

I. Religion, Secularity, and Conflict

1. Religious Conflict?

Introduction

Religion often seems to be a major factor in contemporary conflicts. A glance at the front pages over the past decade shows a number of conflicts that have a religious element: in the former Yugoslavia; Northern Ireland; Israel/Palestine; India, Pakistan, and Kashmir; not to mention the War on Terror. Such a list only covers rather dramatic examples – many regional conflicts do not reach the headlines. In a recent study of religion and grievance formation, Jonathan Fox identified over one hundred ethnoreligious minorities worldwide, and found that many were involved in a conflict of some sort.¹ Most of these conflicts are local, although some, like those mentioned above, affect regional or even global affairs. Moreover, many of the conflicts Fox mentions are not violent. Often, they are social or political conflicts, as when a country has sizable minorities of a different religion from the majority. Clearly, given the diversity of conflicts where religion and religious differences are present, religion is a factor well worth studying.

While the existence of some link between religion and conflict is obvious, the nature of the link is very much in dispute. This is highly important, for understanding the underlying nature of any phenomenon is vital to prescribing a workable response to it. Focusing on surface manifestations will not suffice. More nuanced questions are necessary. Is religion central to conflict or marginal? Is it primarily violent or peaceful? Has academic study marginalized religion? There are a number of competing theories as to how religion relates to conflict, and different theorists would answer each of the above questions differently. Proposed practical responses vary just as widely, ranging from minimizing religious influence to making religious actors central to peacemaking.

The focus of this chapter is three types of competing theory of the relation between

1 Fox, Jonathan, 1999, "The Influence of Religious Legitimacy on Grievance Formation by Ethno-Religious Minorities," *Journal of Peace Research* 36(3): 289-307. Fox defines an ethnoreligious minority as one where 80% of the members of an ethnic minority also share a religion different from that of the majority.

religion and conflict as well as the proposed methods of peacemaking that spring from them. I will first establish working definitions of both religion and conflict, and then outline a fourth theoretical position that helps us better understand their relationship. As this chapter is an overview, I will not discuss specific religions or conflicts in depth, either in defining religion and conflict or in analyzing the various theories. Rather, I will use a broad approach. While I realize that every case is different, given the wide range of conflicts to which this study applies it is worthwhile to establish a general framework for discussion. Nor will this chapter provide an exhaustive analysis of every theory of religion and conflict. Instead, it will serve as a background to the thesis, so it is necessary only to review the general arguments.

Each of the three types of theory I will discuss emphasizes a different aspect of the role of religion in conflict. The first type highlights the ways religion can promote violent conflict behavior, at times going so far as to identify religion as a distinct cause of conflict. The second tends to marginalize the influence of religion and look for alternative explanations to conflict behavior, such as political or socioeconomic factors. The third highlights the ways religion has promoted peace, making a strong case for the inclusion of religious actors in peacemaking. I refer to these, in a form of shorthand, as the “source of violence,” “irrelevant,” and “source of peace” arguments. None of these fully explains the relationship between religion and conflict, largely because each highlights one aspect of the relationship and is not comprehensive. However, each has elements of truth, and by combining insights gained from them a few thinkers are putting forward a more balanced view that takes into account more of the evidence. I will outline this view and defend it as my working approach to religion and conflict before proceeding to the main body of this thesis. First, I will quickly define the two basic terms, religion and conflict.

Religious Conflict?

Often, in discussing this subject, people refer to “religious conflicts” to summarize

the entire topic. However, it is difficult to find an entirely religious conflict. Perhaps the ongoing dispute between the Catholic and Orthodox churches, as played out between the Pope and the Patriarchs, is one. The absence of violence during the Pope's 2001 visit to Greece, despite worried predictions, shows that sometimes even an ancient and seemingly intractable religious conflict may only concern religious authorities. However, the same division between Catholic and Orthodox was one important aspect of the conflict between Croats and Serbs during the breakup of Yugoslavia. Also present were many other elements, including matters of ethnic and political identity. That in one place a division between Catholicism and Orthodoxy concerns only religious authorities while in another it was an element in a much broader conflict highlights a problem with a simple definition of "religious conflict" – the term does not cover the diversity of contemporary conflict. It is necessary, then, to further analyze the term. I will define both religion and conflict separately before coming back to the question, what is a religious conflict?

Many sociologists, including Max Weber, doubt whether it is wise or even possible to begin any exploration of religion by defining the subject.² However, I believe it is necessary to have at least a working definition to establish the parameters of the investigation. Lester Kurtz provides a concise, useful definition for religion, saying a religion "consists of the beliefs, practices (rituals), the sacred, and the community or social organization of people who are drawn together by a religious tradition."³ This definition highlights both beliefs and practices, as well as noting that people in the community are drawn together, not defined, by the tradition. The thing that makes this a definition of religion, and not any other social phenomenon, is the reference to the sacred. It is necessary to differentiate between *sacred*, which means "dedicated [to or] set apart" and can indicate some human agency, and holy or divine, words that indicate

2 Aldridge, Alan, 2000, *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity), p. 23.

3 Kurtz, Lester R., 1995, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge), p. 9.

some form of transcendent source.⁴ For our purposes, it is not necessary to debate the existence of divine or transcendent reality. However, one must note that what sets a religious group apart from others is that members organize around phenomena they perceive as divine. Because of this, they sacralize – make sacred – those phenomena. We can here suspend a debate about divinity, but we must still recognize that to a religious group certain things are sacred. With this definition, we can discuss religion and conflict without specifically contesting religious truths, but without implicitly denying them, either.

Briefly, I would like to note the relationship between the terms religion, spirituality, cult, and fundamentalism. Spirituality refers to a personal relationship to the sacred, whereas with religion the emphasis is on community. There is, of course, a wide crossover between religion and spirituality, but it is important to note the difference. Indeed, spiritually motivated people can come to oppose the very religious structures within which their spirituality was formed. As this chapter focuses on religion, I will pay more attention to communities, but that does not deny the influence of personal, spiritual motivation.

