RELIGIOUS ACTORS AS PEACEBUILDERS

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Religious Actors as Peacebuilders in Contexts of Violent Conflict: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Self-Understandings in Relation to Peacebuilding

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Interreligious peace work in Pakistan. Nauman Hamid, Imam and Bishop Majid Abel have both contributed to peaceful coexistence between different faith communities in Lahore.
Photo: Håvard Bjelland / NCA

1. SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This report documents and analyses selected Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities' understanding and theological interpretations of their role in peacebuilding. Its objective is to inform NCA's Global Peacebuilding Programme and to highlight the strategic value, and the potential benefits and risks, of engaging religious actors as peacebuilders in violent conflicts,.

Undoubtedly, religious actors offer huge potential for peacebuilding. However, including them in peace work also presents risks. Whether they should be involved, and how, and whether they have the political room for maneuver and thus the ability to contribute to a specific peace process, are complex questions that need to be assessed thoroughly in each context.

The fact that religion plays a role in many conflicts should not necessarily be an argument for excluding religious actors from peace processes. Rather, it could be an argument for engaging religious actors in these processes in strategic ways.

Bringing in religious actors, or addressing religious questions, will never address the entire conflict picture. However, engaging and emphasising religion as one of several components of peacebuilding work may have substantial potential by opening up new paths to discuss fundamental assumptions held by conflicting groups.

Recognising the immense variation in religious traditions and conflict contexts, this report's key recommendations for NCA and its peacebuilding partners are outlined below.

NCA PEACEBUILDING SYSTEMS AND APPROACHES

CONDUCT THOROUGH ANALYSES: Any NCA or NCA partner involvement in peacebuilding processes must rely on a thorough conflict analysis. Whether and how to involve religious actors in peacebuilding processes are complex decisions that need to be assessed thoroughly in each context. Analyses should be conducted with local partners and external experts.

SYSTEMISE BEST PRACTICES: With its partners, NCA has gained a lot of valuable experience concerning religion and peacebuilding. In addition to external expert knowledge, NCA should systemise and process experiences and best practices from its own work to contribute to knowledge on religion and peacebuilding.

PRACTISE TRANSPARENCY: NCA should continue to be a transparent peacebuilding actor. It must be clear about its religious identity and legacy, and be clear on the advantages as well as disadvantages this may present for peacebuilding.

NCA PEACEBUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

VALUE THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL PARTNERS: NCA should continue to invest in local partnerships. NCA needs credible local partners to provide guidance on the most effective peacebuilding methodologies and to integrate and modify international conflict resolution approaches with appropriate local customs.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEACEBUILDING PARTNERS: Religious institutions and leaders may have significant influence on peacebuilding processes in various ways. Forming partnerships with appropriate religious actors is therefore critical to the success of NCA's peacebuilding work. Thorough context analyses should help NCA to identify the most influential, effective and appropriate partners.

LINK RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR ACTORS AND PROCESSES: NCA should contribute to building bridges and creative partnerships between religious and non-religious networks and actors in peacebuilding processes. It is critical to link faith-based peacemaking to secular and political processes and authorities, and other actors in society.

RECOGNISE AND USE RELIGIOUS' ACTORS' STRENGTHS IN PEACEBUILDING

USE RELIGIOUS ACTORS' GLOCAL STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE: NCA should further explore the 'glocal' aspect of many religious actors and institutions. Locally based religious institutions can help to ensure community ownership of peacebuilding processes, and religious organisations and networks that incorporate global levels can draw on international links. NCA should reflect more deeply on how these glocal networks can be best utilised in peacebuilding.

EMPLOY RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES AND INTER-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION: NCA's peacebuilding work must contribute to bringing people of different faiths together to counteract religious 'othering' and start rehumanisation processes. Effective interfaith collaboration among religious leaders may offer a powerful and replicable model. NCA should help establish, support and/or partner with inter-religious networks that can play a constructive role in peacebuilding.

HARNESS RELIGIOUS ACTORS' ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES: Sometimes local religious institutions facilitate an area's best-functioning public infrastructure. Many religious communities and organisations have resources such as staff, volunteers, premises, networks and media access. In each case, NCA should explore how its religious partners' institutional and organisational elements can be used to best effect.

BUILD ON RELIGIOUS RITUALS OF RECONCILIATION AND REINTEGRATION: Religious actors' experience of, and competence in, rituals enable them to contribute to social cohesion and bring divided communities together in a way that secular actors generally cannot. Their involvement in peacebuilding can facilitate expressions of empathy, hospitality, apology, repentance and forgiveness, and stimulate moments of transformation and reintegration. NCA and its partners should further explore the potential of these kinds of personal or communal expressions and rituals in their peace work.

WIDEN PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE: NCA should develop explicit strategies of how the organisation and its partners can more effectively recruit and involve youths in peacebuilding work, including in contexts and cultures where youths traditionally have little formal status.

INVOLVE WOMEN AND SECURE GENDER JUSTICE: NCA should intensify its focus on gender justice and involving women in peacebuilding. NCA and its partners should develop concrete strategies to more effectively include and empower women in peacebuilding. NCA should learn more about women's peace work within faith communities and how this could be maximised. In particular, NCA should prioritise building bridges between women's organisations and networks, especially between secular and religious ones.

