ORIENTATION

DID RELIGION DO IT?

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RELIGION AND VIOLENCE: BEST FRIENDS FOREVER?

When we look at human history, both past and present, religion and violence appear to be best friends. While religiously inspired violence is nothing new, the events surrounding 9/11 have brought them sharply to the forefront of the Western world. Ever since, religious violence has been considered one of the most pressing issues of our times (cf. Juergensmeyer 2017). This perception is backed by numbers as the past decade has seen a substantial increase in violent religious tensions. “Religious ideologies and commitment are indisputably central factors in the escalation of violence and evil around the world” (Kimball 2008: 4). According to a recent report by the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center 2018), more than one-quarter of the world’s countries experience high or very high levels of social hostilities involving religion, compared to one-fifth in 2007. At the same time, government restrictions on religion continue to climb, as does the harassment of most religious groups. There are, however, some problems connected with the

term “religious violence”. For one, it might be misunderstood as if religion was the primary or even sole force behind violence. Rather, roots of conflicts entail other dimensions as well, for instance, political, economic or social reasons. Second, the term religious violence can lead to a problematic legitimization of violence by implying that religious violence is always irrational and fanatical and must be defeated by secular violence which is in turn rational and controlled (Cavanaugh 2004).

With much of academic and popular attention still focusing on the violent sides of religion, scholars such as R. Scott Appleby (2000), Marc Gopin (2012; 2000) and Robert Eisen (2011) have emphasized the inherent ambiguity of religion. Religion and violent conflict can indeed seem like best friends, but so can religion and conflict resolution or reconciliation. While Part IV of this book engages with the constructive sides of religion in building peace and reconciliation, Part III focuses on how religion can actually fuel violence and conflict. For before we can attempt to engage religion for conflict resolution and peacemaking, we need to understand how religion functions in conflicts with religious dimensions. There are different models available that can help us understand better the roles of religion in conflict. We have found the works of Owen Frazer, Richard Friedli, and Mark Owen, all academic-practitioners connected to policy-making, very helpful as they differentiate between different ways of approaching religion within conflicts (Frazer and Owen 2018; Frazer and Friedli 2015). Below, we combine their work.

RELIGION AND VIOLENCE (BRIEFLY) REVISITED

Our study takes into account that “no universally accepted definition of religion or faith exists” (Ware, Ware, and Clarke 2016: 324). Rather than engaging in discussions around substantial versus functional definitions of religion, we proceed from the pragmatic premise to understand “religion” as what is described as “religion” by interlocutors and communities in a given context (Waardenburg 1986). As for the analysis of religion in situations of conflict, Frazer and Friedli point us to three factors that shape our understanding (Frazer and Friedli 2015: 9). First, the nature and role of religion in

society. Religion has no existence in and of itself but always takes shape in a particular time and context. The role religion plays in a given conflict is therefore connected to the role it plays in the society in which the conflict takes place. Second, the relevance of different dimensions of religion in a specific conflict. Due to the fact that there are many dimensions of religion in a given society, their respective influence on a conflict differs. Third, the individual understanding of religion by the analyst him- or herself. No perspective is ever entirely neutral or objective. This holds especially true in the field of religion and conflict. The analyst's personal view on religion is therefore likely to have some influence on how the role of religion is understood in a certain conflict.

While conflict itself can be both constructive and destructive, violence is always destructive. Violence, according to Johan Galtung, can manifest at three interrelated levels, namely: the direct, structural, and cultural levels (Galtung 1990). At the direct level, perpetrator and victim can often be directly identified. Perpetrators (and victims), however, have often interiorized violent structures that can function as a latent, underlying trigger of personal violence. Any kind of discrimination, for example, would fall into this category of structural violence, as well as the unjust distribution of resources and opportunities. In order to justify their violent actions—explicitly or implicitly—perpetrators often resort to foundational narratives that are part of the cultural dimension of violence. Here, Galtung speaks of “deep culture” (*Tiefenkultur*) that provides the legitimation of violence through respective traditions. Deep cultures are nourished by cultural memories, by foundational narratives and by systems of value. Next to these three factors, other aspects that need to be considered include unjust economic structures, mass media influences, climatic conditions, or psychological conditions created, for instance, by charismatic leaders. Furthermore, attention needs to be given to the roots of violence. Here, René Girard's thoughts on the mimetic nature of violence are very helpful. Human conflict, according to Girard, is rooted in desire and rivalry rather than in differences of opinion or ideology and can easily escalate in a spiral of violence that needs a scapegoat in order to be stopped (Girard 2008; Hodge, Cowdell, Fleming, and Osborn 2018).