I define a cult as a religious group held together by one person. This is not necessarily a bad thing – many religious groups begin largely based on one person’s interpretation of divinity, which, over time, becomes a self-sustaining communal interpretation.⁵ Many of the behaviors associated with negative or “doomsday” cults – absolute control by the leader, limited or no contact with the outside world – are not specific to religion. Such behaviors are dangerous in any group and have more to do with norms of social control. The analysis in this chapter applies to groups that, while they may be new or fringe religious movements, still maintain contact with the world

4 Quote: *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1st 1933), Simpson, J.A., and Weiner, E.S.C., co-eds., in. al. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1989), v. 14, pp. 338. On holy, v. 7, pp. 318-319. On divine, v. 4, p. 893.

5 For example, I believe that the story of the Pentecost describes this shift. Before the Pentecost, the apostles were held together by the personality and presence of Jesus. After his death, they were thrown into confusion, but were able to establish a community based on his teaching but not requiring his presence.

and are influenced by debates within the wider religious community.

Fundamentalism is an even more problematic term. Scholars disagree greatly on its meaning and applicability. While one may make a case for using it to describe how certain groups practice religion, such as by adhering to or upholding perceived nonnegotiable fundamentals, such groups are only a subset of religion as such. Limiting the discussion to fundamentalism alone would detract from the overall approach of this chapter, which is to explore theories that apply to religious groups generally. Although I may note the term fundamentalist when the media or other commentators use the label, I will try to describe the specific practices or beliefs of groups.

Moving to conflict, a simple, powerful definition put forward by Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham, and Tom Woodhouse is that “conflict [is] the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups.”⁶ Conflict is common and can often be beneficial – it can highlight weaknesses in a group’s positions, encouraging them to revise their goals. How conflicting parties pursue their goals makes all the difference. Drawing on Adam Curle, one can differentiate between peaceful situations, which are beneficial to all parties, and unpeaceful ones, which are disadvantageous to some or all.⁷ Conflicts can occur and still be peaceful, if both groups pursue their goals in constructive ways. However, if one group believes it is necessary to pursue its goals at the expense of another – which often leads to a like response – the conflict turns violent. Violence can either be direct, as with physical violence, or structural, as with the maintenance of social or political inequalities. Resorting to violence is often not a deliberate choice, but rather reflects presumptions people have about proper behavior in conflict. This includes situations in which groups have unequal power to do so, as when a minority group, due to sheer size, is unable to compete on the same level as a majority. Thus, to

6 Miall, Hugh; Ramsbotham, Oliver; and Woodhouse, Tom, 1999, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management, and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts* (Cambridge, UK: Polity), pp. 19-20.

7 Curle, Adam, 1985, “The Scope and Dilemmas of Peace Studies,” in: O’Connell, James, and Curle, *Peace with Work to Do: The Academic Study of Peace* (Leamington Spa, UK: Berg): 9-28, pp. 17-20.

understand conflict is not just to identify the opposing groups and their goals, but also to look at how groups pursue those goals. Similarly, making peace is not simply negotiating to find compatibility between goals, but may involve identifying and countering different forms of violence.

In approaching conflict in this way, there are a number of factors to consider. One is the nature of the goals or issues at stake. They may be relatively negotiable, or they may be deep-seated and not suited to compromise. Another factor is the way in which a group understands both its goals and those of the opponent – different groups often interpret the same circumstances differently. A third factor is the relative social positions of the groups. Where one has a significant amount of power over another, both groups' approaches to the conflict will change. A fourth factor is the role of leadership, which can vary from group to group. However, it is important not to overstate the importance of leaders. The attitudes of group members, both toward their leaders and toward the conflict in general, is vital and may differ from that of the leadership.

Given the diversity of conflicts possible with this definition, to speak of “religious conflict” is misleading, as it implies that religion is the sole factor in a conflict. It is much better to address “the religious element in conflict.” Religious belief may indeed be a key issue in a conflict, as when a religious group seeks freedom to worship as it sees fit. When the goal or issue is not religious, religious beliefs may still affect the ways in which groups of people pursue them. The relative power of the groups also matters, as different religions have different teachings about a believer's response to authority. This applies within a religion as well as without – the role of the leadership varies from group to group. Moreover, one must consider the links between religious and other factors in analyzing a conflict. This is particularly the case when group identity more generally is at stake. For example, Fox's study was of *ethno*-religious minorities – one can not discount the role of other forms of identity and belonging in

assessing the role of religion in conflict.

Because one can look at all conflict behavior, both peaceful and violent, one must also discuss religious elements in peacemaking. Speaking of “religious conflict” often emphasizes the role of religion in the worst forms of conflict behavior. To speak of “the religious element in conflict,” changing religion from being a descriptor of conflict to being just an element, makes it easier to remember that many forms of conflict behavior are peaceful and that religion can be an element of those as well. Even with such a definition, there are a number of theories regarding the role of religion in conflict, and it is to those that we now turn.

Religion: Possible Roles

Religion As a Source of Violence

The argument for religion as a source of violence, while perhaps not the strongest, is the easiest to state. A brief review of the conflicts mentioned at the beginning of this chapter reminds us that religion appears to be involved in many situations, both large and small. Given the intractable nature of many of these conflicts, it would not be extreme to propose that religion has some negative influence, particularly some exacerbating effect on violent conflict behavior. However, to simply present this argument in such simple terms – that “religion causes conflict” – would be unfair, as much accomplished scholarship has been devoted to exploring more nuanced positions.

Perhaps the most famous contemporary work exploring the role of religion as a source of violence is Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. The core of his argument is that cultural and civilizational differences are the most important factors governing politics in the post-Cold War world. In Huntington’s model, religion is “a central, perhaps *the* central, force” that motivates and unites people.⁸ In an apt phrase, Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, in “Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political

⁸ Huntington, Samuel P., 1996, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London, UK: Touchstone), p. 66, original italics.

Conflict,” call this the primordialist position. In this perspective, civilizations, with religion as a key identifier, are primary determinants of conflict behavior that prefigure, though do not replace, other concerns such as economics or politics.⁹ In conflict, groups will tend to side with like civilizations and religions, a tendency that favors unpeaceful conflict behavior.