INCORPORATE NEW UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETATIONS IN PEACEBUILDING

HUMAN RIGHTS: Religion and human rights should be considered mutually supportive and interdependent. NCA and its partners should encourage, facilitate and engage in processes to develop sensitive, appropriate and context-specific new interpretations of sacred texts and traditions to help religious actors (re)claim their roots and roles in cultivating human rights.

Religion and violence: NCA should further explore the complex association between religion and violence. It should use this knowledge to develop methods to enhance theological understanding of peace and support the production of theologically based counter-narratives to violence.

Religious scholars facilitated the integration of girls in a sports for peace program in Afghanistan.
Photo: Jim Holmes / NCA

2. STUDY PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND KEY DEFINITIONS

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY
This study aims to document and analyse selected Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities' self-understanding and theological interpretations, in relation to their religious obligations and guidelines to actively engage in peacebuilding.

THIS REPORT'S OVERALL OBJECTIVE
This report aims to inform and direct NCA's Global Peacebuilding Programme on the strategic added value of engaging religious actors as peacebuilders in contexts of violent conflict. The direct target group for this report is NCA and partners' programme staff and religious actors engaged in peacebuilding. A wider target group is peer civil society, peacebuilding organisations, peace research institutions and bodies funding peacebuilding.

THIS REPORT'S SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE
Specifically, this report aims to document and analyse current theology and practices within Judaism, Christianity and Islam when it comes to their engagement in peacebuilding. The findings and recommendations coming out of this study will contribute to a current understanding of the positive potential and the negative challenges of engaging religious actors in active peacebuilding in contexts of violent conflict.

RELIGIOUS ACTORS
This report defines 'religious actors' as institutions (collective actors) rooted in a religious tradition or individuals who define their role in public life in terms of religion.

For NCA, religious actors encompass institutions, individual religious actors and religious leaders – not just clergy, religious leaders or scholars. Religious actors can be women, men and/or young people (aged 18–35).

PEACEBUILDING
This report defines 'peacebuilding' as a broad range of measures implemented in the context of emerging, current or post-conflict situations, which are explicitly guided and motivated by a primary commitment to preventing violent conflict and promoting lasting and sustainable peace. Peacebuilding includes preventing violent extremism, as well as advocacy, mediation, transitional justice, promoting social cohesion, and reconciliation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research study was commissioned by NCA, which designed it to be relevant to its Peacebuilding Programme.

The study author, Sven Thore Kloster, has a PhD in systematic theology from the University of Oslo. He is a senior advisor on public theology for the Church of Norway's Bishops' Conference and a guest researcher at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. Kloster has for many years worked on inter-religious dialogue in the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. He has published research on religion, politics and global Christianity. Kloster has also contributed to projects on religion and human rights in the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

This study was primarily based on desk research that took place from February to April 2021. This involved collecting and processing information from secondary sources, drawing on theological and related research literature and public statements to systemise and process relevant information.

In addition, this study includes three interviews with distinguished Jewish, Christian and Muslim informants. NCA selected these religious leaders due to their experience and competence in religious peacebuilding work and their high level of authority in their respective faith communities. All three are well equipped to articulate and reflect on their faith community's current interpretations, policies and practices in relation to peacebuilding. The interviews were conducted based on 'do no harm' principles. The conversations were held digitally via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and each interviewee approved the final written version of their interview.

Based on its Terms of Reference, this report's approach and findings are very general. It seeks to provide a general overview, and selected aspects, of a huge academic field – not an exhaustive reflection of religion and peacebuilding.

Bishop Munawar Rumalshah and Mufti Saifullah Khalid have contributed a lot to peacfuld coexistence between different faith communities in Peshawar.
Photo: Håvard Bjelland / NCA

4. RELIGION, CONFLICT AND PEACE: DIFFERENT RESEARCH APPROACHES

4.1 RELIGION AS A SYSTEM OF NORMS, IDENTITY AND INSTITUTION

To study religious self-understanding and religious actors in relation to peacebuilding, it is necessary first to ask: "What is religion and how can one understand it?" The concept of religion is multifaceted, disputed and has no single definition. Instead of dwelling on questions of definition, this report focuses on three of key aspects of religion: religion as a system of norms, religion as identity, and religion as institutions or organisations.[1]

Approached as a *system of norms*, religion is a complex set of shared values, norms and practices that relate to, and are legitimised by, traditions such as sacred texts, dogmas, moral traditions and canonised practices. Religion influences, to various degrees, how individuals and groups live and interpret their lives. In this way, religion – and the various interpretations of it among its adherents – has a forming and formatting function. It is often one of many factors that contributes to communities' and individuals' understandings of concepts such as peace, reconciliation and violence, and how these can be practised, legitimised and mobilised.

Approached as *identity*, religion is a social category that generates a sense of belonging to an experienced or imagined religious community. However, this also means that religion causes exclusion to some extent. As an identity factor, religion also functions as a demarcation line, though different religious traditions and interpretations vary in how they interpret and practise social openness, inclusion and exclusion.

Besides, religion always overlaps with other identity markers. Which identity marker plays a dominant role in complex identity construction depends on the context. In some situations, religion can function as a uniting identity marker among groups that differ in terms of age, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and so on. In other situations, religion can be a dividing factor that generates conflicts, usually by fuelling underlying social, cultural, economic or political differences between different groups.

