

## INTRODUCTION

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Can religion help societies achieve peace and stability? Do religious actors have a role to play in conflict transformation? These are critical questions at a time when numerous conflicts around the world—both within and between countries—are going on. The queries surrounding religion’s relevance were not discussed in the policy world or academia as intensively during the Cold War, when the concerns focused more on secular and material approaches and perspectives. After the end of the Cold War, and as the concerns about a global nuclear war faded, academics and policymakers started to pay more attention to the questions of identity in political processes, international relations, and conflict dynamics. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, perspectives on the role of religion in politics shifted more toward the link between religion and violence, including the role of religion in civil conflicts, wars, and terrorism. Religion was seen as a divisive factor rather than a unifying one. Only recently, there has been a visible increase in discussions on the positive role religion and spirituality can play in the public sphere, and a recognition that social problems cannot be resolved without due attention to issues of faith. This book is intended to be a contribution toward these discussions, with chapters focusing both on missed opportunities in the past, influential religious actors who work toward peace and

stability today, and future possibilities of religion and spirituality playing a role in sustainable peace and justice.

There is a lot to discuss when one looks at religion and peace and, hence, a continuing need for more analysis and conversation. Religious actors have historically played critical roles in human rights campaigns (civil rights movements in the United States), peace movements (the Dutch Peace movement during the Cold War), and political resistance (the Solidarity movement in Poland). There are multiple reasons why the potential role of religion in attaining and maintaining peace warrants a closer inspection. One major reason is the problems created by purely secular and technocratic approaches to social and economic life that either ignore or discredit spiritual dynamics. Twentieth-century peacebuilding efforts were dominated by liberal internationalism, which offered market economy and liberal democracy as panaceas for bridging divisions and solving problems of unstable societies. This approach failed in many settings and destabilized societies even further. In Rwanda, Angola, Bosnia, Mozambique, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, for example, liberal internationalist peacebuilding missions “had the ‘perverse effect’ of undermining the very peace they were meant to buttress.”<sup>1</sup> With evidence from the case of Sierra Leone, Lyn S. Graybill cautions against the dominance of Western legal norms and the International Criminal Court in Africa and warns that ignoring religious norms and values in peacebuilding and transitional justice is costly.<sup>2</sup> Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the national level did not quite resonate with the local tribal traditions for addressing past injustices.<sup>3</sup> This is because peacebuilders and experts from outside these societies have not fully recognized that spirituality is central to many societies and individuals. Humanitarians usually operate in societies where “the religious and the secular are not institutionally or spiritually separated as they are in the West.”<sup>4</sup> Learning from failed experiments, practitioners have gradually come to the conclusion that peacebuilding needs to be sensitive to the particular needs of individual communities. Conflict transformation and peace processes require the inclusion of multiple local and transnational actors in the process, which means bringing together diverse knowledge networks and relevant areas of expertise. Religion is one such critical area that peacebuilders ignored in the past but one that has become increasingly recognized as relevant to societal dynamics.

Religion-peace links warrant further study also because of the close attention paid to the religion and violence connection, especially in the

aftermath of 9/11. Many contemporary conflicts and civil wars have a religion dimension.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the parties are fighting over religion or that the conflicts are entirely religious in nature; there are usually other factors, such as economic inequalities, ethnopolitical tensions, or competition over resources.<sup>6</sup> There are diverse arguments when it comes to the effect of religion on conflicts and their resolution. Religious civil wars are harder on noncombatants when compared to their nonreligious counterparts.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, religious difference does not make a conflict more intractable, unless parties are fighting for an overtly religious cause.<sup>8</sup> To the contrary, if conflict parties have close religious ties, the peace arrangements last shorter and the conflict is more likely to recur.<sup>9</sup> These dynamics confirm that it is too costly to ignore the religion factor in conflict transformation and efforts for a sustainable peace, even in apparently nonreligious conflict settings. In most societies, religion is a part of political identity and national narratives, and policymakers cannot underestimate its importance even when dealing with seemingly secular issues and tensions. Religion being an important factor in conflict means that it has to be figured into peace. The same absolute commitment to one's faith that leads to violent divisions can also provide avenues for togetherness, freedom, and justice under the right conditions with the right people at the helm, which R. Scott Appleby famously called "the ambivalence of the sacred."<sup>10</sup>

Religious ideals have had an impact on the establishment of not only religious organizations and endeavors but also some of the seemingly secular institutions that have contributed to peace. European federalism that is embodied in the European Union, for example, has origins in religious ideas.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, although faith-based institutions can play critical roles in the aftermath of religious conflict, their peacebuilding programs are not just confined to addressing religious conflicts but also those where religion is not the core dimension of the conflict.

