# Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualization

■ **John D. Brewer**
  *University of Aberdeen, Scotland*

■ **Gareth I. Higgins**
  *Executive Director, Wild Goose Festival 2010*

■ **Francis Teeney**
  *University of Aberdeen, Scotland*

**ABSTRACT**

Despite the associations with conflict, religion is also a site of reconciliation. The limited literature on this, however, is constrained by its case study approach. This article seeks to establish a conceptual framework for theorizing the relationship between religion and peacemaking in conflict societies where religion is perceived to be part of the problem. The key to this is civil society and the four socially strategic spaces that religious groups can occupy within civil society and by means of which they can play a role as 'bridging social capital' in peace processes. However, religious peacemaking is mediated by the wider civil-society/state nexus. This shows itself in two sets of variables that simultaneously constrain and facilitate the relationship between religion and peacebuilding. We illustrate the framework with evidence from several examples in order to show how comparative analysis simultaneously illuminates case studies.

**KEY WORDS**

civil society / peace processes / post-conflict / religion

## Introduction

We aim in this article to develop a conceptual framework to enable social scientists to theorize the relationship between religion and peacemaking. Peace is central to all world faiths (with respect to Islam and Buddhism see Ramsbotham et al., 2005; for Christianity see Cejka and Bamat, 2003). However, the field is dominated by a focus on the connection of religion with conflict, although there is a small literature that now recognizes religion as a site of reconciliation (Cejka and Bamat, 2003; Coward and Smith, 2004; Schlack, 2009). This latter genre is limited by its case study approach. Case studies are useful for their richness of detail, but fail to address generic factors that facilitate broader analysis. Our intention here is to outline the scaffolding for a comparative analysis of religion and peacemaking in societies where religion is involved in the conflict, allowing case studies to contribute to the development of a general field. First, let us set the context.

## Religion, Conflict and Peace

If not portrayed as a benign irrelevance, religion is depicted as a malign force. Policy initiatives to promote research on religion in Britain tend to associate religion with extremism and public senses of risk. The association between religion and extremism is two-way: religious groups get involved in politics and secular groups utilize religion for political ends. Religion is, in the language of social movement theory, a 'sentiment pool' (Zald and McCarthy, 1987) that encourages governments, ethno-religious groups and various warlords to believe God is on their side in war. This is matched by the direct and indirect involvement of religious groups in politics. The rise of religious fundamentalism in politics is cited as a barometer of what Putzel (1997) calls the darker side of social capital. Armstrong (2007: 208) argues that Christian fundamentalists are ambivalent about peace – and especially peace in the Middle East – because their interpretation of the Bible is that the end times will be characterized by war in the region and that the antichrist will disguise itself as a peacemaker. This usefully reminds us that concern about religious violence predates the emergence of militant Islam, since all world faiths have made religion an arena of conflict. Established national Christian Churches, such as the Dutch Reformed Church in apartheid South Africa, often aligned themselves with the regime in power. Churches which represent the faith of the dominant class or ethno-national group and constitute a majority or national church, such as the Presbyterians in Northern Ireland or the Catholic Church in Latin America, can be co-opted by the state; even where there is ambivalence about this alignment, the collaboration can be grudgingly accepted by the Church in order to protect itself against repression (for example, the co-option of the Catholic Church under Polish Communism and in revolutionary Mexico, and of the Russian Orthodox Church under Soviet Communism).

We now understand the broad relationship between religion and politics (Bruce, 2003; Norris and Inglehart, 2004), the dynamics of religious violence (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Larsson, 2004), and the role religion plays in military interventions in conflict (Durward and Marsden, 2009). The link between religion and peacemaking is less well documented. The case study approach has focused attention on specific instances where religion has become a site of reconciliation (Cejka and Bamat, 2003; Coward and Smith, 2004) or has the potential to become so (on the Middle East, for example, see Gopin, 2005), and on individual peacemakers from religious backgrounds (Little, 2007). Whetting the appetite with the title *Religion and Conflict Resolution*, Shore (2009) disappoints by discussing only the role of Christianity in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Northern Irish case has dominated (Brewer, 2003a; Brewer et al., 2001), particularly the contribution of ecumenism (Appleby, 2000; McCreary, 2007; Power, 2007), although Ganiel (2008) has broadened the focus by addressing the consequences for the peace process of religious and political change within evangelicalism. Individual peacemakers in Northern Ireland from a religious background who have written autobiographies (Morrow, 2003; Patterson, 2003) or are the subjects of biographies (Wells, 2005), reinforce the particularism inherent in the case study approach.

