

Religions and religious actors have played—and continue to play—both divisive and unifying roles in global conflicts. With growing recognition of faith-based diplomacy and interreligious dialogue, religions can serve as powerful forces for reconciliation, provided their unique characteristics, theological differences, and societal roles are acknowledged and integrated into peacebuilding frameworks.

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