In explaining why religion should play such a role, Huntington makes much use of Gilles Kepel’s ideas found in *The Revenge of God*, borrowing the phrase itself as a chapter subheading. Kepel believes that the resurgence of religion is largely a response to perceived failings of modernity, from the collapse of communism to social ills in modern societies. Neither irrational religiosity nor manipulation by unscrupulous leaders, “rather it is the undeniable evidence of a deep malaise in society that can no longer be interpreted in terms of traditional categories of thought.”¹⁰ While the catalyst is modernity and its problems, nontraditional religious understandings set these movements apart and give them their strength. This view is echoed by Mark Juergensmeyer, who in *The New Cold War* says, “in times of social turbulence and political confusion ... new panaceas abound. It was inevitable that many of these would involve religion, sometimes perceived as the only stable point in a swirl of economic and political indirection.”¹¹ Elsewhere Juergensmeyer explains that religions’ teachings of transcendence can give their adherents a mandate they feel surpasses worldly judgments.¹² Such a mandate can contribute to the violent potential of religious movements.

Not everyone is so tempered. Among the most vociferous opponents of religion is Richard Dawkins. For Dawkins, religion is not only a primary determinant of conflict

9 Hasenclever, Andreas, and Rittberger, Volker, 2000, “Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict,” *Millennium* 29(3): 641-674, pp. 643-644.

10 Kepel, Gilles, 1994, Braley, Alan, trans., *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity), p. 11.

11 Juergensmeyer, Mark, 1993, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 194.

12 Juergensmeyer, Mark, 2000, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 216.

behavior, it is very nearly the sole cause. While he sometimes moderates this position, as when he identifies two causes of violent conflict – the carrying of grievances across generations and affixing blame to groups rather than individuals – he says “religion fuels both. All violent enmities in the world today fuel their tanks at this holy gas-station.”¹³ Although this opinion was offered just after and thus in the context of the September 11th attacks, it is consistent with Dawkins’ overall view of religion. While not everyone takes such an explicit stance, it is not uncommon to hold religion as the direct cause of violence. Dawkins is the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University, and figures such as Salman Rushdie and Polly Toynbee, among others, have recently echoed this view,¹⁴ so one can not construe it as being a fringe position.

If religion is the cause of a given conflict, what can one do about it? For someone who takes Dawkins’ view, the only thing that one can do is get rid of religion. Dawkins and others feel that, to date, people have been too respectful of religious beliefs, but that it is time to confront them in favor of rationality. This may be possible in a situation where beliefs can be debated, but where violent conflict has erupted it is often too late for words. In such a situation, those who directly blame religion usually opt for what Hasenclever and Rittberger call a strategy of deterrence and repressive denial.¹⁵ The goal is to make violence an unacceptably costly option for religious groups through the use of force. Religion, as such, is not the issue – the primary concern is with conflict behavior.

In the longer term, such a solution may be impractical, if not dangerous, as it will almost certainly exacerbate problems. Huntington opts for a balance of power between

13 Dawkins, Richard, 2001, “Time to Stand Up,” paper delivered to the Freedom from Religion Foundation (by James Coors in lieu of Dawkins), Sep., <www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/WorldOfDawkins-archive/Dawkins/Work/Articles/2001-09time_to_stand_up.shtml> (as on 27 Jan. 2005).

14 Rushdie, Salman, 2002, “India’s Shame Is Religion’s Too,” *The Age* (AU), 13 Mar., <www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/03/12/1015909849138.html> (registration required).
Toynbee, Polly, 2002, “Religion Isn’t Nice. It Kills,” *The Guardian* (UK), 6 Sep., <www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,787075,00.html>. Both web addresses current on 27 Jan. 2005.

15 Hasenclever and Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference?” p. 661.

civilizations. The first requirement is that civilizations recognize their particular identity – any claims of universality he sees as false, immoral, and dangerous.¹⁶ He suggests two main rules for dealing with intercivilizational problems, the abstention rule and the joint mediation rule. States in one civilization should abstain from intervening in other civilizations and, should a conflict arise between members of different civilizations, the “core states” from each civilization should work together to mediate it rather than intervening for their fellows.¹⁷ Instead of such a multipolar view, Juergensmeyer foresaw a new bipolar Cold War between secular states and religious groups around the world. At best, he felt this opposition could develop into grudging respect, and at worst it could become more hostile than the old Cold War.¹⁸ In either Huntington’s or Juergensmeyer’s view, however, there is little room for contact between religious groups – groups handle conflict partly by maintaining a strong identity, but largely by keeping apart.

While viewing religion as a source of violence may have the advantage of simplicity, both in outlook and prescription, it has a number of weaknesses. First, the evidence does not fully support the conclusions. In “Two Civilizations and Ethnic Conflict” Jonathan Fox analyzed the statistical evidence for a clash of civilizations and found that the model is not entirely accurate. While there has been some decrease in the number of violent conflicts within the West, globally there has not been a significant change in the number of what Huntington defines as civilizational versus noncivilizational local conflicts. Thus, from a Western perspective the West may seem to be more at odds with other groups than faced with internal conflict, but from other civilizational perspectives this is not the case.¹⁹ Moreover, to say that religion is always a source of violence in conflicts that do arise ignores the many instances when religious individuals or groups

16 Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, pp. 310-312.

17 Ibid., p. 316.

18 Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?* pp. 197-201.

19 Fox, Jonathan, 2001, “Two Civilizations and Ethnic Conflict: Islam and the West,” *Journal of Peace Research* 38(4): 459-472.

have successfully engaged in peacebuilding, which I will discuss later in this chapter. A second weakness is that this position does not fully address other causes of conflict. While usually admitting the existence of other factors, such as economic or political grievances, authors with this position often discount or minimize these factors and hold religion to be the key or trigger factor, as does Dawkins. Huntington and Juergensmeyer, while paying more attention to nonreligious factors, stress the separations rather than the commonalities groups may have in responding to these factors, making peacemaking strategies based on finding common ground more difficult.