One of the consequences of the case study approach is to simultaneously isolate and localize the effects of religion on peacemaking. Religion is separated from other factors and becomes the independent variable. For example, some of the literature within international relations on the role of religion in peace processes is written by theologians (Shriver, 1995) or Christian social scientists (Amstutz, 2005), who have a natural tendency to prioritize religion amongst the range of factors important to peacemaking. Religious leaders get celebrated as institution builders and heralds of change (Little and Appleby, 2004), and ideas like 'faith based diplomacy' (Johnston, 2003) and 'religious statecraft' (Johnston and Sampson, 1994) proliferate. Where broader processes that intersect with religion are discussed, the case study approach inevitably renders them as localized, pertaining to the particular instance.

Some of this literature also focuses on case studies where religion exists apart from the struggle, giving religious leaders legitimacy because they transcend conflict and are above the fray (in particular see Little, 2007). This type of case study is of no value when the conflict is religious or is experienced as religious (because the conflict is between groups socially marked by religious boundaries). The specifically *religious* hue given to the nature of the conflict in these situations is a serious constraint on the potential for peacemaking by religious groups (as the nature of the conflict is in all peace processes; see Brewer, 2010) and throws up interesting questions that have not been addressed before. How can something that is perceived to be part of the problem become part of the solution? What are the mechanisms by which religion transforms itself from a site of conflict into one of reconciliation? The case study approach is not well suited to answering these questions or, at least, is incapable of identifying generic factors across several cases that facilitate comparative analysis.

The purpose of this article is to outline a conceptual framework for the comparative analysis of religion and peacemaking in conflict societies where religion is part of the problem. This involves identifying those mechanisms in civil society by which religion can transform itself into a site of reconciliation and identifying two structural factors that mediate this transition: the majority-minority status of religious organizations; and the official-unofficial nature of their intervention. We take these as measures of religion/state relations. We argue that the connection between religion and peacemaking has to be theorized within a nexus of religion, civil society and state relations. Religion matters in peace processes but its role is dependent on this wider relationship. While it is possible to imagine other conceptualizations, we see this article as contributing to a debate that transcends the case study approach by stimulating interest in comparative analysis of religion and peacemaking. However, some conceptual and terminological ambiguities require clarification before we proceed.

## Terminological Clarification

In sociology, religion is understood as a set of beliefs, symbols and practices oriented towards and demarcating the 'sacred'. Sociology leaves it to the world religions to define what comprises the sacred; and this may not involve the notion of god. This emphasis on the sacred allows sociology to make comparisons across the world religions by ignoring evident differences in beliefs, symbols and practices. When the term 'religion' is used here, it refers to all world faith groups, not just Christianity. Our examples concentrate on Christian religious groups, but the mention of Jewish, Buddhist and Muslim cases reflects our commitment to developing a sociological model that transcends their differences and is applicable to all world religions.

The term 'peace' also bears clarification. The important distinction is between what Galtung (1996: 3ff) refers to as negative and positive peace (also see Barash and Webel, 2009: 3–12). The former is the absence of violence; the latter the achievement of fairness, justice and social redistribution. This finds empathy with Wolterstorff's (1983) suggestion that peace incorporates feelings of well-being and a sense of flourishing and Sen's idea that socio-economic development is freedom (1999). As Wolterstorff notes, peace is often perceived in negative terms as the absence of something (violence) rather than an affirmation (of justice, fairness and the like).

The spiritual resources for peace within all world religions evoke both meanings – espousal of non-violence and value commitments to justice and fairness – but particular religion/civil-society/state relations can lead some religious groups to justify the use of violence and limit the communities to whom justice and fairness are extended: hence the connection between religion and conflict. But even with respect to peacemaking, the religion/civil-society/state nexus can cause some religious groups merely to advocate negative peace. This emphasizes the importance in our framework of the two factors that mediate the relation that

religious groups have with the state and by means of which they can be diverted from advocating positive peace, which we represent here as their majority-minority status and the official-unofficial nature of their peace interventions.

## Religion, Civil Society and Peacemaking

The notion of civil society is much in vogue in peace research (see Brewer, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2009). It has been suggested that global civil society is an anti-dote to war (Kaldor, 2003) and that civil society groups help in the introduction of deliberative democracy as a way to deal with violent politics (for example, Dryzek, 2005). Bell and O'Rourke (2007: 297) noted that of 389 peace agreements between 1990 and 2007, 139 made explicit reference to civil society involvement. This included civil society allocation of resources and humanitarian aid, the monitoring of parties' obligations under peace accords, the provision of participative forums and direct involvement in constitution building. This is not an exhaustive listing, and it reproduces the problem of localism, by failing to theorize the mechanisms by which civil society impacts on peace processes and by not locating it within a comparative framework.