Finally, religion also has an *institutional* side. Although not all religion is institutional, this report holds that an institutional aspect is significant to much religion, particularly in peacebuilding efforts. One reason for this is that the institutional side of religion strengthens its normative commitment as well as its identity function, for example in terms of representation, public presence, accountability, coherence and visibility in society. In many contexts, religious institutions have administrative and

organisational assets, such as employees, volunteers, buildings, media platforms, land and networks. However, there is a great variety within and between various religions' institutional systems, organisational structures and mediating mechanisms.

4.2 RELIGION, PEACE AND VIOLENCE

The nexus between religion, peace and violence is a contested subject. Based on empirical studies, some scholars claim that religion predominantly fosters violence, while others claim that it nurtures peace.[2] Some scholars claim that religion, when correctly interpreted and practised, is likely to promote peace – or violence.

This report avoids such debates. Whether religion in general, or a specific religion, predominantly fosters peace or violence falls outside the scope of this study. Similarly, this report does not compare Judaism, Christianity and Islam to explore which has been historically most or least associated with violence or peace.

This report contends that religion, as a system of norms, as identity and as institutions, can be a resource for peace as well as fostering violence. All three religions have been involved in violence. Not only have Jews, Christians and Muslims committed atrocities and other forms of violence during their long history, but they have also drawn on religious symbols and convictions to justify this violence. Moreover, there are elements in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic canonised traditions that, when taken in isolation or over-emphasised, can plausibly be used to legitimise violence. However, the opposite is also evident. Not only have Jews, Christians and Muslims committed themselves to courageous, peaceful actions and substantial peacebuilding efforts during history, but they have also drawn on religious symbols and convictions to justify and explain such actions. Moreover, there are significant parts of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic canonised traditions that advocate peace and that easily lend themselves to promoting peace.

The plasticity of religion as a system of norms provides religious actors and institutions with a huge responsibility and set of possibilities in *how* they choose to engage religion in their interpretations and practices. In the words of the Rabbi and professor Marc Gopin:

> "There is an infinite set of possibilities associated with religious institutions and their behaviour in terms of peace and violence. I never cease to be amazed by how the seemingly most violent religious institutions or texts in history give way over time to the most exalted values and moral practices. At the same time, the most pacifist foundations of tradition can be turned toward the service of the most barbaric aims."[3]

This demonstrates a third stance of this report: that religion is always part of a larger societal context, where it is shaped by, and has a shaping effect on, political, cultural, social and economic processes. Religion alone is unlikely to create peace, just as it is unlikely to be the main cause of any serious violent conflict.[4]

The scope of this study is to ask how different religious actors explain and understand their calling to peacebuilding, and how they mobilise their religious convictions to generate and sustain cultures of peace and hinder violence.

Rabbi Arik Ascherman, co-Director of the organization Rabbis for Human Rights. Here in conversation with a Palestinian farmer in the West Bank on legal rights related to olive harvesting and tree planting.

Photo: NCA, 2010

5. AN OVERVIEW OF KEY PEACEBUILDING INTERPRETATIONS AND PRACTICES IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Within Judaism, Christianity and Islam there are myriad theological interpretations and institutionalised practices relating to peacebuilding. This chapter presents a summary of selected presentations from distinguished scholars of Jewish, Christian or Islamic theology. Space limitations prevent extensive analysis here. Instead, this chapter aims to stimulate reflection and discussion about the resources for peace within the faith traditions. For example: are the following interpretations recognisable for NCA's partners? Are there other principles or interpretations that are more relevant for peacebuilding?

5.1 JUDAISM

"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:18.

"Therefore say, 'I hereby grant him my covenant of peace'." Numbers 25:12.

"'Peace, peace, to the far and the near', says the Lord; 'and I will heal them'." Isaiah 57:19.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." Numbers 6:24–26.

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Proverbs 3:17

SOME CENTRAL CONCEPTS AND RESOURCES FOR PEACE IN JEWISH THEOLOGY

There is a huge variety of practices and reasoning within and between different Jewish traditions. For example, Orthodox, Liberal, Reformed and Hassidic Judaism differ greatly in terms of rituals, ethics and understanding of Jewish law. Nevertheless, the sacred traditions of Judaism contain rich texts and practices that emphasise compassion, peace and opposition to violence. Jewish professor and Rabbi Marc Gopin has written extensively about religion, conflict and peacebuilding. Some of his reflections on the resources and key concepts of peace and peacebuilding within Judaism are summarised below.

SHALOM (PEACE): Rabbinic Judaism and particularly the Talmud grew out of a historic situation where quietism and non-violence was important.[5] The Talmud explains that shalom is one of the underlying principles of the Torah: "The entire Torah is for the sake of the ways of shalom."[6] Gopin emphasises that the term shalom is repeated more than 2,500 times in classical Jewish sources.[7] Shalom means wholeness, fulfilment, completion, unity and wellbeing. It involves safety, freedom from oppression and a well-being that encompasses the individual, all humanity and the entire world. Shalom denotes everything that is implied in God's blessing and embraces much more than merely the absence of war; it has a social and relational meaning that can be expressed in trust and fellowship. Shalom comes about when human beings turn to God and live their lives in communal relationships.