RELIGION IN CONFLICTS: SIX WAYS TO THINK ABOUT ITS ROLE(S)

Much of conflict analysis tends to view religion as either irrelevant, and hence neglectable, or too complex to be of any use, thus relegating it to the realm of specialists. Neither approach is satisfactory. The first is blind to a significant factor both in conflict and conflict resolution. The latter neglects the fact that religion is in fact connected to many different dimensions of a given conflict. Gaining a precise understanding of the roles of religion in conflict is crucial for developing effective approaches for conflict resolution. In order to shed light on the ominous “religious factor” in conflict, Friedli, Frazer, and Owen identify the following six ways of thinking about religion in conflict by way of analyzing different case studies. These include understanding religion as community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, as discourse, and as an institution (Frazer and Owen 2018: 10; Frazer and Friedli 2015: 10). Just like religion in general, each aspect is ambiguous in and of itself and can serve as a source of conflict or as a resource for conflict resolution. These six ways of understanding religion are not mutually exclusive, in that any number of them might have an impact in any given context. The aspects are fuzzy on the edges, meaning that there is some overlap with others. In the following sections, we will introduce each aspect, using different examples to illustrate the practical implications of it for conflict analysis and, subsequently, conflict resolution. We also point to helpful questions to ask when analyzing the roles of religion in a conflict (Frazer and Friedli 2015: 28).

RELIGION AS COMMUNITY: AUTHORITIES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND IDENTITIES

According to French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim 1915: 47). Next to other aspects, this definition emphasizes the community-building, integrative dimension of religion. The structural functionalist school

of Durkheim and his followers were interested in the way religion serves to create and uphold societal structures and institutions, for instance, the family and the state. This includes the legitimization of authorities, the respective roles of men and women, as well as the sanctions rendered against those who act contrary to these structures. In conflict situations, this community-forming aspect of religion can be both divisive and constructive. It can be used to forcefully uphold traditional authorities and to suppress deviant voices. Yet it can also be a resource for building relationships and social cohesion, even beyond group boundaries, and strengthening community resilience.

Next to religion's role in constituting authorities and power structures, this perspective points to religion's impact on identity formation. Religion is a powerful source for establishing identities, both on personal and collective levels. Again, this dimension is ambivalent. It can serve to form alliances by connecting people of the same religion even across otherwise separating identities, such as along ethnic or national lines. Yet by establishing an "us", religion can also create a "them", thereby engaging in divisive "othering". Many current brands of religio-nationalist identity, such as Hindu nationalism in India or Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, play off this powerful dimension of religion. The Northern-Irish conflict (1969–1998) also centered strongly on religion as community and as identity marker. The terms "Protestant" or "Catholic" served not only as religious labels, but included social, political, and economic aspects, as each group drew its identity to a large extent through separating oneself from the perceived "other". At the same time, the peace process benefitted not least from the cross-community relationship and trust building across religious actors like the Methodist minister Harold Good and Catholic priest Alec Reid, who were selected as the two independent witnesses overseeing the decommissioning of IRA arms after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

For the analysis of the role of religion in a conflict and for creating possible entry points for conflict resolution, questions to ask include: Do religious identities serve to divide communities? Is there a shared religious identity that could serve to connect people across conflict lines? How can religious actors and institutions build relationships between people and reduce tension?

RELIGION AS A SET OF TEACHINGS: CONCEPTS, NORMS, AND VALUES

Different from the “functional” perspective on religion apparent above, “substantial” views focus on the content of a religion, its set of teachings or doctrines. For the Abrahamic religions, their Holy Scriptures—the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran—are of crucial importance because they are viewed as containing divine revelation. While other religions are less focused on sacred texts, religious teachings are nevertheless important in most traditions. They not only help religious teachings to make sense of life, they also often include distinctive norms and values for everyday behavior. Through their ethical implications, religions can contribute to a shared understanding of norms and laws, thereby increasing social cohesion. At the same time, this entails a danger of othering, if, for example, the Sharia law is used to create boundaries between “us” (the believers) vs. “them” (the unbelievers).

Again, religious teachings are ambiguous. They can be used as effective weapons in inciting violence and conflict, yet they are equally powerful tools for peace and reconciliation. Both religious peacemakers and religious suicide bombers refer to their Holy Scriptures in order to explain their actions. In his study of Judaism, Robert Eisen traces major Jewish texts from the Bible to modern Zionism and shows how each of these texts can be used for teachings on peace and on violence (Eisen 2011). With reference to the Bible, for example, Eisen sees three sources of ambiguity:

ambiguity in the semantic meaning of the biblical text, from the smallest to the largest units, ambiguity in the relative weight given to particular phrases, passages, or concepts within the overall scheme of the Bible; and ambiguity regarding the use of historical context to explain violent passages.