There is also a naïve assumption in much of the global civil society literature that civil society is always progressive and works toward the same peaceful end. The fissures in global civil society reproduce themselves locally in specific peace processes in two ways. Leaving aside those regressive parts of global civil society that oppose peace, firstly, progressive groups can be divided over means. Civil society is a politically contested space in Sri Lanka, for example, and tends to be divided along ethnic lines, with separate Tamil and Sinhalese NGOs (Orjuela, 2008). In Rwanda, for example, global human rights groups criticize transitional justice in the *gacaca* courts, while global women's groups applaud them for empowering women (Cobban, 2006); and both are right if we conceive of global civil society as containing fractures which differentiate groups locally within particular peace processes. Secondly, progressive groups can be divided over ends. There is no discord over commitment to peace, but peace means different things. One notable disagreement is over commitment to negative or positive peace. The latter requires more than just agreement to a negotiated settlement; it means the wholesale reordering of social relations. For these reasons Holton (2005: 139) refers not to one global civil society but to several, as different parts occupy distinct spaces, globally and locally.

Religious institutions are good examples of civil society groupings and offer the opportunity to illustrate these fissures. The US-based Metanexus Institute (2006), for example, refers to the positive contribution of religion as 'spiritual capital' and has funded a research programme to promote the idea. But in the older language of Putnam (2000), religion is a form of 'bonding social capital' in civil society, a social network which links group members in solidarity; and the virtues it disseminates can be anti-peace. Putzel (1997) referred to the 'dark side' of social capital, meaning the creation of trust, sociability and bonding

amongst regressive religious and ethnic groups. This is similar to Chambers and Kopstein's (2001) notion of 'bad civil society', by which they mean organizations and voluntary associations that are malevolent by their resistance to peace – racist groups, xenophobic organizations and spoiler associations are obvious examples. In this regard, the Ku Klux Klan is as much a part of civil society as Northern Ireland's ecumenical churches. We should not, therefore, romanticize civil society in a peace process, for some religious organizations will oppose the settlement or try to keep the divisions real; religious zealots with their 'spoiler violence' (Darby, 2001) rarely work alone, but have the aid and support of third-sector, civil society organizations behind them. In this respect, Smith and Stares (2007) argue that diaspora religious communities are as much peace-wreckers as peace-makers. For these sorts of reasons religion is not usually thought of as a form of 'bridging social capital' that links across diverse groups. Normally, the bonding capital of religion is very high, bridging capital weak.

However, one way to conceptualize the role religion plays in peace processes as a form of bridging social capital is to distinguish the social spaces it occupies in civil society as special locations for religious peacemaking, which takes us intellectually well beyond enumerating lists of local civil society contributions. These socially strategic spaces in civil society give religion weight well beyond that carried by the number of adherents – which in some places is declining – and they bring into higher relief the mechanisms by which religion aligns itself with positive peace and transforms into becoming part of the solution. They are useful also for deconstructing the idea of civil society as homogeneous, by illustrating that religious groups can work differently from each other; and sometimes in opposition.

We suggest that there are four strategic social spaces in civil society involved with advocacy of positive peace:

- *Intellectual spaces*, in which alternative ideas are envisaged and peace envisioned, and in which the private troubles of people are reflected upon intellectually as emerging policy questions that are relevant to them as civil society groups. Civil society groups can help to rethink the terms of the conflict so that it becomes easier to intellectually contemplate its transcendence or ending, and through their championing of alternative visions come to identify the range of issues that need to be articulated.
- *Institutional spaces*, in which these alternatives are enacted and practised by the civil society groups themselves, on local and global stages, making the groups role models and drivers of the process of transformation. Civil society thus lives out the vision of peace and transgresses, in its own practice, the borders that usually keep people apart – being institutions that practise, say, non-racialism or non-sectarianism well in advance of the general citizenry.
- *Market spaces*, in which cultural, social and material resources are devoted by the civil society groups, drawn from local and global civic networks, to mobilize and articulate these alternatives, rendering them as policy issues in the

public sphere, nationally or internationally. With practices that implement, within their own terms of reference and field of interest, this alternative vision of peace, civil society groups commit resources – labour power, money, educational skills, campaigning and debate – to underwrite their own commitment, to persuade others to share this commitment and to draw society's attention to the policy transformations that peace requires.

• *Political spaces*, in which civil society groups engage with the political process as back channels of communication and assisting in negotiation of the peace settlement, either directly by taking a seat at the negotiating table or indirectly by articulating the policy dilemmas that the peace negotiators have to try to settle or balance. These political spaces can be domestic and international, inasmuch as civil society groups can focus on facilitating political negotiations internally, as well as internationalizing the negotiations, either by using diaspora networks to pressure domestic governments and policy makers to come to the table, or by urging involvement of third parties and neutral mediators in the negotiations.

In what follows we apply this framework to show how it illuminates several case studies and thus offers a way of beginning comparative analysis across them.

## Religion, Bridging Capital and Peacemaking

It is clear that, in many cases, religious organizations constitute themselves as intellectual spaces to challenge the terms by which the conflict is understood and to envision a new society. Some of them think about what for many others (including some other religions) is still unthinkable – non-racialism, non-sectarianism, the ending of repression, political and socio-economic reform, the fall of communism and the like. Religious groups are more effective in doing this when they are part of a general coalition of civil society groups that envision the future, much as in South Africa where most were part of a general anti-apartheid alliance, but they occasionally either lead the opposition, such as in Burma, or coordinate it, as in Poland.

