

Religion as a Resource for Peace: A Theoretical and Practical Framework

RELIGION AS RESOURCE FOR PEACE

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This article develops a theoretical and practical framework for religion as a resource for peacemakers, rooted in the emerging sources on conflict resolution as well as in the broader literature on International Relations, within which further research can be conducted, leading ultimately to the implementation of the proposed model in conflict resolution settings where religion is a salient factor. This framework will identify specific ways in which various religious traditions can aid conflicting parties, as well as mediators, in establishing acceptable and binding agreements, or rules that can help transform the relationship from one of enmity to one of cooperation.

Despite many a war waged or injustice defended in the name of religion, each faith tradition paradoxically carries the potential solution to conflict: the conciliatory norms or rules within the tradition and sacred texts, along with the authority to guide antagonists toward peace through religiously appropriate and thus culturally-sensitive rule-making. The world's four largest faiths, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, each possess to a greater or lesser degree both adversarial and cooperative rules. The goal of this research is to bring to light these alternative rules as they pertain to conflict and its resolution so that peacemakers may foster deep discussions regarding these rules and demonstrate to disputing parties that they have choices. The parties can continue to operate in an adversarial manner, at times bolstered by either actual or fictitious religious mandates, and thus perpetuate relationships based on fear, hatred and violence; or they can choose to adhere to the cooperative, conciliatory rules embedded within their own religious traditions, thereby constructing together relationships, institutions, and societies based on trust, good-faith interactions and mutual gain. An underlying assumption of this work is that agreements that are rooted in the spiritual traditions of conflicting parties who consider themselves religious have the greatest likelihood of long-term success.

Conflict Resolution Defined

Jürgen Deding (1999: 11), in his assessment of peace research at the end of the century, observes that "terminologically speaking . . . we find reference to conflict reduction, termination, transformation, settlement, analysis and 'prevention' in addition to the customary term of conflict management. Of course, the related notions of . . . negotiations, mediation including 'good offices', and peace-making and peace-building should also be taken into consideration."

To help define this vast and amorphous term, I. William Zartman (1997) offers a satisfying consensus definition:

Conflict resolution refers to removing the causes as well as the manifestations of a conflict between parties and eliminating the sources of incompatibility in their positions.

In this paper, the term 'conflict resolution' is used interchangeably with 'peace-making' and 'peace-building' and should be understood in light of Zartman's definition and as encompassing any or all of the terms and activities mentioned by Deding.

Religion and the Field of International Relations

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the subject of religion has been perceived as largely unworthy of scholarly inquiry, since it was deemed 'unempirical' and entirely a personal issue. Yet, in recent years, the religious component has been re-entering political discourse and the field of international relations in at least three ways. The first is as a potential or real source of inter- and intra-state violence. Samuel L. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) and Robert Kaplan's *The Coming Anarchy* (2000) illustrate well this view of religion — and of course some varieties more than others — as global menace.

Others have pierced the surface of respective faiths, seeking to discover whether some religions, or religion in general, are inherently violent and incite

rebellion. Researchers in this vein have reached a consensus that all religions bear both violent, rebellious teaching and peaceful, or 'quietist' instruction (Boulding 1986; Cox 1994; Fox 1999; Gopin 1996; Greeley 1982; Haynes 1991, 1994; Juergensmeyer 1991; Keddie 1985; Lewy 1974; Little 1996; Rapaport 1984, 1988, 1991a, 1991b; Sampson 1997; Sprinzak 1991; Vendley and Little 1994).

Finally, religion is re-entering international relations through the demonstration of its positive role in conflict resolution. Most of these works to date have centred on the conciliatory activities of Christian workers and organisations (see Farhounad 1997; Johnston and Sampson 1994). Similarly, Christian approaches to peace-making pervade the literature compared with other religious traditions. Most notable are the works of Quaker conciliator Adam Curle (1971, 1981, 1986a, 1986b) and Mennonite peace-maker John Paul Lederach (1995, 1997). While Hinduism – predominantly through the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi – and more recently Buddhist thought and practice with regard to nonviolent action have impacted the praxis of conflict resolution in the West, most theorists and practitioners continue to draw predominantly from one, usually their own, religious tradition. All of this underscores the need for research on still other traditions and involving more systematic, multi-faith comparisons.