The underlying cause of these weaknesses, I believe, is dramatic oversimplification. Here, religious differences equal conflict and division. Negative expressions of religion are indeed possible, but to classify all religion as divisive misses a wealth of evidence to the contrary. Such an approach often stems from essentializing groups, both religious and non-, regarding them as predisposed toward certain behaviors. That many religious groups are involved in conflict and that some have turned to violence does not mean that religion is always conflictual. Such monocausal thinking often leads to a strategy, like deterrence or separation, focused on conflict behavior and not conflict source.

However, even within the works cited above, we can see something of a way forward. This is most striking in Kepel's work. It is only in Kepel's opening chapter that he equates the "revenge of god" movements with all religion. Throughout the rest of his book, he clearly refers to "revivalist movements," language that differentiates these movements from mainstream religion. Huntington and Juergensmeyer both call, in their own ways, for looking at connections between groups – Huntington proposes a third rule focusing on commonalities to balance abstention and mediation,²⁰ while Juergensmeyer believes that understanding the centrality of values for religious groups may promote a revival of moral thinking in nonreligious politics.²¹ While keeping in

20 Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 320.

21 Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?* pp. 195-196.

mind that religions play a role on contemporary conflicts, and that religious groups may resort to violence, by not essentializing these facts we can look at other ways of resolving such conflicts than with simple opposition to religion.

Religion As Irrelevant

The second theoretical position I will present is that which sees religion as irrelevant to understanding conflict. This is, in some ways, a reversal of the position that religion is a source of violence. Notably, while both may recognize economic, political, or other factors to religious conflicts, the first position holds religion as the primary factor, whereas this one holds the other factors as the true causes, with religion an extraneous variable. The positions are similar, however, in that neither looks at the role religion can play in peacemaking. As with the previous position, viewing religion as irrelevant leads its proponents toward considering ways of “dealing with,” rather than working with, religion.

As with Huntington, the most famous proponent of this position, Francis Fukuyama, did not write about religion per se. Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, however, presents a general social theory from which we can extrapolate an understanding of religion. Fukuyama draws on Hegel’s dialectic and holds both that history ends with the liberal state – we have created a social system that answers all the big questions, so no more development need happen – and that this applies to the whole world, not just current liberal democracies. Although it has not yet spread worldwide, eventually material and historical forces will push all societies toward the same form of liberalism. Fukuyama says, “This process [of scientific and technological development] guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritances.”²² Equally powerful is a prime nonmaterial factor: thymos, the human desire for recognition by others. While religion also draws much of its power from this source, only rational liberalism fully satisfies it.²³

22 Fukuyama, Francis, 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London, UK: Penguin), p. xiv.

23 Ibid., pp. 214-216.

Christianity, which nearly satisfies the need for recognition by promising all people equality before God, had to be translated during the Enlightenment “into the here-and-now”²⁴ to reach its final, liberal goal of providing a model of social and political equality. For Fukuyama, it is only reasonable to expect this change in other religious traditions. Any resistance he sees as a reaction against the inevitable.

A similar desire to find alternative causes of religious conflict underlies the discussions of authors who do directly analyze it. A common belief is that expressed by James Kurth in “Religion and Ethnic Conflict – In Theory.” Here, the ultimate cause of religious conflict is the failure of both nationalism and communism to improve the lives of people, coupled with the threat that global liberalism will destroy religious identity.²⁵ For Jeffrey Seul in ““Ours is the Way of God”: Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,” it is again not religion as such but the need for a stable group identity that drives many conflicts.²⁶ While material factors may be involved, in times of economic or political stress people seek a group with which to identify. Religion, often having a more visible role than other identifiers, naturally forms a point around which to rally. While this is similar to some explanations focusing on religion as a source of violence, the key difference is that here religion is not inherently conflictual. Rather, the trials of modernity and the need for identity drive what appear to be religious conflicts.

With this approach, where religion is involved, as it is not the cause of conflict, it must be a tool used by groups in the service of more fundamental concerns. In another apt phrase, Hasenclever and Rittberger call this the instrumentalist approach. They also note that this is usually seen as a matter of elite abuse. Leaders with particular agendas seize upon religion as a powerful tool to promote their ends.²⁷ This view does deny the presumption that religious groups share some type of essential character. Fred Halliday,

24 Ibid., p. 198.

25 Kurth, James, 2001, “Religion and Ethnic Conflict – In Theory,” *Orbis* 45(2): 281-294.

26 Seul, Jeffrey R., 1999, ““Ours is the Way of God”: Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 36(5): 553-569.

27 Hasenclever and Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference?” pp. 645-646.

in *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* makes the general claim that “no religion ... is a set menu of moral, political, and social behaviour; it offers, within some varying limits, an à la carte selection, varying within sect, time, and context, if not from individual to individual.”²⁸ Leaders can thus select elements that serve their social and political needs. Given this overall belief in the primacy of nonreligious factors and the secondary role of religion, when there is no conflict religion ceases to be an issue and, in the liberal view, may exist in the private sphere without problem.

Because, in this approach, religion is not a cause, neither can it be a cure. Hasenclever and Rittberger call the general approach taken by thinkers with this perspective a strategy of development and democratization.²⁹ If religion is an instrument, a tool used by elites in conflicts that are truly about political or socioeconomic problems, then by addressing those problems one alleviates the cause of the conflict. Halliday puts this quite clearly. He says one should separate the real, material causes of conflict “from their confused religious expression, then address these [material] difficulties themselves.”³⁰ In so addressing one should adopt a universalist stance and encourage development, where “development [is] understood as both growth in the economic field and democratization in the political.”³¹ Without economic and political sources of conflict, its “confused religious expression” will no longer be a problem.

Unfortunately, at times this religious expression can appear somewhat resistant to change. What is more, the underlying political, social, and economic problems may be difficult to address. Also, given that some religious groups see themselves as already in conflict with the modern world, they will regard overtures made by that world with deep suspicion. For these reasons, Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin envision, in “America

28 Halliday, Fred, 1996, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris), p. 114.

29 Hasenclever and Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference?” pp. 664-665.

30 Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, p. 128.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

and the New Terrorism,” that countries threatened by religious extremists will need to remain on the defensive and “hope that broader historical developments will ameliorate, rather than inflame, ... grievances.”³² In other words, if, currently, one can not promote political or socioeconomic solutions, then perhaps the forces of history will eventually do so.