The Polish case is worth exploring further. For example, the transition from communism was strongly supported officially by the Catholic Church (much of the following is taken from Herbert, 2003: 197ff). Catholic clubs were formed as intellectual spaces to envision a new Poland but they also facilitated the development of an independent movement of intellectuals, utilizing human rights discourse against the government, and protesting against the government's own constitutional reforms. The church traversed from local parish to diocese, going between national and global networks, articulating on many stages its intellectual challenge to communism. But the political confrontation was not only intellectual, for the church materially and culturally assisted Solidarity in its active engagement with the political peace process. The Pope

eventually provided much of the vocabulary for Solidarity on human rights (Herbert, 2003: 205). As an urban and industrial movement, Solidarity alone could not have united an essentially rural society without the Catholic Church. It utilized market spaces to deploy funds to assist Solidarity with organizational resources and training, it supplied meeting places for Solidarity, gave material support for some of its cultural activities, and funded the provision of alternative social services under the auspices of Solidarity, especially education and public health. Finally, the Catholic Church worked in political spaces by mediating between the Gdansk workers in Solidarity and the communist government, playing the role of third party to broker with a state that might otherwise have ignored Solidarity. Not surprisingly then, the Catholic Church was at the negotiating table to discuss the transition to democracy (Herbert, 2003: 210).

Occasionally, forms of popular religion, working outside more conservative religious hierarchies, are better at occupying intellectual spaces. Local churches on the ground in Nicaragua played an important role through which people built a commonsense understanding of the conflict and developed a commitment to social redistribution that supported the policies of the revolutionary parties. Populist Virgin Mary cults were forums for the advancement of positive peace by reinforcing sets of values antithetical to capitalist accumulation (Lancaster, 1988), a position on social transformation that ensured they were opposed by conservative bishops. Popular religion was particularly powerful nonetheless because it deployed Catholic symbolism that the official church found hard to suppress or limit. For example, Virgin Mary cults did not emphasize Mary's purity and passivity, representing her instead as a powerful decisive figure, able to intervene directly in the lives of poor peasants. In this respect they were institutions in which devotees of Mary could engage in public celebrations of popular religion that were, in effect, political spaces that the conservative church could not control.

This envisioning of peace in intellectual spaces not only helps to achieve an end to violence as a form of negative peace, it assists in maintaining the peace settlement afterwards as people suffer the emotional rollercoaster of renewed violence or deal with the after effects of violence. Religions tend to be able to stake a claim to expertise in dealing with issues like restorative justice, forgiveness and 'truth', which is why religious groups have played a role in managing many 'truth' recovery processes, in Latin America in particular (Hayes and Tombs, 2001), in Bosnia (Herbert, 2003: 229–64) and in South Africa (Shore, 2009). Christian churches have tended to see themselves as living two Gospel axioms: one from John, that it is the truth which sets people free (John 8 verse 32), the other from Matthew, that it is in forgiving others that people are themselves forgiven (Matthew 6 verses 14–15). Thus, in part, the Christian churches have seen it as their role to help the faithful forgive, to come to terms with the legacy of violence, and to build new more democratic societies. This is true even in those countries where religious groups did not officially support the protest against repressive regimes; even conservative churches in Latin America wholeheartedly supported 'truth' recovery processes, sometimes at great cost. Archbishop Romero in El

Salvador and Bishop Gerardi in Guatemala were assassinated for their part in disclosing past human rights abuses (for a study of the two see Hayes and Tombs, 2001: 11–102). These examples illustrate how engagement with the terms of the conflict in one strategic social space can encourage religious groups to occupy other strategic spaces where they put peacemaking into practice.

Religious groups constitute an institutional space in which these intellectual challenges are practised, locally, nationally and globally. In Northern Ireland's case, for example, it was mostly the ecumenical churches that developed ideas about non-sectarianism, inter-faith dialogue, new forms of shared liturgy and the like that challenged the basis of the division between Catholics and Protestants. The ecumenical churches lived out these ideas as a practice in a variety of cross-denominational activities, such as church-to-church contact, joint clergy groups, shared services and joint prayer groups, which they underwrote financially, culturally and symbolically. (For the various kinds of peacemaking activity by some of the churches in Northern Ireland see Brewer, 2003a; Brewer et al., 2001.)