Faith-based actors have also been influential in justice initiatives. Religious groups have played a role in managing truth recovery processes, ranging from multiple settings in Latin America to the Balkans. In some cases, transitional justice institutions came into existence thanks to pressure from religious actors. Religious actors are not simply just another participant in transitional justice; like in the cases of South Africa and Guatemala, religious actors pressured governments to adopt transitional justice institutions based on reconciliation.<sup>12</sup> Religious ethics can lead to particular conceptions

of peace, especially in transitional justice in the form of truth commissions and war crime trials, in settings from South Africa to East Timor.<sup>13</sup> Sandra R. Oyola, for example, highlights the critical role of the Diocese of Quibdó in Colombia and argues that the feelings of hope and justice religiously inspired by the diocese made a difference in the participatory processes of construction of social memory in Bojayá, Chocó.<sup>14</sup>

Every religious tradition has its own sources of nonviolence within itself, and under the right conditions these sources can help with reconciliation, peacebuilding, and transitional justice.<sup>15</sup> Religious symbols and rituals can facilitate understanding, peace, and trust-building. In this spirit, Marc Gopin emphasizes the importance of rituals and symbols in conflict resolution within the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and he states that faith leaders should lead religious settlement, repentance, and reconciliation ceremonies and that old mosques and synagogues defiled in violence should become sites of rebuilding.<sup>16</sup> In the same vein, Tanya B. Schwarz laments that prayer is ignored in transnational advocacy scholarship. Governmental funding organizations like the United States Agency for International Development recognize the importance of prayer in community projects and initiatives, Schwarz argues, yet there are restrictions regarding the integration of prayer into government-funded activities because prayer is often erroneously seen as a solely private activity that does not have a place in the public sphere.<sup>17</sup>

While talking about religion, a discussion of the specific role of religious leaders is also critical. The American Jewish World Service, World Vision International, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, and Catholic Relief Services engage in peace initiatives and humanitarian assistance programs; the Community of Sant'Egidio (globally) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (in sub-Saharan Africa) have mediated between warring forces and have negotiated peace agreements that ended wars; and the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya supports community infrastructure and educational development. Faith leaders, in general, are regarded as having “a well-established and pervasive influence in the community, a reputation as a force for change based on a respected set of values, and unique leverage for reconciling conflicting parties, including an ability to rehumanize relationships and the capability to mobilize community, national and international support for peace process.”<sup>18</sup> In the case of the conflict between Colombian authorities and Fuerzas Armadas

Revolucionarias de Colombia, religious community organizers were accepted more easily due to their impartiality.<sup>19</sup>

Religious actors play multiple roles in conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and human rights, which can be subsumed under the term “religious peacebuilding.” Scholars and activists have worked on elaborating the term, created a space for a discussion of this very particular type of effort, and noted how religious actors have increased their peacemaking efforts responding to the societal needs in twenty-first century.<sup>20</sup> According to Gerard Powers, “religious peacebuilding” can be defined as “the beliefs, norms, and rituals that pertain to peacebuilding, as well as a range of actors, from religious institutions, faith-based private voluntary organizations that are not formally part of a religious institution, and individuals and groups for whom religion is a significant motivation for their peacebuilding.”<sup>21</sup> Powers states that interreligious peacebuilding has one or more of the following purposes: deepening relationships, improving understanding, finding common ground on beliefs and actions, promoting common action, and encouraging complementary action.<sup>22</sup> John D. Brewer and his colleagues typify religious peacemaking as active and passive, the former living out commitments as a social practice, the latter as idealistic commitment but lacking in application. They also distinguish between social (related to societal healing) and political (related to negotiated deals) peace processes.<sup>23</sup> Daniel Philpott argues that the central meaning of reconciliation is the restoration of right relationship and “it is largely religious leaders and communities who have sponsored it, though not exclusively.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Nukhet A. Sandal argues that religious leaders have constituted communities of expertise and informed the conflict-transformation processes in settings like Northern Ireland and South Africa.<sup>25</sup> Examples abound when it comes to prominent religious actors playing critical roles in attaining and maintaining peace. Pope John Paul II, along with his envoy Cardinal Antonio Samore, successfully mediated the Beagle Channel conflict that erupted between Chile and Argentina in 1985 over the possession of three islands. Religious actors such as the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) were critical in the formulation and signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999 to end the civil war in the country. Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Pax Christi, and World Vision International, along with local religious leaders, played a critical role in facilitating the peace process in northern Uganda that brought an end to attacks on civilians by the Lord’s