Although not essentialist, like the previous position, one of the problems with this position is that it often presumes that religion does have a negative effect when it emerges into the public sphere. This is where the term fundamentalism often enters the discussion. When religion makes any claims in the public sphere it violates the directionality of history as put forward by Fukuyama – if the irreligious liberal state is the end of history, any religious expression is regressive. Even when writers in this camp listen to the religious, it is to separate Halliday’s “confused religious expression” from real problems. While this is better than the position emphasizing religion as a source of violence, which can extend to regarding all religions as inherently violent, regarding all public expression of religion as fundamentalist is not much better.

Many authors fail to address religion at all. In reviewing Huntington’s clash thesis in “Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu?” Bruce Russett, John Oneal, and Michaelene Cox use his religious labels, like Islamic and Buddhist, without addressing their meanings. They found that traditional realist and liberal factors such as resources and interests account for state behavior, omitting any effect Islamic or Buddhist interpretations may have on those factors.³³ But as Edward Luttwak points out, ignoring such interpretations led policymakers to overlook important religious developments in 1960s Vietnamese Buddhism and 1970s Iranian Islam, among other places. While interests certainly played a part in those conflicts, religious change was

32 Simon, Steven, and Benjamin, Daniel, 2000, “America and the New Terrorism,” *Survival* 42(1): 59-75, p. 74.

33 Russett, Bruce M.; Oneal, John R.; and Cox, Michaelene, 2000, “Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu? Some Evidence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37(5): 583-608. See also Huntington’s response and a reply by Oneal and Russett in the same issue.

central to both cases.³⁴ Not considering religion, or only considering it when it can not be ignored, exacerbates the tendency to wait for such things to blow over, as evidenced by Simon and Benjamin's take on future policies.

A key theoretical problem in this position is its universalist approach. Having found what they regard as true causes of human development, many writers are loath to consider even variations on them, let alone other possibilities. While one can not deny the necessity to address real, visible problems, to relegate religion to the private sphere and proceed with a single model of development misses important factors. For one, as Kurth points out, if modernization itself is contested in some religious perspectives, then emphasizing modernization is clearly going to be problematic. Moreover, rather than being a nearly infinitely plastic set of concepts elites may use in addressing their concerns, religious perspectives are constrained by history and philosophical traditions. Understanding religious perspectives themselves, apart from a universal history, is necessary for a constructive dialog.

Unfortunately, fewer possibilities for ways forward are evident in scholarship that regards religion as irrelevant than there were in work highlighting its importance as a source of violence. Nonetheless, there are some. Fukuyama, for example, does recognize that change within religion is possible, although he still assumes the endpoint toward which such change will go. Simon and Benjamin, among others, recognize the continuing need for a better understanding of the links between religion and conflict, if only, as with Halliday, this is to untangle true cause from religious expression. Still, this is an advance on highly conflictual, primordialist views. Moreover, in the course of exploring religious discourses, one begins to find that there are many alternatives not yet considered.

34 Luttwak, Edward, 1994, "The Missing Dimension," in: Johnston, Douglas, and Sampson, Cynthia, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press): 8-19, pp. 10-13.

Religion As a Source of Peace

Against the positions outlined above, that hold religion as a source of violence in conflict or as irrelevant compared to political and socioeconomic factors, there is a small but growing body of work exploring religion as a source of peace. Writers with this outlook challenge a number of the presumptions that underlie the other two positions. They cite the many cases in which religious groups have been involved in peace processes. They promote relations between religious groups and public institutions rather than relegating religion to purely private matters. Although it often leaves unanswered an important question – what if a religious group is, indeed, calling for violence? – this work is a necessary first step in broadening our understanding of the role of religion in conflict.

The best work in support of this position comes from Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, particularly in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*. In this and other works they have presented a range of case studies that challenge the perception that the sole role of religion in violent conflict is that of precipitating or exacerbating factor.³⁵ Some of these studies deserve a brief mention to balance out the more negative list presented at the beginning of this chapter. They note that some religious groups, such as Quakers and Mennonites, have a distinguished history of peace work in a number of different conflicts. Spiritually motivated individuals have been key to addressing, if not resolving, conflicts in the Sudan, the Punjab, and elsewhere. At times, groups and individuals can come together and produce great social change, as in South Africa where a wide range of religious individuals and institutions played important roles in the transition from the apartheid system.

In conjunction with these examples of religious involvement, many authors also present ways that traditionally nonreligious actors, particularly at the state level, can

35 Johnston, Douglas, and Sampson, Cynthia, eds., 1994, *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press). See also Sampson, Cynthia, 1997, "Religion and Peacebuilding," in: Zartman, I. William, and Rasmussen, J. Lewis, eds., *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press): 273-316.

benefit from an understanding of religion. In Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God*, written after *The New Cold War*, he has moved from his original stand that, at best, there could be a relationship of grudging respect between religions and states. He observes that where governments have addressed the specifically moral lessons of religious groups (without necessarily becoming religious) they have enhanced mutual respect, which, in turn, benefits peacemaking. Moreover, when governments violate moral norms to oppose religious groups, as when the Algerian military annulled elections favorable to Islamist parties, they lose credibility.³⁶ "In a curious way, then," he posits, "the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself."³⁷

There are a number of reasons why religious groups can and should have a presence in peacemaking. Sampson highlights the multiplicity of roles that religious actors can play across all phases of a conflict. Drawing on John Paul Lederach's work, she identifies these as the advocate, intermediary, observer, and educator roles,³⁸ and demonstrates the ways they have worked with a number of case studies. She also highlights the different levels at which religious actors may work, from individual to international, while Johnston tends to emphasize the power of individuals operating with deep conviction.³⁹ Both also stress the social location and moral authority that may be uniquely available to religious groups. Religious institutions in particular often have a historical involvement in a community and are thus insiders, and such long-term presence is also important to seeing peace work through.⁴⁰ Religious groups also often teach a variety of philosophical and moral precepts, such as repentance and forgiveness, that particularly aid long-term peacemaking.⁴¹

36 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 238-239.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

38 Sampson, "Religion and Peacebuilding," pp. 279-280.

39 See Johnston, Douglas, 1994, "Looking Ahead: Toward a New Paradigm," in: Johnston and Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, pp. 317-323.