As another example, liberal Rabbis in Israel–Palestine, such as the group known as Rabbis for Human Rights, work in the occupied territories amongst Palestinian groups, confronting the Israeli army in instances of abuse, protecting Palestinian homes and olive groves, and dispersing food and clothing, thereby putting into practice, in a particularly courageous way, their intellectual challenge to Zionism. The intellectual challenge that drives their occupancy of institutional spaces is rooted in the claim that support for human rights is inherent to ancient Judaic teaching. Its director, Rabbi Arik Ascherman, and two co-defendants were put on trial for standing in front of army bulldozers demolishing Palestinian homes as a practical application of this belief.

When religious groups focus less on themselves as institutions, as path-breaking as this may be in some situations of communal conflict, in order to work amongst the poor, dispossessed and victims of communal violence, they occupy market spaces in which their resources get devoted to peace. This is often a two-stage process, taking them from pastoral care to politics. From the initial involvement in the 'private troubles' of poor communities and victims, the realization often comes that allocating resources alone does not resolve these ills, recognizing that communal conflict makes them worse. From this can follow a wider engagement with the issue of peacemaking and the deployment of resources to help its materialization. The local Catholic churches in Colombia, for example, provided an alternative welfare system to the government, being a major provider of basic services, education and health (as they and other churches have done in many others places also). The Catholic Relief Service (CRS) had been operational inside the country for 50 years, but in 2000 it began a 'solidarity with Colombia' programme, which expanded and strengthened its focus on peace and justice (CRS, 2005). The programme supports civil society efforts to provide emergency and humanitarian assistance and human rights education, as well as promoting conflict transformation. As a global network, the CRS in Colombia was able to draw on international links, and joined with the Catholic Church in the US to confront the violence.

Through these sorts of global connections, religious groups are able to encourage co-religionists from outside the country to expend resources that both address the private troubles of people affected by violence and transform them into public issues on a global stage. Where religion and ethnicity elide, diaspora networks constitute a further web of co-religionists with potential to deploy resources to enhance the market spaces in which religious groups operate for the purposes of peacemaking. The small-scale actions of Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel–Palestine, for example, are made much more effective when linked to co-religionists in the US, some of whom are engaged in inter-faith dialogue to further the peace process (Abu-Nimer, 2004: 494). The organization makes effective use of web-based campaigns to highlight its work and to pursue an international campaign for worldwide Jewry to 'return to its moral self'.

South Africa is another case in point. It represents an example where religious groups were highly constrained in the spaces they could occupy in challenging apartheid. Ironically, however, it was the religious commitment of Afrikaners that ensured the churches some relative protection. In apartheid South Africa, churches were the last set of institutions to be banned, churchmen (there were then no churchwomen) often exploited small areas of wriggle room to use the pulpit to attack the apartheid state, and they set their support firmly behind the anti-apartheid movement, becoming heavily involved in political spaces that confronted the state (see Prozesky, 1990). The South African Council of Churches and the South African Catholic Bishops, for example, helped to mobilize the grassroots by occupying key social spaces. In market spaces, they gave assistance to communities suffering oppression in the townships and made alternative social welfare provisions, while in political spaces they tried to effect negotiations with the government and the ANC to moderate the violence (Knox and Quirk, 2000: 166). It was no accident that the 'truth' recovery process in South Africa was led by the churches, and Archbishop Tutu in particular, for they had a residue of legitimacy that came from their strong anti-apartheid credentials. Wilson's (2001) analysis of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission reveals that, in the Vaal region, religious groups were the only local organizations working explicitly with the Commission towards the goal of reconciliation: 'not businesses, or health institutions or educational establishments, just churches' (2001: 134). This was also, in a sense, a weakness, since the domination of the religious redemptive notion of reconciliation fostered by Tutu discouraged the formation of an alliance across civil society groups to deal with the issue of reconciliation, and inhibited African notions of restorative justice in preference for western-Christian ones (Shore, 2009: 176), distinguishing it from the Rwandan case. When the involvement of religious groups puts off engagement by secular civil society groups, or isolates their respective work in hermetic spheres, peace processes are disadvantaged.

The importance of occupying strategic social spaces is that it facilitates two transitions: from negative to positive peace, and from pastoral care to political engagement. When religious organizations enter the political process and engage in the politics of reconciliation and relational change, they operate in a

political space that is capable both of delivering positive peace and monitoring conformity to settlements afterwards. The churches were wholly excluded from the public political process in Northern Ireland that negotiated the Good Friday Agreement, in large part because of anticipated internal disagreements over the settlement. Nevertheless, they were used as back channels of communication prior to the talks, and prominent church people have since been co-opted by the government to lead over-sight of decommissioning and to take forward the question of how the conflict should be remembered. The British government drew up a list of Protestant clergy who they thought they could recruit to sell the Good Friday Agreement, an idea later abandoned when it was leaked to the press; their principal target was Archbishop Robin Eames, Head of the Anglican Church (which is the established church in England, but disestablished in Northern Ireland). On retirement, Eames co-chaired the government initiative to assess how the conflict should be remembered. The Consultative Group on the Past chaired by Eames and Denis Bradley constituted a partial faith-based input to peacemaking. The fact that at least two of the other members were appointed explicitly because of their faith-based background meant that half of the participants, in what can be considered the most important post-settlement dimension of the ongoing peace process, were from the churches. This acknowledges that the churches in Northern Ireland still have a key role to play in delivering positive peace.