(Eisen 2011: 64)

How these texts are read and understood, Eisen points out, depends on the complex interplay between religious traditions and forces from the outside such as from politics, society, and economy.

At the same time, the interreligious search for common ground and shared values, such as peace or justice, has proven a potent tool in the reduction of stereotypes and interreligious tensions. The Jordan-based initiative “A Common Word Between Us and You”, for example, launched a seminal Muslim-Christian dialogue in 2007

based on the concepts of loving God and neighbor. This ongoing interfaith dialogue project has received positive reactions from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish leaders worldwide and continues to contribute to interfaith cooperation.

Questions to ask in the analysis of religion's role in a conflict and for seeking ways to transform the conflict include: How are religious teachings being used to ignite and justify conflictive behavior? How are they used to promote peace and reconciliation? How are religious teachings being used to identify common ground between conflict parties?

RELIGION AS SPIRITUALITY: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, MOTIVATION, AND MEANING

Spirituality refers to personal experiences of faith and bestows a sense of motivation and meaning. Spirituality often plays out in a particular lifestyle and in certain ethical choices, individually or as part of community life, such as in a religious order, ashram, or Sufi circle. In conflict situations, experiences of spirituality can act as a strong motivator, in particular in combination with experiences of meaning or purpose. Violent Muslim extremists, for example, have justified their attacks with reference to their understanding of doing God's will (Kruglanski et al. 2009). Here, the eschatological framework of many religions plays a crucial role. The individual person sees him- or herself as embedded in a larger framework that even extends beyond the boundaries of death and time. One's own individual and finite life becomes thereby connected to a bigger purpose and meaning. Not only does the spiritual dimension of religion serve as a potent motivator for specific actions—both conflictive and constructive—common spiritual experiences can also help create strong bonds between people, even across lines, furthering both in-group and out-group experiences.

The activities of the NGO International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) during the Kashmir conflict 2000–2007 provide an example of approaching religion in conflict through the perspective of religion as spirituality. Working with a conflict resolution framework called “Faith-Based Reconciliation”, ICRD promotes the idea that the three Abrahamic religions share the principles of pluralism, social justice, forgiveness, and God's sovereignty (Cox 2007).

For the Kashmir context, this approach was modified to include non-Abrahamic traditions, for example, references to Gandhian non-violence. In their faith-based reconciliation seminars, ICRD brought together next-generation leaders from all strands of Kashmiri society, including religion, civil society, business, or media, and from all main religious groups. During the seminars, participants not only formed relationships across boundaries, but were also invited to participate in religious rituals including prayers, reading of religious texts, and speaking words of apology and forgiveness.

In analyzing the role of religion in a conflict, the following questions help in discerning its spiritual dimension and in creating points of entry for conflict transformation: How are shared spiritual experiences used to strengthen exclusive group identities or, respectively, to create connections between people? What divisive or peace-promoting behavior do actors explain as motivated by their spiritual experiences?

RELIGION AS PRACTICE: SYMBOLS AND RITUALS

It is in practice that religion becomes visible. Dress, food, and certain forms of behavior, for example, towards the poor, and different rituals, are part of religion as practice. Weeks, years, and life cycles are being structured by the rhythm of religion. Traditionally, religion plays a significant role in *rites de passage* (Van Gennep 2004) as it guides through the hazards of life's transitions. Birth, entering adulthood, marriage, and death mark turning points in life. In sacralized codes and rituals, religion provides stability, structure, and meaning through these perilous passages, thereby re-enacting and preserving the socially constructed world. Catholic Christianity, for instance, knows of different sacraments throughout the life cycle, including baptism, confirmation, marriage, and the anointment of the sick. Furthermore, through the participation in rituals, from Sunday service over circumcision to pilgrimages, such as *haddsh*, social bonds are being formed and strengthened. While relationships may be created even beyond boundaries, symbols and rituals can also serve to enforce in-group and out-group identities.

In the context of conflict, religion as practice plays out in several respects. For one, practices themselves can become matters of contestation, thereby fueling conflict. For example, the relationships

between Japan, on the one hand, and China and South Korea, on the other, have been repeatedly tried by the visits of Japanese officials to the Yasukuni Shrine. This Shinto shrine is dedicated to the commemoration of those who died in service of Japan, including convicted war criminals. Visits by high-ranking officials are therefore perceived and criticized by China and South Korea as displaying a problematic view of history on the side of Japan and as belittlement of Japan's war crimes. Other examples of religious practices contributing to conflict include the blessing of swords and other weaponry. The ritual of *benedictio armorum* was performed by the churches and enjoyed high popularity in the Middle Ages. Yet religion as practice can also yield significant resources for coping with conflict. Times of conflict are intensely unsettling, during which familiar rituals and ceremonies provide much-needed structure and comfort. Even more so, they may be used to facilitate helpful rites of passages that constructively deal with the past, such as through reconciliation rituals and commemoration ceremonies. Here, traditional rituals may be used and adapted, or new rituals may be created as the case study of Rwanda shows (Chapter 9).