Comparative Religion and Conflict Resolution

Recently, a number of authors writing within the International Relations sub-field of Conflict Resolution have begun to make initial comparisons among various religious approaches to resolving conflict. In the works of Harvey Cox et al. (1994) and Douglas M. Johnston (1996), the potential resources for conflict resolution in a number of religions are briefly sketched, acknowledging that each tradition has an important and, to date, largely unexplored contribution to make. Cox et al. (1994: 281), in their brief overview of precepts from Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and Judaism, conclude by calling for rigorous study and critical analysis that recognises the variety of world views alive today, the areas in which they differ, and the points at which they intersect.

Johnston (1990: 60) similarly examines a few important tenets that support peace-making within the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim traditions and

states that the instances where religious mediation has helped to heal differences have been sufficiently frequent and effective that they should command the attention and support for those who seek new approaches to the current world disorder.

Cynthia Sampson (1997: 298), in her exploration of the roles played by a variety of religious workers and institutions within Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism, concurs with Cox and Johnston:

If active engagement and pluralism on the part of religious actors are here to stay, then . . . the time has come to identify, encourage, develop, mobilise, and empower the special resources and potentials of religious actors for constructive conflict transformation.

In the same vein, David R. Smock (1992: 1995) summarises discussions from two symposia sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace that deal with the concepts of just war and pacifism from Judaic, Christian and Muslim perspectives. He concludes that these dialogues moved participants of various faiths closer to consensus and that further inter-religious dialogue is necessary and useful so that innovative means of promoting peace throughout the world may be jointly discovered (Smock 1995: ix).

Finally, conflict resolution practitioner and rabbi Marc Gopin provides the most thorough comparison thus far on the topic. Gopin seeks to broadly outline a course of study linking religion to conflict and its resolution. He identifies a number of religious values as important to strategies of conflict resolution and as evident in some Eastern and Western faith traditions: empathy, nonviolence and pacifism, sanctity of life, interiority, Buddhist compassion, religious disciplines, and messianism and imagination. In Gopin's concluding remarks (1997: 23), he submits that there is an inordinate number of values [i.e. rules] among global religions, many yet to be analysed, that may provide useful tools to engage in conflict prevention, conflict management, compromise, negotiation and reconciliation.

While each of these works surveyed above is a valuable contribution to the emerging literature, the authors explicitly acknowledge the tentative or nascent

nature of their explorations. They each call for in-depth, rigorous comparisons among many traditions. It follows, then, that a detailed and systematic exploration of the world's four major religions in search of the teachings, or rules, that specifically address core issues involved in conflict resolution is a much-needed and unfulfilled next step in this relatively new sub-field of International Relations.

A Conceptual Framework

As stated at the outset, the goal of the proposed research is to find specific ways in which various religious traditions can aid antagonists and those seeking to constructively intervene in establishing acceptable and binding agreements or rules that can help transform the relationship among conflicting parties from one of enmity to one of cooperation. To go about reaching this goal, I have found two social theories to be particularly instructive: political scientist Nicholas Onuf's constructivism and sociologist Gordon Fellman's conception of adversarial versus cooperative co-operative paradigms.

Constructivism

Onuf's version of constructivism asserts that people, acting as agents, both construct and are constructed by society, through a dialectical process of engaging in 'speech acts' that lead to rule-making and eventually to the construction of institutions that, in turn, socialise members of society. Depending on the types of speech acts made and the kind of rules that develop, society is created, maintained, and transformed (Onuf 1989; Kubalkova 1998). Religious texts, then, are filled with rules that instruct people on how to act and how to view the world. These rules, to a greater or lesser degree, rule, in that they shape the beliefs and behaviour or adherents to a particular faith. Religious texts and traditions offer seemingly contradictory rules with regard to conflict and its resolution. These paradoxical rules give agents choices: the type of rules upon which people choose to base their beliefs and actions determines the nature of relationships, institutions, and society, all of which in turn shape individuals and their decision-making processes.

Adversarial versus Cooperative Paradigms

Sociologist Gordon Fellman and conflict resolution practitioners Louis Kriesberg and J. Dennis Sandole help us to understand two crucial types of rules. In his work entitled *Rambo and the Dalai Lama: the Compulsion to Win and its Threat to Human Survival* (1998: 27), Fellman asserts that two paradigms shape and are shaped by individuals: adversarial and mutually (I will instead use the term 'cooperative'). The adversarial paradigm assumes that people are "dangerous, potential competitors, and inevitable combatants". On the other end of the spectrum lies cooperation, defined as a view that "trusting, satisfying relationships are desirable and possible". Fellman asserts that the pervasiveness of the adversarial paradigm at all levels of society is the main reason for violence in general and warfare in particular. He advocates what could be described as a constructivist approach to paradigm change. Individuals can, and must, choose to construct cooperative relationships, thereby transforming institutions that perpetuate the oppositional paradigm. In this way, he echoes Onuf's assertion that individuals and society are cogenerated. Kriesberg (in Elias and Turpins 1994), proposes a similar dichotomy. Sandole (1998) likewise speaks of 'competitive' and 'cooperative' tendencies.