In Poland, however, the Catholic Church was much more overtly political and was a leading member at the negotiating table. It is rare in modern times for occupancy of political space to be so overt, since non-fundamentalist religious groups have mostly withdrawn from direct involvement in the political process. Nonetheless, they occupy political spaces in peace processes when they mobilize against the effects of violence, criticize governments and rebels, call for peace accords and facilitate the negotiation of second-best compromises. In cases where religious groups are open to state repression, such as apartheid South Africa, or are kept at arm's length from the peace negotiations, as in Northern Ireland, operating in this political space can be difficult and their activities take place mostly in secret until the last stages of the conflict. This has been the churches' problem in Northern Ireland, for example, for in this political space they mostly kept well below the parapet for a very long time (as was also the case in Poland in the early years). But there are some examples of religious involvement in popular uprisings in open defiance and with heads well above the barricades, such as Buddhist monks in Burma and Tibet, Catholics in the Philippines, liberation theology priests in Latin America and anti-apartheid clerics.

## The Religion/Civil-society/State Nexus

There is nothing sequential about these spaces, as if religious organizations progress linearly from one to the other; and they are not hermetic, with religious groups able to merge them. Nor do they imply a judgment of the quality

or effectiveness of the peacemaking done on each plane. However, it is necessary to draw out something that by now seems obvious. The civil-society/state nexus mediates the relationship between religion and peacemaking, and wider political circumstances simultaneously constrain and facilitate religious engagement with peace processes.

Sociologists routinely see civil society as occupying space between the market and the state, and civil-society/state relations have a powerful impact on the relationship between religion and peacemaking. There are a few sociologists of religion who locate their discussions of religion in the context of civil-society/ state relations. Casanova (1994), for example, argues that the re-entry of religion into civil society is constrained when the church is closely allied to the state and he feared the capacity of religion to 'seep' outside civil society into political spaces. Recently, Turam (2004) discussed the connection between Islam, civil society and the state in Turkey, showing civil society to engage with the state in positive ways that mediated the impact of Islam in modern Turkish politics. We continue this reflection by stressing the importance of the state in linking religion and peacemaking. This shows itself in two ways: whether the intervention by religious groups is official or unofficial; and undertaken from a position of majority or minority status.

Majority-minority status has a powerful effect on the ability of religious organizations to occupy particular spaces, and constitutes an important structural factor that mediates the bridging capital of religious peacemaking in civil society. Minority status, in particular, is a serious constraint in accessing some of these strategic social spaces; but it is simultaneously an opportunity. Minority status can be defined by one or more of three conditions. The first is being one of the smaller denominations or world faiths within the faith of the majority community, with the majority understood either in the commonsense way as the faith of the largest number of the population or of the dominant group (such as Methodists within Protestantism in Northern Ireland and Christians in Sri Lanka or Israel–Palestine). Minority status is also conferred on those who comprise a small wing of an otherwise majority denomination, such as liberal Rabbis in Israel–Palestine, ecumenists in Northern Ireland or anti-apartheid members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Finally, non-established and non-national churches have minority status compared to those that are state churches.

Minority religious groups in these senses crop up throughout case studies as leading examples in peacemaking, for they have less to lose and most to gain from involvement with peacemaking. Established religions, tied to the state and linked to the majority population's sense of nationalism, find it difficult to mount challenges to the regime or to exclusive forms of ethno-nationalism. This is why the Sinhalese Buddhist community in Sri Lanka lags behind the country's small Christian community in peacemaking (see Wijesinghe, 2003). Some Protestant ministers in Northern Ireland found it necessary to carefully negotiate even joint carol services with neighbouring Catholic parishes, without risking being hounded out by their congregations. The South African Dutch Reformed

Church preached racial separation from the pulpit; it was left to a few coura-
geous individuals within the Dutch Reformed Church to speak out, such as
Beyers Naude, or to minority wings, such as the separate Black Dutch Reformed
Churches, notably people like Allan Boesak, or the non-established churches,
like the South African Council of Churches and the South African Catholic
Bishops. Majority religions may also be restricted in their peacemaking by pre-
vious support for violence against minorities.