Resistance Army. The active participation of credible religious authorities in the peace process is necessary, and conflicts can rarely be solved with just utilitarian and rationalist diplomatic paradigms.<sup>26</sup> In short, scholars in multiple fields have pointed to the importance of religious expertise and religious leaders in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.<sup>27</sup>

This book does not focus on religious peacebuilding *per se*. It has a wider focus, and its participating scholars, who combine the perspectives of the humanities and the social sciences, take peace as a societal condition of human safety and security. Based on their regional expertise, ranging from the Americas to Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, they explore the potentials of religion and religious actors in creating a sustainable peace, respect for human rights, and justice in specific contexts. Can we learn from cases where religious actors helped transform conflicts? Under which conditions can religion and religious actors play healing roles? What are the missed opportunities? And how should we define peace within divided societies? With examples from around the world, authors in this volume show that religion matters and there is potential for religious actors to play positive roles in divided societies. In some cases, this potential has been actualized; in some others, it has not.

In the book, chapters in part I consider peace and religion from transnational perspectives. The authors tackle the potentials and pitfalls of religious-actor involvement in the public sphere, pointing out to the possibilities and constraints offered by various theoretical and practical approaches. Exploring the role played by faith-based organizations in peace and social justice movements across the global South and among disenfranchised groups in the global North, Cecelia Lynch shows the importance of nongovernmental actors who operate across borders. She also suggests that we limit ourselves unduly if we consider peacebuilding an externally imposed structure and when we draw firm lines between major world religions and Indigenous ones, as the two often blend in the practices of peoples and inform the work of organizations who strive to help societies attain greater stability and the promise of security and prosperity. Taking a regional approach, Jeremy Rinker compares networks in South Asian religions, focusing primarily on Hindu, Buddhist, and Hindutva devotionalism as a potential source for collective identities centered on peaceable communities. He warns that such devotionalism is still exploited for more divisive purposes by political and spiritual leaders and that true peacebuilding may require destroying

the hierarchical assumptions built into societal and religious practices. Jonathan C. Agensky, expanding from a case study on South Sudan, considers the role religious organizations and Christian churches have played in peacebuilding in sub-Saharan Africa and the important contributions of such groups to worldwide efforts at what he calls “strategic peace.” This leads to comparable pitfalls observed by Rinker: too often religion remains instrumentalized by political elites for their own objectives. Adding a theoretical perspective grounded in the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hannah Arendt, Afra Jalabi questions how we define and understand modernity and how religion has been used to incite violence, all while those who exploit it typically employ the language of peace. Equally, she shows that across time and space people have struggled to come to terms with the past and to address forms of domination, some of them supported by religious organizations as all of the chapters in this section suggest.

Part II focuses on settings that involve Muslims and the policies developed toward these communities. How do communities deal with state imposition of specific interpretations of religion or terms of citizenship? How do security policies, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, affect Muslims? Loren D. Lybarger, Brandon Kendhammer, and Nukhet A. Sandal explore facets of identity, peace, justice, and Islam. Setting her chapter in the context of Turkish repression of Kurdish identity, Sandal emphasizes the constructive role played by the Democratic Islam Congress, especially as the Islamist party of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gained tighter control of the Turkish state. Religious forums can offer an opposition network and allow for interactions between groups that may counteract some of the rhetoric and even the effects of policies set by elites. Kendhammer explores this theme with a harder edge when he considers US efforts to combat violence and extremism in West Africa. The jury is still out on the effectiveness of engagement with global religious communities—a point of emphasis in US policy especially in the 2010s—and on the extent to which this may represent an instrumentalization of religion that could help or hinder peace processes in the long term. To Kendhammer, it seems that a one-size-fits-all approach to West Africa is overly prescriptive and threatens to obscure opportunities to build peace within the specific context of individual countries and societies. Lybarger presents a case study on the Palestinian diaspora in the United States that points at the wider phenomenon of how religion offers a means of resistance to the modern bureaucratic state. More broadly, he returns to