HUMANISING THE ENEMY: Gopin mentions a particular Jewish conflict resolution strategy by pointing to Exodus 23: "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden you shall refrain from abandoning him with it and shall rescue it with him". Helping an enemy with a burden would change their opinion of you. According to Gopin, this is a classic example of a strategy involving unilateral gestures that cause cognitive dissonance in the enemy, which, in turn, is specifically designed to cause a rethinking of the idea of self and enemy.[8] In this way, one gets the chance to break the dynamics of conflict escalation and enemy demonisation. However, Exodus 23:5 also expresses a divine gesture of humanising enemies, perceiving them as people who need help and support rather than an incarnation of evil.

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY: Another method of conflict resolution with ancient Jewish roots is what Gopin names 'shuttle diplomacy'.[9] This has deep Talmudic roots referring to Aaron, the high priest and brother of Moses, who did not seat disputing people around a table for negotiation. Aaron went to one conflicting party, listened to their pain, gave them constructive advice, waited until the pain left their heart and then went to the other party and did the same. Apart from its spiritual grounding, the core elements of shuttle diplomacy are: honouring both sides by entering their spaces and respecting the boundaries of their world; active listening; emotional comforting; lengthy engagement with the parties, building trust over time; and making all possible efforts to create a new relationship between conflicting parties. The end result of this process, according to the rabbinic narrative, is that disputing parties often admit that each had misjudged the other. The result of conflict resolution arising from this kind of awareness is not just a problem solved or a compromise found, but the kind of reconciliation that leads to physical embraces and possibly new friendship.

FORGIVENESS AND REPENTANCE: Rabbinic Judaism emphasises forgiveness as something that demonstrates a process of change, initiated by the person who did something wrong. From this point of view, there is a continuum in a story of conflict, change and forgiveness that should be embedded in the much larger practice and metaphysical reality of *teshuva*.[10] Teshuva can mean repentance, returning and transformation, or restoration of the capacity to transform oneself or a community, and is considered one of the most sublime elements of faith in a good, forgiving God.

Confession is central to the rabbinic notion of repentance. For example, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish year, is completely devoted to repentance in the form of repeated confessions, which can be a profoundly healing element of social change. Confession, regret and commitment to the future are powerful antidotes to the damage done to victims. It addresses their need for their story to be acknowledged as true; it speaks to their memory, their basic sense of identity and justice, and their trust in a new future.

DIVINE DEEDS: According to Gopin, a true Jewish peacemaker always acts as if they are the bridge between their community and the enemy community, being able to maintain *mitsvot* (divinely mandated deeds in Jewish tradition).[11] The person should seek to emulate divine characteristics (such as patience, self-sacrifice, hospitality, humility, and the capacity to listen and to be silent) towards their enemy but should also express the love for the Jewish family required by the biblical and rabbinic tradition requires. Any person must extend a helping hand to the suffering enemy, as Exodus 23:5 demands, at the same time as expressing the special love of his or her people that the Torah expects.

The universality of the love command: Gopin also draws on a central Jewish person from the past: Samuel David Luzzatto.[12] Luzzatto was one of the most pragmatic thinkers in the history of Jewish thought. He was convinced that the compassion that Judaism commends is universal and extends to all God's creatures, excluding no races, because all human beings are children of the same Father and created in the image of God. Even where there has been enmity or wrong done to the Jewish people by idolaters (idol worshippers), such as the Edomite or the Egyptians, Luzzatto noted that the Torah commanded tolerance. The biblical texts that Luzzatto cited to prove his ideas involve the treatment of idolaters, not simply non-Jews. This conviction led him to consider that Jewish ethics should be considered universal. For example, the commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) should apply universally, not only to Jewish neighbours. Such universal perspectives are supported by many Jewish rabbis today.

Messianic peace: According to Jewish tradition, the Messianic Era will be one of global peace and harmony, an era free of strife and hardship, and one conducive to furthering knowledge of the Creator. The theme of the Jewish Messiah ushering in an era of global peace is encapsulated in two of the most famous scriptural passages from the Book of Isaiah:

> "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation and they will no longer study warfare." (Isaiah 2:4)

> "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:6-9)

SOME INSTITUTIONALISED JEWISH PEACE PRACTICES

JEWISH PEACE FELLOWSHIP: Formed in 1941, this nondenominational Jewish organisation is committed to active non-violence as way of resolving conflict, drawing on the Torah, the Talmud and contemporary peacemaking sages such as Martin Buber, Judah Magnes and Abraham Joshua Heschel. The organisation describes its work as:

> "to abolish war and to create a community of concern transcending national boundaries and selfish interests, refrain from participation in war or military service, and respect the common humanity in each person, male or female, affirming the differences in religion, ethnic background, national loyalties... all these are transcended by belief in the sanctity of life." [13]

TAG MEIR: This umbrella organisation in Israel seeks to transcend religious divides, enlisting support from across the Israeli Jewish spectrum, from secular, Reform and Conservative to Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox actors. It was formed as a response to extremist right wing settlers' 'price tag' attacks *(Tag Mechir)* on Arabs and minority groups in Israel and Palestine.[14] Tag Meir explains that it "sees

the battle against racism as also a part of a campaign to support democratic values, and the very traditional Jewish values of loving one's neighbours and justice for all."[15] Through activities including demonstrations, condolence visits, painting over racist graffiti and material support to defaced religious places, Tag Meir offers victims of these attacks support and the chance to voice their situation and perspective.