40 Johnston, Douglas, 1994, "Review of the Findings," in: Johnston and Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*.

41 Sampson, "Religion and Peacebuilding," pp. 275-276.

To increase the presence of religious groups in peacemaking, those who emphasize religious peacemaking stress the need for religious groups to actively promote their own peaceful values. William Vendley and David Little cite the need for self-examination by religious traditions, particularly of their “primary language,” which comprises the traditional stories and customs that are carriers of religious meaning. “Religious communities will have to take a long, hard look at themselves and, when appropriate, admit that not everything said in their tradition points in the direction of peace.” They must seek to employ those themes that do promote peace while “disregarding or modifying” conflictual ones.⁴² Writers also stress interreligious cooperation, both as evidence of religious peacemaking potential⁴³ and as a direction to further pursue in promoting peaceful values.⁴⁴ The process of promoting positive religious values over negative ones is part of what Hasenclever and Rittberger call the constructivist position.⁴⁵ A key element of the constructivist position is its challenge to the view that religion only promotes violence, either inherently or when caught up in a response to worldly problems. However, this is not the entirety of Hasenclever and Rittberger’s constructivist position, which I will discuss more fully in the next section.

Theorists highlighting the positive role of religion also encourage nonreligious actors to take seriously the role of religion. As Luttwak pointed out, a religion-blind view of politics has led to grave misunderstandings in several situations. Luttwak called this materialistic determinism and recommends that, at the very least, diplomatic and intelligence organizations include specialists in religion.⁴⁶ Stanton Burnett has discussed at greater length the change in mindset that needs to occur, specifically in diplomatic circles. He emphasizes the increased training in and preparation for religious

42 Vendley, William, and Little, David, 1994, “Implications for Religious Communities: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity,” in: Johnston and Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, pp. 307-309.

43 Sampson, “Religion and Peacebuilding,” pp. 304-307.

44 Vendley and Little, “Implications for Religious Communities,” pp. 313-314.

45 Hasenclever and Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference?” p. 647.

46 Luttwak, “The Missing Dimension,” pp. 14-16.

engagement all diplomats would need.⁴⁷

While this position goes a long way toward countering some of the errant views put forward by the other two stances, it suffers from its own limitations. Most importantly, it does not discuss how religious groups can make a difference when the religious identity of a group is part of the conflict. In only very few of the conflicts Johnston, Sampson, or others cite was a religious group party to a conflict, and in only one was a substantive peace reached. This peace accord, in the Sudan, fell apart in just over ten years when the leader of the Muslim north sought to impose *sharia* law on the country, including the non-Muslim south, contravening the peace process. This occurred, in part, because of structural failure to follow up the process at the grassroots level,⁴⁸ so we can only speculate on possibilities and missed opportunities for further, religious peacemaking. Still, the near absence of analyses of conflicts where religion is a central issue indicates a serious limitation with much of the research.

Moreover, there is much difficulty with the promotion of peaceful religious values within any given religion. Most writers seem content to ignore violent religious discourses, assuming that peaceful discourses are there, whole unto themselves and ready to be used by peacemakers. This makes theorizing an engagement between peaceful and violent discourses difficult. Each is viewed as a separate entity, whereas they usually draw on the same sources and traditions. Vendley and Little called on each religious tradition to examine itself and promote its peaceful aspects. This is certainly necessary, but is also undoubtedly a difficult task – how does one “disregard or modify” centuries or millennia of shared tradition? This question is usually left unanswered by proponents of the idea.

At the root of the problem, I believe, is an unspoken relativism many scholars have while examining the peaceful potentials of religion. While the development of peaceful

47 Burnett, Stanton, 1994, “Implications for the Foreign Policy Community,” in: Johnston and Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, p. 295.

48 Johnston, “Looking Ahead,” pp. 318-319.

expressions are necessary, too often each religious group is seen to already have such elements within it and no further development is necessary, particularly where that would involve engagement, let alone judgment, across religious boundaries.

Interreligious interaction is here largely a case of praising preexisting common ground.⁴⁹ In a sense, this can become an echo of the view of religion as irrelevant. Both positions challenge the idea that religion causes conflict, but neither looks deeply at how beliefs can shape understandings of conflict and thus behavior in it. Relativism denies the presumption that the liberal answer is universal but does not promote any form of dialog that could cross religious boundaries. Religious belief is still private, in that individuals and groups motivated by spiritual concerns pursue goals in the public sphere without necessarily engaging with one another. Criticism across religious boundaries is eschewed, and challenging violent religious interpretation remains an internal affair.

Still, the advance made by presenting a positive face of religion is an important one. Those who regard religion as irrelevant challenge the belief that religion is inherently conflictual by noting alternative explanations for conflict. Highlighting peacemaking possibilities in religion demonstrates that, in fact, religion can be a positive force for peace. Yet the problem of religious promotion of violence remains. How can one expand on nascent peaceful interpretations and interreligious cooperation, both positive directions, in the face of this problem? A few authors are beginning to address such tricky aspects of religion and its involvement in conflict. Their various approaches, I believe, point toward the position at which I hinted in beginning this chapter, a position that balances elements of each of the three views I have already covered.

A Balanced View

A balanced view of religion and conflict must take into account issues raised by all three positions. Evidence abounds that religious dogma can exacerbate violence, as does evidence, unfortunately less frequently or adamantly cited, that religious groups

⁴⁹ For example: Vendley and Little, "Implications for Religious Communities," p. 314.

have acted with the most peaceful of ideals. Moreover, religion is usually only one element of a conflict – political, social, and economic grievances also matter and must be addressed for any workable solution to emerge, even though religious understanding of those issues can affect the approaches taken in addressing them. We must first tackle all of these insights to comprehend the many roles of religion in conflict, then ascertain the impact they have on peacemaking.