the key issues of the politicization of religion—he holds that it is a two-way street traveled both by political and religious leaders—and religion as a contributing source of violence as well as of peace. Naturally, after nearly two decades of the “war on terror,” we may see these issues as particularly prominent when it comes to Islam and the greater Middle East, though it seems clear from all our chapters in this book that the grave problems are hardly unique to one religion or one region and also that there is hope to be derived from deeper exploration of how religion and peace could further grow together.

The three chapters that make up part III consider the intersections of religion and peace in Christianity, focusing on inclusive and exclusive interpretations. Amy Erica Smith argues that when we discuss the importance of religion, we should take into account land as well as people. In her chapter on Christianity and Indigenous people in South America, she shows the spiritual richness and unique identity that emerged from blending Indigenous traditions and interpretations with Catholic doctrines and hierarchies. Debates between conservatives and liberal reformers are ongoing—at times they are fierce—but cultural tolerance and toleration could offer a meaningful path to peacebuilding on that continent and elsewhere. Slavica Jakelić probes the fraught moment at which populists in Europe, most successfully in Hungary, have promulgated exclusivist national identities based on language, ethnicity, and a narrow understanding of religion, often driven by a combination of historical grievances and fear of outsiders, particularly exploiting the refugee crisis since the early 2010s. At the same time, Jakelić shows that fundamental Christian beliefs could well serve as antidote to the instrumentalization that is currently predominant in parts of Europe and that Christians in Germany and elsewhere are rallying against extremism. In the case of Ireland and Northern Ireland, religious leaders quite obviously played a direct role in the peace process. But, as Margaret M. Scull explains in her chapter, religious ceremonies and symbolism had become a touchstone long before the peace process gained ground. Scull asks whether funerals of paramilitaries who died in “the Troubles” were a missed opportunity for peace, and she, much like Jakelić, points out the entanglement of religion, politics, and identity. Scull concludes that until the peace process took hold, the reaction of churches to funerals contributed to tensions and may have helped prolong the violence, but she also shows that attitudes of leading clergy changed and funerals eventually became grounds for healing.

The book concludes with a chapter by Peter Mandaville, who weaves together academic and policy-related questions surrounding religion, diplomacy, and peacebuilding.

The book's argument is not that all religious actors can be peaceful or there must be a religion dimension in every aspect of societal life. Peace requires political engagement, and for many religious actors "the challenge is to have a political impact without being politicized."<sup>28</sup> Anna Grzymala-Busse draws attention to the fragility of moral authority and how the legitimacy of the religious actors can be undermined by what is perceived as "overt and narrow politicking."<sup>29</sup> In multiple contexts (including India, China, Tibet, and Vietnam), Christian peacebuilding and initiatives have been closely identified with foreign imperialism and interpreted as a threat to sovereignty, and hence communities mostly have turned to their region's majority religions.<sup>30</sup> We recognize that religious actors are rarely fully neutral, their assistance might come with conditions, and their involvement in political processes can undermine their moral authority, not to mention the existence of religious leaders who work against reconciliation to protect their own status in conflict settings. As many of the chapters in the volume show, religious strategies and activities of peace are usually directed against the kind of public theologies and religious interpretations that are not conducive to peace, inclusion, and justice. As some of the chapters point out, there are also missed opportunities. Religious actors may be well positioned to contribute to peacebuilding, but they might exacerbate interethnic divides and become mostly inwardly focused, not even aware of their capacity as peacebuilders.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

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5. See Jonathan Fox, "The Salience of Religious Issues in Ethnic Conflicts: A Large-N Study," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 3, no. 3 (1997): 1–19, and Jonathan Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 through the Millennium* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).
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