OZ VESHALOM – NETIVOT SHALOM (THE ORTHODOX PEACE MOVEMENT): This movement was founded in 1975 to present an alternative orthodox expression of religious Zionism. Its main aim has been to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians within a religious Zionist framework and to strongly oppose ethnocentric, extremist nationalist and fundamentalist claims advanced by religious Jews.[16] The movement declares:

"as the only religious Zionist peace organisation of its kind, we… seek to effect a fundamental change within the national religious community and throughout Israeli society by endeavouring to:

- Demonstrate support for the peace process based on political reality and justice.
- Enhance Jewish unity and pluralism among Israel's religious and secular publics.
- Practise coexistence and support for equality for Israel's Arab minority.
- Advocate political rights for Palestinians, including the establishment of a Palestinian state."[17]

RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: In 1988, in the wake of the first intifada (Palestinian uprising), a group of rabbis founded a movement to defend the basic human rights of every person living in the state of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Initially called *Shomrei Mishpat* (Those who act justly) the movement has been known as Rabbis for Human Rights since 1991. Unlike the Orthodox Peace Movement, founding members of Rabbis for Human Rights were mainly Reform and Conservative rabbis that had immigrated to Israel from the US after 1967. The organisation's main purpose is not to propose an ultimate solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but rather to implement the consequences of the Jewish Scriptures in the local political context. The organisation has consistently called for the respect of human values.[18] It stresses that not only the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafted by the United Nations in 1948, but also Jewish religious tradition itself attribute an inviolable and sacred value to the life of every person, whether they are Jewish or not.

5.2 CHRISTIANITY

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Matthew 5:9

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." John 14:27

"In everything, *do* to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7:12

"for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me," Matthew 25:35

"Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Mark 9:50

SOME CENTRAL CONCEPTS AND RESOURCES FOR PEACE IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

As with Judaism, there is a huge variety of practices and reasoning within and between different Christian traditions, for example Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental-Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal Christianity. They differ greatly in terms of their rituals, ethics and understanding of Scripture. Nevertheless, the sacred traditions of Christianity contain rich texts and practices that emphasise compassion, peace and opposition to violence. This section presents some key concepts and resources for peacebuilding within Christian traditions that various Christian scholars have elaborated on.

PEACE: As in Judaism, the Christian notion of peace is not primarily understood negatively (the absence of war) but positively, as a concept that conveys a rich multidimensional reality entailing an abundance of life within communities.[19] When biblical authors speak of peace (*shalom* in the Hebrew or *eirené* in the Greek) they speak of something that includes, but encompasses far more than, the political realm. In one sense, peace relates to being in covenant with God, dwelling within His merciful and faithful love. To be at peace with God is to dwell as one with Him and all of divine creation in a harmonious, just and loving community. In another sense, Paul and John talk about the interior peace that individuals experience when living in the presence of Jesus (John 15; Romans 6:4–11). Peace in this sense relates to redemption via Christ, God's forgiveness of sins, and that believers are cherished and loved far beyond what they deserve.

LOVE OF ENEMY: One basic step in the pursuit of peace is providing hospitality to strangers. Just as in Judaism, hospitality to strangers is fundamental to Christian ethics. In the New Testament, Jesus' teaching is laden with expressions of hospitality. Jesus tells people to extend hospitality to Samaritans, the despised ethnic group that shared the Holy Land with the Jews, and to tax collectors, the hated agents of Roman rule. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus even calls for extending this hospitality to one's enemy. A truly Christian ethic calls for avoiding retaliation when one has been attacked. This is a huge and constant challenge to any Christian community.

MISSIO DEI (MISSION OF GOD) AND HOPE: Most Christian churches believe that the mission of God is essentially about bringing peace: between God and humans, between humans themselves, and between humans and wider creation. In line with this, Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter has argued that God is the author of reconciliation, while people are called to participate in God's work.[20] A Christian peacebuilder therefore needs the ability to imagine a different future than seems currently possible, and to imagine ways of getting there. For Christians, this imagination is driven by the hope, vision and promise of a different future, of the coming kingdom of God. When asked about the challenge of keeping this hope alive when working with people in extreme situations of poverty and violence, liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez replied, "Hope is giving some security for the possibility of change."[21]

DISCIPLESHIP: While Christianity is a historical construct that binds together multitudes, it is also the experience of individuals and communities trying to follow the steps and the example of Jesus of Nazareth. According to the Catholic conflict resolution expert Andrea Bartoli, the attitude required for discipleship is empathy or solidarity – to offer one's presence and gestures of peace to those in need.[22] In the New Testament gospels, Jesus identifies himself with people in need and relates to others from that point of view. He is not the helper but the helped, not the one who is served but the one who serves. He declares, "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40). He also calls his disciples to forgive, so they will be forgiven (Luke 6:37), to love their neighbour (Mark 12: 29-31; Luke 10:27), not judge others without looking at themselves (John 8:3–11) and repent their sins. In following Jesus, believers choose to (re)turn to a life of love, obedience and discipleship and come to participate in the mission of God.[23]

IMAGO DEI (IMAGE OF GOD), HUMAN DIGNITY AND RIGHTS: For most Christians, human rights are rooted in the fact that all human beings bear the image of God, and all are equal before God (Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:28–29). However, these kind of rights are tied to responsibilities towards others –

who also have rights that Christians must seek. Christians need to balance the rights and wellbeing of individuals with those of the community, and to ensure that pursuing equal rights does not flatten distinctive differences between individuals and communities. The Bible is clear that while all humans possess the image of God, we are all distinctively different. Christians are called to overcome this difference but not erase it when building relationships and inclusive peace. This ought to lead to considering diversity and inclusion, because peace needs to allow for diversity, engage with difference and bring people who reflect this diversity together within a community.