Getting conflicting parties to adopt and operate from a cooperative paradigm is the ideal goal of the conflict resolutionist. In order to truly resolve a conflict, not just enforce a settlement, former combatants need to change their perceptions of one another as enemy and conceive of a future in which cooperation is possible and even desirable. Yet the pervasiveness of the adversarial paradigm, particularly when carried to its most ferocious extreme in warfare, betrays the enormous difficulty of making such a paradigm shift. Theologian and peace researcher John Howard Yoder (in Smock 1995:6) reiterated this enormous challenge faced by peace-makers when he identified three kinds of adversarial discourse, or mind-sets, that he believes are dominant in the world and that cause war. Realism or Machiavellianism (taking care of one's perceived national interests exclusively), ideological warfare (one's cause is most righteous and the enemy has no morality or legitimacy), and the idea that war proves one's manhood or dignity as a leader. In just one example, the debate on all sides over the recent Kosovo conflict was steeped in these three paradigms.

If the world is rampant with adversarial thought and action, shouldn't it be expected that violence will flare up on occasion? Isn't it asking too much for warring factions to embrace a cooperative paradigm when everywhere around them there appears to be little support or guidance for doing so? Enter religion: Fellman (1998: 26) defines the cooperative alternative as "the yearning to merge with something higher. Some people call this spirituality, the sense that there is a higher, inclusive force in the universe. This force may be named God, Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Brahman, spirit, love, transcendence, enlightenment, nirvana. The names are numerous and reflect the striving, the yearning for union." Jimmy Carter echoed this belief that cooperation among former combatants is difficult and rarely achieved, yet a political and moral duty and ultimately divine in nature. Reflecting on his meditation work between Menachem Begin and Anwar el-Sadat, Carter concluded (in Johnston and Sampson 1994: vii):

If the talks at Camp David engaged statesmen in the search for a political settlement, in the final analysis they also involved religiously committed men. Each of the principals [himself, Sadat and Begin] ... recognised peace to be both a gift from God and a preeminent human obligation.

Research Design

Rooted in Onuf's constructivist framework and Fellman, Kriesberg, and Sandole's two criteria of adversary versus cooperation, sacred texts and other authoritative sources of the four major world religions can be analysed in search of the teachings or rules, pertaining to the following issues. This research can then be a tool for mediators as they design interventions:

a) Agency

In order to orient the parties toward the idea that through exercising choice, they can effect change (i.e. 'agency'), the following question should be addressed: *In your tradition, does an individual have the capacity, or free-will, to change his mind, or is his behaviour determined by outside forces or innate human nature? If free-will does exist, what impact can one person have?*

b) Root Causes

What is the source or nature of conflict, why does it arise (because of sin, human nature, unbelievers, misunderstanding, selfishness, etc.)?

c) The 'Other' and Tolerance

How should people from other faiths be treated? What is the relationship of one's own community to that of others? How are enemies perceived, how should they be treated?

d) Morality of and Justification for Violence

When, if ever, is violence justified? Is there virtue in making war (i.e. is 'manliness', bravery, strong leadership, etc., associated with war or aggression)? What are the 'rules' of war?

e) Revenge and Retribution

How should aggressors and 'sinners' be dealt with? How should injustice be addressed?

f) Reconciliation

How are conflicts ended, i.e. how is peace to be made? How should people be reconciled? What are the definitions of truth, justice, peace and mercy?

g) Social Justice:

What human rights are to be respected, and do these apply to everyone in all circumstances? What is the relationship between government and those it governs?

h) Economic Justice:

What are the guidelines for economic activity? What are the rules regarding sharing (i.e. redistributing) wealth? What are the responsibilities of rich to poor?

In anthropological terms, this research takes a hybrid, emic-etic conceptual approach to exploring and comparing the religious traditions. I turn to Kevin Avruch's apt description for clarification:

An emic approach is one that privileges an actor-centred understanding, what used to be called, in times less concerned with political correctness, "the native's point of view". An emic analysis identifies, systematises (where possible or appropriate), and utilises native categories, terms and propositions about the world, culture, or the domain under study. By contrast, an etic approach privileges the analyst's understanding (or explanation) of these things. Native categories or thinking are of course collected and analysed, but as data in aid of etic theorising and explanation and not, as in emic studies, as ends in themselves. By definition, the aim of an etic analysis is to systematise data from different (emic) domains in order to construct (or discover – the verbs lead to different epistemologies) categories that work trans-epically (1998: 60-61).