Only where a national religion identifies itself with opposition to the state,
as in Poland, can it distance itself from the state regime sufficiently to engage
with the peace process; otherwise it is left for established or national religions
to about-turn when the failed regime is on the cusp of collapse. Minority status,
on the other hand, can facilitate an intellectual challenge to the way the conflict
is understood and to the intellectual envisioning of peace, as well as enhance the
religious critique of existing social relations and thus their commitment to
positive peace and social transformation. Minority status can place them out-
side the mainstream, leading to feelings of strangeness from the majority and to
empathy with other minorities, or of being in a similar position to the victims
of communal violence. It can lead to feelings of marginality and thus to extra
efforts to make a difference in the peace process in compensation for what is
otherwise a low profile or even relative neglect. The Methodists in Northern
Ireland, representing 3 per cent of respondents in the 1998 Life and Times
Survey (Brewer, 2003b), have been disproportionately involved in the peace
process for these sorts of reasons; Methodists from Ireland have won the World
Methodist Peace Award on three occasions in its 30-year history. And liberals
in a denomination or world faith often find it easier to talk to liberals in
another rather than extremists in their own.

Minority status, however, can also be associated with limited material and
cultural resources, restricted social capital and legitimacy, a low profile in or
exclusion from the political sphere, and hostility and oppression from members
of the majority religion (as is the case for both Christians and the Rabbis for
Human Rights group in Israel–Palestine) all of which tends to restrict occu-
pancy to intellectual and institutional spaces. Minority status restricts access to
cultural, material and financial resources fundamental to peacemaking, limiting
their occupancy of market spaces. Membership of Rabbis for Human Rights
tends to be from Jews with a background in the West, educated in western
universities, and imbued with western sensitivities toward humanitarian values,
which places them in a more extreme minority position within contemporary
Israel–Palestine and total exclusion from political spaces.

Minorities' exclusion from market spaces is less likely to affect those group-
ings linked to dominant faith communities and wealthy co-religionists outside –
financial links to which can facilitate them becoming key agents in the allocation
of resources. This enables their occupancy of local political space by dint of their
market power. Some world faiths are global and although placed in a minority
position within particular nation states they can nonetheless call on international
networks and rich resources for local effect. This global interchange certainly

helped Catholics in Belfast. For example, Fr Sean McManus established the Irish National Caucus in the US as a pro-Nationalist lobby that had powerful reso-nances amongst Catholics in Northern Ireland and was a major fund-raiser, although Unionist critics disparaged the Caucus as gun-runners for the IRA. Religious groups with majority status, conversely, gain easier entrée to the politi-cal process because of their majority status or established church position and have greater resources to dispense in key market spaces. They become powerful agents in peace processes whenever this privileged status is exploited in political spaces to help realize a settlement.

Majority versus minority status does not neatly overlap with the contrast between official and unofficial intervention. Sometimes engagement with injus-tice and oppression is official church policy in opposition to the state – as with the Catholic Church's involvement with Solidarity and the collapse of commu-nism in Poland – and on other occasions it is unofficial, representing unsanc-tioned reactions by religious organizations in fear of state repression. This tends to be the case for monks in Buddhist countries that have political dictatorships. Religious hierarchies sometimes withhold official backing of local peace initia-tives but nonetheless stomach it, as was the case with the Catholic Church's quiet toleration in Northern Ireland of local priests' dialogue with Sinn Fein and the IRA, while on other occasions the official church can try to prevent local priests challenging the status quo. For example, liberation theology in Latin America was attacked by the same Pope that sought the liberation of his Polish homeland, although local priests in Latin America often disregarded him and were active agents for social change. In Nicaragua, for example, commen-tators stress that it was 'popular religion' not the official Catholic Church that assisted social change (Lancaster, 1988; Linkogle, 1998). In Latin America, the official church position often changed only with the government, being wary of exposing itself to threat. The official church often restricted itself to negative peacemaking – the provision of pastoral care to the affected communities, criticisms of the violence, calls for restraint, formulaic statements after each tragedy and the promotion of national dialogue between the protagonists. However, in some instances, restrictions on local priests and rabbis are not imposed in order to defend corrupt regimes or to protect the religion against repression, but as a control mechanism intended to make peacework the pre-serve of the religious hierarchy or, at least, to afford leaders the opportunity of doing the high profile peacemaking.

## Conclusion

Are conflict societies better off without religion? Little's case study of 16 reli-gious peacemakers in part answers the question in the negative by asking another, what difference does religious peacebuilding make (2007: 438–42)? Religion makes a difference to peacemaking, he argues, for three reasons: it supplies a theology or hermeneutics of peace; it gives religious peacemakers

detachment and trustworthiness; and is a corrective to the focus on the specifically religious dimensions of violence. These points are very helpful in demarcating the religious contribution to peacemaking, but in conflict societies where religion is itself the problem – and religious peacemakers find it difficult to be perceived as neutral – its impact in society can be negative. Kennedy (2004) recently concluded that religion in Ireland, for example, had been 'nothing but trouble'.