Questions to ask for conflict analysis and resolution include: What practices are sources of division? What practices help to overcome barriers and to build relationships?

RELIGION AS DISCOURSE: LANGUAGE, POWER, AND *WELTANSCHAUUNG*

With the other four ways of approaching religion focusing on one specific aspect of religion, such as practices, or teachings, religion as discourse is the most comprehensive perspective. Discourse in this sense refers, initially, to the specific vocabularies and languages used for communication. In the context of conflict, this has a two-fold significance. On the one hand, contestation can refer to the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of different interpretations. Recent studies point to a correlation between conflict and allowing or not allowing for different meanings of a term (Ochs et al. 2018). On the other hand, acknowledging diverse interpretations is only the first step. Different interpretations can themselves become a source of tensions, for instance, when the term "justice" is used in diverse ways by various parties. Efforts in "translations" are needed in order to facilitate genuine communication.

Yet religion as discourse goes beyond mere semantics. Michel Foucault points us to the fact that discourse is an entire system that includes language, but also thought, practices, and ideas. These systems are subject to constellations of power and knowledge. Religion as discourse thus means the social construction of reality and how it is perceived, a whole *Weltanschauung* with its own internal logic. Along similar lines, George Lindbeck (1984: 33) defines religion as “a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought”. This framework is a dynamic construct and set in the context of constant power struggles, both internally and externally. By internal power struggles we mean conflicts within a religious tradition, for instance, regarding authoritative interpretations of certain norms or Scripture passages. External power struggles, on the other hand, point to the fact that religious systems are not disconnected from the world, but are always part of larger political, economic, and social dynamics. In conflict situations, tensions can revolve around the incommensurability of different discourses. This results in communication problems when particular concepts, for instance of a secular state separating religion and politics, only make sense from within a certain framework. Often, the acceptance of certain statements within a discourse depends on those who are perceived to speak in authority. Their authority can give legitimacy to both conflictive and constructive language and behavior. Just as some Catholic priests condoned and practiced ethnic hatred and violence during the genocide in Rwanda, thereby inciting other Christians, figures like Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu proved a powerful example of reconciliation rather than revenge in post-apartheid South Africa.

Helpful questions when approaching religion as discourse include: What are the differing worldviews behind opposing discourses? Do problems of interpretation contribute to tensions? How can different understandings be translated to facilitate genuine dialogue?

RELIGION AS AN INSTITUTION: LEADERS, NETWORKS, AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Religion is institutionalized at different levels, extending from the local congregation over regional and national councils to

international networks. Religious institutions are engaged in the delivery of a variety of services, including worship, education, and health. Through their leaders, religion receives visibility and a “face” (for instance, Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in South Africa). By means of their leadership and the hierarchy they represent, religious institutions can be powerful agents for both conflict and conflict resolution. Recent conflict analysis has found the intermediate level of leadership particularly influential as it connects to both the grassroots level and higher authorities. At the same time, religious leadership is still mostly dominated by older men, while women are at times systematically excluded. The Buddhist Sangha in Thailand, for instance, refuses to accept women’s ordination. The same holds true for the Catholic Church, some Protestant denominations, and many Muslim and Jewish congregations.

In terms of conflict resolution, religious institutions can be helpful for creating a platform for advocacy and raising awareness. Due to their local, regional, and even international links, they can often-times access financial, logistical, and human resources. For external parties, such as UN peacekeeping forces, religious institutions can become valuable contacts with insider knowledge of the context, the conflict, and its religious dimensions. With their influence and mobilization powers, religious institutions can provide important support to peace processes. The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) is an example of approaching the institutional dimension of religion in the transformation of a conflict. In 1991, civil war erupted between the government and the rebel group RUF (Revolutionary United Front). In 1997, nine Muslim and 19 Christian leaders formed the IRCSL to advocate for dialogue and the end of violence. Through their joint commitment, they managed to rally public support for peace, thus pressuring both the government and the rebels to end the conflict. Their effort contributed significantly to the Lomé Peace Accords of 1999.

Questions to approach religion as an institution in conflict analysis include: In what ways are religious institutions part of the conflict? Which engagements are divisive, and which promote peace?

In this chapter, we focused on the conflictive dimensions of religion and asked: Did religion do it? By ways of unpacking the complexities of “religious violence”, we discussed six different ways of

approaching religion in conflicts: religion as community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, as discourse, and as an institution. This orientation will be followed by three case studies, spelling out the concrete implications of religion in different conflicts, namely, in Israel, Rwanda, and Pakistan.

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