That is to say, this research seeks to reflect an 'emic' cognizance of different world views embedded in the various religions while posing a uniform set of questions pertaining to conflict resolution. The literature of major world religious traditions are then explored 'eticly' for the answers to these questions, yet the research remains 'emicly' open to unique concepts or rules of each religion that may defy comparison. During the actual encounters with antagonists, the facilitator may guide the discussion 'eticly', yet discussion and debate may flow in 'emic' directions.

The Framework Applied

As stated above, these questions, while being the core queries around which further research should take place, also provide a framework that mediators can use to elicit a deep and soul-searching discussion among conflicting parties regarding the religious rules surrounding conflict and its resolution within their distinct traditions. While what I am suggesting is a peace-building 'activity', I nonetheless consider it a foundational event in a much longer peace-building process, one that would be driven by and focussed on the parties in the conflict themselves rather than centred on the role of the

intermediary. In this way, the onus is on the participants rather than the mediator to transform their relationships along with the continuum from antagonism toward reconciliation and cooperation (see Curle 1971, Lederach 1997, Laue and Cormick 1978, Mitchell 1993, Kriesberg 1991, and Keshlery and Fisher 1990 for this conception of peace-building as a multi-party process rather than a task of the intermediary).

My approach has a strong affinity with Mennonite peace-building, in that the goal of the intervention is primarily to make connections and build relationships of trust between antagonists (see Merry 1997). Furthermore, ideally those who facilitate these sessions will be members of existing institutions – either indigenous groups or foreign NGOs or religious organisations – who are already familiar with the conflict, have developed good relations with disputants, and can incorporate appropriate aspects of this research into their ongoing programme. Therefore, ideally the broader context in which these sessions are held would be as an integral part of an ongoing involvement, lasting perhaps for decades, that seeks to strengthen and transform relations among ordinary people, and which also offers facilitation of ongoing negotiations between leaders. While appropriate for application by Mennonite peace-workers, this framework can nonetheless be adopted by anyone who bears a similar philosophy and long-term commitment to the peace process and to the people involved. Although this framework can possibly be attempted as a shorter-term intervention, in order to develop the necessary level of trust among the parties and the mediator that will enable discussion of core values and the willingness to listen and appreciate the values of one's antagonist, a considerable time commitment is probably more likely to yield positive change.

Ron Kraybill (1994) proposes a spectrum along which intermediaries may focus: Persons, Processes, and Structures. Given the content of the proposed discussion questions, that of religious rules, any intervention designed around the above questions addresses all three areas: On the personal level, discussions address the individual's relationship with, and distinct conception of, God and what God mandates with regard to personal behaviour and how one is to treat others. At this level, attitudinal and moral change takes place and personal relationships, perhaps even friendships, across antagonistic lines ideally are developed; on the level of Process, bringing antagonists together face-to-face and considering one another's sacred texts presumably facilitates greater

understanding and helps to establish common ground between the parties, both of which move the process forward. The process itself hopefully has a transformative effect on conflicting parties, in that by learning about each other's core values and contemplating what the other feels called to do by their own religion, the enemy is in effect granted some legitimacy, humanised, and understood more deeply, and through this process tolerance is cultivated. On the structural level, the discussion of religious rules pertaining to economic and social justice creates a broader understanding of groups' positions and duties regarding structural societal issues, and from there, political, social, and economic disparities can be addressed.

While all of the above questions should be addressed in the research into the four religious faiths, not all pertain to every conflict and, therefore, mediators, in designing their intervention, will only choose for discussion those questions that seem most applicable to the transformation of the relationships at hand. The discussions should probably take place first within each respective group alone; then, when mediators feel that the parties are ready to meet with one another, this framework could again be used to facilitate inter-group discussion and negotiations. The model for the single and group interactions could entail reading and discussing passages from the sacred texts that answer the appropriate questions and that address the two rule types (adversarial versus cooperative) — either stated explicitly as commands or relayed through stories. Therefore, the facilitator's familiarity with appropriate passages is crucial in these explorations. The outcome of this research project investigating the rules of four religious traditions is the foundation and fuel for these discussions.