R. Scott Appleby presents a good synthesis in *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. Appleby's main point is that such an all-encompassing concept as the sacred, and thus religion, is ambiguous – one can interpret it in a number of different ways. Thus, people's response to it is ambivalent – one can feel contradictory emotions or hold contradictory ideas about the same thing.⁵⁰ While he offers a theological explanation for this, that it is related to people's imperfect understanding of the sacred, he also notes that this is a human dilemma, not a divine one. I would add that nonreligious yet complex cultural or social traditions often face the same ambiguity and ambivalence, so this discussion remains within the sociological boundaries I marked at the beginning of the chapter.

Ambivalence turns religious traditions into ongoing “arguments” between contradictory but still plausible beliefs and acts, not least regarding conflict behavior. Indeed, the same passion that inspires violent religious actors inspires religious peacemakers, and, often, the same texts can justify both positions. For example, Gandhi used the Bhagavad Gita, usually interpreted as a tale of duty and war, to symbolize the inner struggle of nonviolence. Although one can trace a general pattern of increasing “compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation” in religious doctrine over time,⁵¹ these arguments take many forms as people interact with both fellow believers and others outside of their tradition, so it is difficult to predict exactly what shape the results will

50 Appleby, R. Scott, 2000, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), pp. 29-30.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

take.⁵²

These arguments can become caught up in debates on other issues like ethnicity or politics. This is the fuller understanding of Hasenclever and Rittberger's constructivist position mentioned in the last section. They view social conflict as embedded in a number of sociocultural structures, of which religion is one, by which conflicting parties define themselves and the conflict.⁵³ Although such conflict may be grounded in socioeconomic or political causes, these structures affect both how people interpret those causes and how they choose to act. Appleby notes that, due to ambivalence and ongoing arguments, violent interpretations may be justifiable in any religion, albeit perhaps not in the best tradition of it, and one should not underestimate religion's "ability to underwrite deadly conflict on its own terms."⁵⁴ Moreover, although leadership is important – it is only with strong leadership that a group can hold together throughout a conflict – Hasenclever and Rittberger stress that these structures are socially constructed and "have a life of their own."⁵⁵ Religious justifications are not merely instruments leaders can use, but, rather, leaders must work within a larger context of competing understandings of tradition. This important point is also made by Raymond Helmick, who holds that religion has its own agenda towards the sacred, and one can not understand it as merely a means toward peacemaking.⁵⁶

This understanding balances many of the insights gained from the previous positions. It admits both the ability of religion to spark violence and to peacefully resolve conflict, but gives neither priority. Rather, one can observe both aspects in any religion, as well as the ongoing argument as to which is more true to the tradition. Peacemakers can find hope in Appleby's evidence for patterns of increasingly peaceful interpretation, but this

52 Ibid., p. 40.

53 Hasenclever and Rittberger, "Does Religion Make a Difference?" pp. 648-649.

54 Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, p. 30.

55 Hasenclever and Rittberger, "Does Religion Make a Difference?" p. 649.

56 Helmick, Raymond G. (SJ), 2001, "Does Religion Fuel or Heal in Conflicts?" in: Helmick and Petersen, Rodney L., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press): 81-95, pp. 81-82.

does not minimize the need to engage with those who hold violent views. As Kepel noted, doing so “does not ... make us into either their advocates or their fellow-travellers.”⁵⁷ This is the position taken by Douglas Johnston in his more recent work, such as *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*. In the introduction to that book, he notes the violent potential in religion and encourages the inclusion of religious peacemakers specifically to “fight fire with fire.”⁵⁸ Also, this approach takes into account the many factors in conflict and leaves room for economic and political assessments, adding an appreciation of religion and other sociocultural elements. In their work, Hasenclever and Rittberger regard religion as an intervening variable, neither solely violent nor solely peaceful – and certainly not irrelevant, for it is deeply involved with how parties may approach a conflict.⁵⁹

With that understanding of conflict, the challenge is to promote peaceful interpretations over violent ones, which was not met by the religion-as-peaceful position. A key element of any such approach, Appleby maintains, is to support the strengthening of religion. By a strong religion, he means one where “its institutions are well developed and secure and its adherents “literate” in its doctrinal and moral teachings and practiced in its devotional, ritual, and spiritual traditions.” In particular, people must be engaged with the wider religious tradition and its arguments. A weak religion, on the other hand, is one in which people have lost touch with the wider tradition, remembering only relatively empty rituals and forms.⁶⁰ In a strong religious community, it is difficult for leaders so inclined to promote violent interpretations of tradition because adherents are familiar with other views, and religious peacemakers may advance them effectively. Weak communities or religiously illiterate followers, on the other hand, would have difficulty arguing against violent interpretations.

57 Kepel, *The Revenge of God*, p. 11.

58 Johnston, Douglas, 2003, “Introduction: Realpolitik Expanded,” in: Johnston, ed., *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press): 3-10, p. 6.

59 Hasenclever and Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference?” p. 649.

60 Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 76-77 and pp. 285-288 passim.

Appleby recognizes that there is a difficulty with the term “strong,” as many violent organizations are certainly quite strong in the sense that they have extensive religious understanding, at least of those aspects of tradition that support their beliefs. He would also use the term strong to mean following the general pattern of increased peacefulness he identified.⁶¹ However, I believe that this would be stretching the term too far and seek other ways to describe this aspect of a positive religious tradition. Johan Galtung, in “Religion, Hard and Soft,” opts for what he calls soft religion, an aspect he believes is evident in all religious traditions where intensity of internal belief begins to overshadow outward forms. Soft religion is less likely to promote violence by relying less on ritual and being more accepting of others.⁶² While this may indeed be the motivation for many spiritual peacemakers, I have two problems with using the term. For one, it may apply more to mystical than practical believers; that is, to those who seek intensity over practical communal or social effect. It is usually such practical issues that are at the root of conflict. It also may lie outside of the sociological remit I have set for myself and so, while it would be worth investigating in a religious or theological context, does not translate well here.

It is precisely those outward forms, both rituals and codified beliefs, that Marc Gopin addresses in *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*. He does not limit himself to purely rationalized peacemaking – in fact, he finds that that is often a barrier to the more felt aspects of religious life⁶³ – but he does work with defined, particular beliefs and not Galtung’s amorphous soft religion. What he stresses are not only those aspects of any religious tradition that promote peaceful conflict behavior, but in particular traditions that deal peaceably with outsiders. As a Rabbi, he writes primarily about Judaism and the other Abrahamic traditions, but

61 Ibid., p. 77.

62 Galtung, Johan, 1997, “Religions, Hard and Soft,” *Cross Currents* 47(4), <www.crosscurrents.org/galtung.htm> (as on 27 Jan. 2005).