FORGIVENESS: Just as in Judaism, forgiveness is a central issue in Christian theology as a direct consequence of the Christian understanding of a merciful and loving God and people as finite and limited beings. Preaching forgiveness was a major theme in Jesus' own ministry, both in terms of God forgiving human sins and humans who forgive one another. This is most famously formulated in The Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

However, the meaning and implementation of Christian forgiveness varies, especially in contexts of conflict. According to the Franciscan scholar Paolo S. Nicosia, the concept of forgiveness can play a crucial role in peacebuilding when it is consistent with other essential parts of a culture, as it can interact with moral and spiritual notions such as a commitment to truth, justice, apology, repentance and penance.[24]

RECONCILIATION: This is a process as well as a goal. Schreiter has conceptualised a multi-strand Christian understanding of reconciliation.[25] One aspect is recognising that reconciling is to be part of God's work. Another is a 'victim first' approach – in reconciliation, God begins with the victim and turns to the oppressor afterwards. This is built on Jesus' ministry: go first to the orphan and the widow, the prisoner and the stranger. A culture of peace requires healing and a measure of justice for victims to avoid people harbouring resentment. But justice usually takes a long time. Another aspect of Christian reconciliation is that God makes a 'new creation' of the victim and the wrongdoer.

Part of the reconciliation process is to build a new common narrative, as Paul does in the letter to the Ephesians where he addresses the formerly divided gentiles and Jews, and presents them as being together in the common household of God. Finally, Christians lodge their suffering in the story of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ (the Paschal Mystery), a path that leads from suffering to a new state of life. According to Schreiter, that transformation is an example of the Christian process of reconciliation – it takes people to a new and unexpected place in ways they only partly understand.

SOME INSTITUTIONALISED CHRISTIAN PEACE PRACTICES

HISTORIC PEACE CHURCHES – THE MENNONITES: The Mennonite church family is a historic Christian peace church that objects to war. This is based on the conviction that Christian life is incompatible with military action, because Jesus tells his followers to love their enemies and refuse violence. The Mennonites represent a continuation of the early Church's pacifism. Many early Christians refused to engage in the military of the Roman Empire, a practice and theology that changed after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Emperor Constantine. Today, the largest populations of Mennonites are in Canada, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India and the US.[26]

Many Mennonite churches are actively involved in peace and social justice issues, locally and internationally. Mennonite organisations such as the Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams and Mennonite Conciliation Service are involved in relief

and peace work in various ways. Christian Peacemaker Teams, for example, supports teams of peace workers in conflict-affected areas around the world to reduce levels of violence, facilitate non-violent direct action and related training, and observe and report on human rights.[27]

PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL: This is the world's largest Catholic Christian peace movement. Founded in Europe in 1945, it has grown into a global network working towards reconciliation, peace and justice. It aims to build bridges with secular civil society, as well as with people working for justice and peace in other churches and faith traditions. Pax Christi's work is founded on a commitment to prayer, spirituality, study and action for peace. The movement's mission is "to transform a world shaken by violence, terrorism, deepening inequalities and global insecurity."[28] It is committed to non-violence, demilitarisation and disarmament, human security, human rights, and the rule of law as the basis of peaceful societies.[29]

LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION (LWF) PEACE MESSENGERS: Through this programme, the LWF encourages young people to take a more active role in initiatives that help to build peace in their churches and wider society. Its training resource equips participants from member churches and other faith communities with knowledge and practical skills for constructive conflict resolution and peace advocacy in their communities and beyond.[30] The organisation will "promote intergenerational engagement on topical issues for church and society" and "strengthen local and global advocacy to promote human rights and protect the rights of marginalised communities: We will build on grassroots experience and knowledge to bring local human rights issues and realities to the global arena."[31]

LITTLE ANTS OF PEACE: In the Altos de la Florida slum near Bogotá, Colombia, a group of women works with neighbours in their community of 300,000 people, most of whom have been displaced by violence. They call themselves Hormiguitas de la Paz (Little Ants of Peace); by carrying away a grain of suffering every day they hope to dismantle a mountain of oppression. The women formed this community organisation to protect and support each another, raise money through micro-enterprises, provide prenatal care, get children into school, access clean and affordable water, and build and maintain roads to access the steep, rocky slopes on which they live. Their work is part of, and supported by, the local Catholic diocese.[32]

5.3 ISLAM

"He is the All-Merciful, the Mercy-giving. God is He save whom there is no deity; the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the All-Peace." (Quran 59:22–23)

"O You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace" (Quran 2:208).