Through the discussions and text readings on the relevant questions mentioned above, peacemakers will hopefully be able to demonstrate to adversaries that they do have choices in the matter, to show that alternative roads or paradigms are available, and to explore the probable outcomes of remaining on the adversarial path or constructing a future based on cooperation. If cooperation is chosen, this research and the discussions it facilitates will illuminate concrete ways in which conflicting parties, with the assistance of the mediator, can construct and thereby embed their conflict resolution rules in their respective religious traditions.

Before ending this brief exploration of the possible ways that the framework can be utilised, one last comment needs to be made about the appropriateness of the model. A couple of 'threshold' questions need to be answered first by mediators when considering intervening in any conflict, in order to ascertain whether an explicitly religious framework is suitable for addressing that particular dispute. These questions can be researched by the would-be mediator beforehand and then discussed informally with leaders of each group, and could include: "What role, if any, does religion play in this conflict? Is your religious faith important to you and your group, and how so? Does it guide your actions in every-day life? Does it guide you in this conflict? In what way? Do you feel you are being true to your faith by participating in this conflict? How so? Do you feel uncomfortable about some aspects of this conflict because of your religious faith? How so?"

If, from the responses to these questions, the mediator concludes that religion is either a contentious factor in the conflict itself or important in the lives of the parties involved, or both, then a model adapted from this research may be appropriate. Note that religion does not have to be an explicit, contentious issue in order to use the framework; on the contrary, religion could have ostensibly nothing to do with the dispute, but much to do with the parties themselves. If those involved consider themselves religious people, and therefore are to some extent subject to and influenced by religious 'rules' governing conflict and its resolution, then the framework may also be apropos.

Data Sources

To summarise, the proposed research is rooted in the following sources. The work's conceptual framework is based: first, upon recent works from International Relations Theory on constructivism; second, on cooperative versus adversarial themes found within the literature of Sociology, Psychology, Conflict Resolution and Comparative Religion; and third, upon a contemporary conception of culture within the field of Anthropology delineated by Avruch, in which religion is seen as one type of culture or identity. Next, the scholarly literature on conflict resolution, stemming from Peace and Security within the field of International Relations, should be surveyed.

The study of the four religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism should entail reviewing sole and comparative works vis-a-vis religion, conflict, and its resolution; exploring faith-based models or approaches to conflict resolution; analysing core religious texts from the four faiths in search of the alternative sets of rules (adversarial and cooperative) related to the questions listed above; and supplementing this analysis with authoritative interpretations of religious concepts and sacred texts.

Finally, the framework for actual application by peacemakers must be fine-tuned, tested and most likely modified. To accomplish this, other practitioners' approaches need to be studied further and appropriate features drawn out and adapted to suit the needs of the current project. The model should be critiqued by religious practitioners who have already conducted mediation in inter-religious settings, and also by those who wish to do so but have not yet made an attempt, due to a lack of appropriate models or knowledge to facilitate such a discussion.

Conclusion

In many ways, religion is to the field of Conflict Resolution what homeopathy is to modern medicine: the first is the progenitor of the second, yet today, particularly in the United States, the former is often misunderstood, feared, berated or disregarded. The fundamental principle of homeopathic medicine is the 'law of similars', that like cures like, and more specifically, that administering a trace amount of the 'problem' is itself the effective remedy. If we apply this natural-world reasoning to the realm of human relations, we hypothesise that perhaps a rather modest dose of religious intervention, when inserted into a conflict situation, may be the catalyst that triggers true healing, with the least amount of invasive procedures or bloodshed. Mennonite peace-builder Ron Kraybill (1996) believes that all conflict bears an inherently religious component and, thus, peace-building ought to not only address this component, but also be imbued with a spiritual motivation itself. If he is correct, then perhaps the 'homeopathic approach' of religious peace-builders armed with an adequate breadth of inter-religious knowledge can be just what the proverbial doctor ordered to treat the outbreak of identity-based conflicts in the post-Cold War era.

By extensively studying the world's most observed religions within the framework of the questions delineated above, an approach to conflict resolution can be developed that draws on religion as the major resource for moving warring parties towards peace. This approach provides both a framework that mediators can use to elicit profound discussion among conflicting parties regarding the religious rules surrounding conflict and its resolution within their distinct traditions as well as the necessary tools to demonstrate alternative roads or paradigms in the form of these religious rules. These tools can be used to facilitate discussion, to highlight the fact that most religious traditions are ambiguous about conflict, thus providing the opportunity for individual choice, and to help those in conflict explore probable outcomes of remaining on an adversarial path versus constructing a future based on cooperation.

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