However, this article has tried to stake a claim that religion matters to peacemaking even in these situations, for it is possible for religion to turn itself into becoming part of the solution. Case studies of religious peacemaking advance this view without identifying the mechanisms by which it is accomplished or specifying the conceptual framework by which comparative analyses can begin. We suggest that comparative analysis is fostered by locating religious peacemaking in terms of religion/civil-society/state relations. We specified the strategic social spaces in civil society that religious organizations have to occupy if they are to engage with positive peace. Utilization of these strategic social spaces is mediated, however, by wider religion–state relations, reflected in whether the intervention is official or unofficial and in the majority-minority status of the religious groups involved, ensuring that religious groups will be divided over their involvement in peacemaking. These factors, we suggest, are the generic 'nuts and bolts' for building a framework by which we can move beyond case studies. Various examples have been cited to illustrate the sorts of comparative analysis this conceptual apparatus illuminates. We proffer this conceptual framework as the beginning of a debate about how best to theorize the connection between religion and peace.

Two final points are worth emphasizing. First, we have not supplied the motivational stories that explain why religious groups might *want* to occupy these strategic social spaces in civil society. The reasons are likely to differ from case to case. Comparative analysis, in other words, does not eliminate the need for case studies: it supplies the mechanics, case studies the motivations. Second, religion is not the independent variable in peacemaking. Religion matters because its contribution is mediated by civil society and the state. Indeed, specifically religious factors can inhibit utilization of strategic social spaces in civil society, as we saw in relation to majority-minority religious status and the official-unofficial nature of the engagement. Religious organizations work more effectively when in alliance with other civil society groups with whom they share the same strategic spaces. The capacity of religion to aid the development and dissemination of bridging capital in conflict societies where religion is the problem (rather than just contribute to potentially disruptive bonding capital), is dependent on garnering trustworthiness, legitimacy and relationship-building skills with other civil society groups *outside* contested sacred spaces. In doing so there is no need for religious groups to deny their religiosity and denude themselves of faith, as Power (2007) claims the ecumenical churches did in Northern Ireland by turning themselves in community relations groups. What matters is that they enter strategic social spaces in civil society as faith communities in partnership with secular groups, giving a specifically religious dimension to peacemaking but as part of a general coalition of peacemakers.

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## John D. Brewer

Is Sixth-century Professor of Sociology and President of the British Sociological Association. He has held visiting appointments at Yale, St John's College Oxford, Corpus Christi College Cambridge and the Australia National University. He is the author or co-author of 12 books and editor or co-editor of a further three. In the past he has applied C. Wright Mills's ideas on the sociological imagination to explain the ending of violence in South Africa and Northern Ireland (*C. Wright Mills and the Ending of Violence*, Palgrave, 2003). His latest book is *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach* (Polity, 2010). With Gareth Higgins and Francis Teeney he is writing up an ESRC-funded project on the role of the churches in Northern Ireland's peace process, entitled *Religion, Civil Society and Northern Ireland's Peace Process*. He is Principal Investigator on a £1.26 million cross-national, five-year project on compromise amongst victims of conflict, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Address: School of Social Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3QY, Scotland. E-mail: j.brewer@abdn.ac.uk

## Gareth I. Higgins

Is currently Executive Director, Wild Goose Festival 2010. He was a Visiting Scholar in Cultural Anthropology, Duke University, NC, from 2008 to 2009. He was Independent Consultant to: Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (2008), UK Government Department of Social Development (2007–8), Integrated Education Fund (2006–8), Open University 'Measuring Reconciliation' Project (2007–8), WAVE Trauma Centre (2005–7), Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2005), Democratic Dialogue Reconciliation in Practice Project (2003–4), ECONI Forgiveness Project (2003), Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (2002), Church of Ireland Hard Gospel Project (2001–3), Presbyterian Youth for Peace Project (2000–1), and Lecturer at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin from 2001 to 2007. He is co-author of *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland 1600–1998* (with John Brewer; Palgrave, 1998). His PhD from Queen's University Belfast (2000) is on the myth of the antichrist in Northern Ireland and he was founder and director of the Zero28 Project, a post-sectarian peace building NGO, 1998–2007.
E-mail: garethhiggins@ireland.com

## Francis Teeney

Is a Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences, University of Aberdeen, working with John Brewer and Bernie Hayes on a Leverhulme Trust-funded project on compromise amongst victims of conflict. He is a part-time Lecturer in Psychology at Queen's

University Belfast and associate member of the Centre for Research on Political Psychology at Queen's. He gained a PhD in Sociology from Queen's University, 2004. He has worked in several research projects in the past: HUMAINE, a European-funded network of academics concerned with analysing human emotions, Queen's University Belfast, 2004–5; and an ESRC-funded project on the role of the churches in Northern Ireland's peace process, University of Aberdeen, 2005–9. He has published the following: *Report on Gender Issues* (European Commission, WPO, Humaine Portal, 14 February 2005; *Report on IPR* (European Commission, WPO, Humaine Portal, 14 February 2005. Address: School of Social Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3QY, Scotland. E-mail: f.teeney@abdn.ac.uk