63 Gopin, Marc, 2000, *Between Eden and Armageddon* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), pp. 40-50.

his point applies to all religions. Within Judaism there is a category of person, the *ger* or stranger, who, though not part of the community, deserves respectful treatment.⁶⁴ Here, community boundaries are maintained in a way that, to Galtung, would exemplify hard religion, but the boundary is open to those outside. Although Gopin does not specifically use the term, openness is a useful counterpoint to Appleby's strength. It promotes the development of peaceful religious discourses within specific traditions that include those outside the tradition. Such inclusion would also necessitate a different take on religious literacy, such as that as promoted by Phil Lewis – a literacy of the other traditions to enhance communication.⁶⁵

If one combines the strong to weak and open to closed dimensions, one can form a matrix on which one can plot different types of religious discourse. A weak and closed religion would be one in which believers maintain boundaries not through religious strictness but simply through lacking different discourses. A strong yet closed religion would be one like those Appleby noted that, while having extensive internal religious literacy, ferociously maintains boundaries against perceived enemies. A weak and open religion might, at first, sound beneficial, in that openness is established without risking introduction of negative religious discourses that may benefit from strength, but such a group could easily slide into closed religion, particularly if unable to argue with a strong, closed religious revival. Moreover, a weakening of religion may threaten the identity of the group, a perennial concern in conflict. Strong, open religion, on the other hand, would have a vibrant internal life that can resist arguments in support of violence, and would be open to the presence of other groups without diminishing necessary boundaries between them.

A strong-open approach is the best position from which to start a dialog strategy, as

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁵ Obliquely mentioned in; Lewis, Philip, 2001, "More than a Race War," *The Tablet*, 21st July, <www.thetablet.co.uk/cgi-bin/register.cgi/tablet-00545> (as on 27 Jan. 2005), in referring to the Ousley Report, *Community Pride not Prejudice*, on community relations in Bradford. Although religious literacy is a feature of his *Religions in Conflict* course at the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, he has not specifically treated it in an academic work.

Hasenclever and Rittberger call it, that focuses on delegitimizing violence in conflict.⁶⁶ A strong-open perspective also balances issues raised by each of the other positions' strategies for handling religious conflict. Strengthening religious discourses echoes Huntington's recommendation concerning boundaries, and also benefits those who specifically want to emphasize religion's potential for peacemaking. Openness ameliorates the possible hardness of those boundaries and thus makes for easier communication and peacemaking. Moreover, while promoting openness can defuse closed forms of religious belief, the strengthening of religion itself allows interreligious activity to promote deeper dialog between members without requiring a lessening of group identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented three theoretical perspectives on the relation between religion and conflict and briefly outlined how those perspectives shape peacemaking. I began with a definition of religion in which beliefs and practices composes the response of a community to the sacred. This definition brackets transcendent sources of the sacred, which, although important, is better treated by other disciplines. Theories focusing on religion as a source of violence hold those beliefs and practices to be central to, or even the cause of, violence. If that were true, then one ought to oppose religion itself. For those who see religion as irrelevant, other factors, chiefly socioeconomic or political, are the primary causes of conflict, and religious belief is merely a tool leaders can use to motivate people in pursuit of those ends. Here, addressing the "true" causes of conflict, separate from but not antagonistic toward religion, becomes the goal. Finally, there are those who highlight the many ways in which religious groups have promoted peaceful ways of resolving conflict, and put religion back into the picture as a possible source of peace.

Each perspective addresses elements of the role of religion in conflict, but not all of

⁶⁶ Hasenclever and Rittberger, "Does Religion Make a Difference?" p. 665.

them. The first perspective, while correctly noting negative aspects of religion, fails to appreciate, or even acknowledge, any positive side. The second brings nonreligious issues into the picture, but at the cost of minimizing the importance of religion. Finally, the last highlights positive aspects of religion but without fully addressing the problem presented when religion is, indeed, at the center of conflict. Clearly, a more balanced view is necessary.

Large-scale conflicts always have a number of elements, of which religion may be one. For this reason alone it is difficult to identify a purely religious conflict. Moreover, due to the ambivalence of the sacred, different understandings of tradition lead adherents toward different conflict behaviors. Often, different interpretations of the same source texts or concepts can lead some toward violence and others toward peaceful forms of engagement. The key, then, is to understand how one can strengthen those understandings that promote peaceful approaches to conflict. This must take place alongside initiatives that address other elements of a conflict, such as economic and political issues. However, as religious belief will affect how people understand these issues as well as their ways of handling them, one can not address these elements in isolation. Instead of imagining that one can “figure out” a religious conflict, one is now responding to the religious element of a conflict, minimizing neither the nonreligious nor the religious aspects.

Drawing on Appleby and Gopin, I have proposed a strong-open approach to this task. By strengthening a religion, adherents become more familiar with the many elements of their tradition and, thus, it is harder for elites to justify violent conflict behavior. Promoting a strong openness entails not only strengthening those aspects of a tradition that promote constructive conflict behavior, but also those that apply such principles outside the community. This approach encourages the development of peaceful discourses within a community without weakening community boundaries.

Who would lead this? Obviously, any change in a tradition has to come from within,

from trusted interpreters of tradition. Otherwise, members of that tradition will probably reject it. However, nothing in this approach suggests that this process is solely internal. Religious groups constantly engage with each, no matter how hard they make their boundaries. Often, internal developments are responses to changes in the wider world, and there is no reason why outsiders can not be involved in the process. It is this subject, the role of the wider world, that is the focus of the rest of this thesis. In particular, I will look at the role of secular peacemakers. A number of the most troublesome conflicts, both domestic and international, seem to pit religious against nonreligious actors. The next chapter introduces the concept of secularity and details several ways people have understood it. The body of the thesis then explores these understandings and evaluates how they have influenced conflict and its peaceful resolution where not just religion but secularity are involved.