"And it may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those whom you are facing now as enemies, and God is All-Powerful, and God is Much-Forgiving, Mercy-Giving." (Quran 60:7)

"And a requital for a wrongdoing is equal to it, but whoever forgives and makes peace [with another], his reward rests with God; He, verily, does not love the transgressors." (Quran 42:40)

"Whether they are the ones who believe [in the Prophet], or whether they are Jews, Christians or Sabians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and do righteous deeds – their reward is surely secure with their Lord; they need have no fear, nor shall they grieve." (Quran 2:62)

SOME CENTRAL CONCEPTS AND RESOURCES FOR PEACE IN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

There is a huge variety of practices and reasoning within and between different Muslim traditions, for example Sunnite and Shiite, but also between different Sunni traditions and schools such as Sufism, Salafism and Wahhabism. They differ greatly in terms of rituals, ethics and understanding of Islamic law. Nevertheless, Islam's sacred traditions contain rich texts and practices that emphasise compassion, peace and opposition to violence. Professor in Islamic studies, Mohamed Fathi Osman (1928–2010),[33] wrote extensively on religion, conflict and peacebuilding. The following section outlines some of his reflections on the concepts and resources for peace and peacebuilding within Islam.

SALAAM: As in Judaism and Christianity, peace is also a key concept in Islam. The Arabic word *salaam* (سلام) (peace) comes from the same root as the word Islam – the word *silm* (which means 'submitting to God' and also 'peace'). Muslims often stress that both meanings are intertwined. In Islam, God is seen as the All-Peace who calls on all people, and Muslims in particular, to enter wholly into peace: "O You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace (Islam)" (2:208).

Professor Osman has stressed that the Creator of life condemns aggression and the destruction of life, whatever argument or rhetoric supports such actions.[34] Further, he states, the Quran urges people to repel wrongdoing with self-control and reconciliation. Patience and self-control are emphasised in the Quran more than 85 times, and forgiveness more than 20 times.

ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE: Osman outlines five principles in the Quran that are particularly important in terms of peacebuilding from an Islamic perspective, which are listed below.[35]

There is a spirit from God in every person: God grants and bestows dignity on all people, and the human mind is God's invaluable gift for human conception and interaction, whatever one's ethnicity, gender, belief or opinion. In the Quran, when God creates the human being, God tells the angels: "And when I have fully formed him and breathed into him of my spirit, fall down before him in prostration" (15:29, 38:72). Further, the Quran says this spirit from God is in all descendants of Adam, throughout the generations. (7:172, 17:70).

Human diversity: This is part of the creation and one of God's wonders (30:22). The Quran stresses that human diversity is meant to let people know and complement each other through a universal intellectual and practical cooperation: "and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another" (49:13). Although people are different, they can argue fruitfully and ethically together and reach common ground:

"And had your Lord so willed, He could surely have made all people a single community, but [He willed it otherwise, and so] they continue to have divergence, [all of them] save these upon whom your Lord has bestowed His grace [by following God's guidance in handling these differences ethically], and to this end He has created them [all]" (11:118–19).

Even with regard to religion, the Quran teaches that human diversity applies: "Unto every [community] of you [humans] have We appointed a [different] law and practical way of behaviour; and if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community, but [He willed it otherwise] so as to test you through what He has given unto you. Compete, then, with one another in doing good works. Unto God you all must return, and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were used to differ" (5:48; see also 2:148).

No coercion: There should be freedom of religion and no coercion in Islam, as reflected by the Quranic verse: "No coercion is ever allowed in matters of faith" (2:251). The Quran states that faith must come through voluntary conviction and acceptance. Accordingly, any use of force relating to faith is wrong and contradicts the religious principle of Islam: "And had your Lord so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them; do you then think that you could compel people

to believe?" (10:99). This is an important message, given the punishment for apostasy in many Muslim traditions.

Justice, care, patience and forgiveness: These qualities should be nurtured in Muslims' relations with other people (e.g., 60:7–8). Meeting other people's feelings, thoughts or actions – even if they are not good – with "that is better, magnanimous, and more rewarding," in this life and the eternal life to come, is emphasised several times in the Quran. Believers are urged to understand patience and forgiveness not as mechanical practices, but as untainted, virtuous and "beautiful" (2:18, 83; 70:5).

Never initiate war: Muslims should never initiate war, and in self-defence they must return to peace whenever it is offered. Non-defensive war is actually forbidden by Sharia, (Islamic law). War was never practiced in the time of the Prophet Muhammed except for self-defence against aggression (22:39–40; 4:75). Legal and ethical principles in confronting the enemy on the battlefield pave the way for restoring peace, by trying to reduce hostility by restricting military operations to combatants only, honouring any promise or agreement, and caring for the wounded and prisoners of war. Meanwhile, any move towards peace from aggressors has to be seriously considered, whatever doubts may exist about their intentions (8:61–62).

ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: Professor Qamar-ul Huda has edited the book Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam, which explores this topic in contemporary Islam.[36] The overarching concept is that Islam requires followers to preserve and protect life, and foster peace and tolerance. The book highlights examples of peacebuilding efforts among Muslims and towards non-Muslims, as well as advocates for Islamic principles of non-violence and peacebuilding, and traditional conflict resolution methods.

This book states that Islamic peacebuilding efforts at all levels reaffirm five basic principles, some of which overlap with the Islamic principles of peace identified by Osman:

1. All of humanity has a common origin, and human dignity must be recognised and respected, regardless of religion, ethnicity or tribe. (Quran 17:70, 95:4, 7:11, 2:30). According to Islamic scholar Mohammed Abu-Nimer, everyone holds the same God-given dignity and this commonality "calls for equal rights and treatment as well as aspirations toward solidarity among all people."[37]
2. The diversity among people encapsulates the richness of traditions.
3. Muslims striving to improve the world must cooperate, collaborate and engage in dialogue with others, and among themselves, to foster peace.
4. To be actively involved with Islamic tradition means not leading exclusive, shut-off lives, but engaging with others respectfully.
5. Muslims must practise good deeds and strive towards justice in their everyday dealings with all people.

SOME INSTITUTIONALISED MUSLIM PEACE PRACTICES

THE MARRAKESH DECLARATION: More than 250 Muslim religious leaders, heads of state and scholars launched this declaration in January 2016, to defend the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim countries. Representatives of persecuted religious communities – such as Chaldean Christians from Iraq – attended the conference where the declaration was launched. This declaration was a response to the persecution of religious minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis, by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[38] It draws on historical Islamic sources, such as the Charter of Medina, to unite the Islamic world against such atrocities and heresies.

LIBRARY FOR NON-VIOLENCE: The Palestinian activist Nafez Assaily started a mobile library in Hebron named Library on Wheels for Nonviolence and Peace (LOWNP). Today, LOWNP is a Palestinian non-governmental, non-profit association that offers alternative education through community outreach. Together with individuals and local organisations, LOWNP helps people overcome their grievances and campaigns for social justice in peaceful ways. The organisation works in a variety of settings to try to help people build hope, develop skills and a sense of direction in order to create a new future.

SWEDISH YOUNG MUSLIMS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: Since 2008, the NGO *Svenska Muslimer för Fred och Rättvisa* (Swedish Young Muslims for Peace and Justice) has worked for peace and justice in Swedish society and beyond. The organisation has six local branches in Sweden and one in Paris. It mainly comprises young people but is not age-limited, and it cooperates with other peace organisations and religious actors in Sweden. The organisation's work is based on the values of peace and justice, Islamic principles and universal human rights declarations. Its aim is to, "from an Islamic point of view, work for just peace in and among countries, grounded in human rights, just [equitable] trade and economy, social equality, freedom and global solidarity and responsibility."[39]

AFGHAN INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING (AIL): Working to rebuild her native Afghanistan and incorporate Islamic traditions of peace and conflict resolution, Sakena Yacoobi founded AIL in 1995. The group supported 80 underground home schools for more than 3,000 girls in after the Taliban closed girls' schools in the 1990s. Until the Taliban reconquered Afghanistan in 2021, AIL served 350,000 women and children each year through educational learning centres, schools and clinics in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. AIL's work includes teacher training programmes, preschool education, classes for children whose education was interrupted by war and violence, women's learning centres, and support programmes for grassroots organisations. AIL's human rights and leadership training is based on the Quran. The organisation was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.[40]

Members of peace committees in conflict areas in the Amhara Region and Oromia Region share experiences.

From left to right: Temima Shunburu from Oromia Region, Bale Gasara Woreda, Abay Kebede from Oromia region Bale Robe woreda, Fatoye Siraj, Amhara regional state, North Shewa zone, Senbete Woreda.

Photo: Metasebia Assefa Eshete January 2022

6. INTERVIEWS WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

This chapter features interviews with three internationally renowned religious leaders about the theology of their faith in relation to peacebuilding.

6.1 JEWISH LEADER: RABBI DAVID ROSEN

Rabbi Rosen lives in Jerusalem. He is the former Chief Rabbi of Ireland (1979–85) and currently serves as the American Jewish Committee's International Director of Interreligious Affairs. He is a President of Religions for Peace, serves on the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Commission for Interreligious Relations and is the Jewish member of the Board of Directors of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Centre for Intercultural Dialogue. He is a past President of the International Council of Christians and Jews, and the former chair of the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations.

Within your religion, what motivates you to work for peace?

The sages of the Talmud say that there is no value that we are obliged to pursue more than that of peace. In psalm 34 it is written, "Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and pursue it." The Talmudic comment says that while other precepts depend on time, place and circumstances – for example, the commandment to give charity to the poor depends on whether you come across the poor – peace is the only commandment where you are told to go out and look for it and pursue it.

There is another comment of the sages of the Talmud that says, "God's greatest gift is the gift of peace, and without peace all the other gifts are not fulfilled." Therefore, the value of peace is one of the highest values within Judaism. In fact, within the Jewish tradition peace is not only the name of God, but also seen as the ultimate divine attribute that we are asked to emulate. It is not possible for a Jewish person, or any religious person I would guess, not to see peace as a value that they are obliged to pursue.

Relationships to other people are rooted in the idea that all human persons are created in the divine image, and therefore every human person is a manifestation of the divine. In fact, we can go further and say that precisely because we call it Creation, the cosmos is the manifestation of the divine, and that our treatment of the cosmos is ultimately a manifestation of how we relate to God. Therefore, there is no greater impiety than the desecration of human dignity and life, the summit of Creation. Peace is the vehicle by which we strive for the actualisation and fulfilment of the potential of the human individual and of human society. The pursuit of peace is thus the ultimate social imperative of the religious spirit and heritage within Judaism and, as I indicated, I believe that this is true of religion as a whole.

What is the added value of religious actors in peacebuilding, and what are the risks of involving religious actors in peacebuilding?

I wish there was more of an understanding of the importance of engaging religious actors in peacebuilding. In the Holy Land and in the Middle East, for example, part of the failure of peace initiatives has been the disregard of the religious dimension in conflicts. International diplomats or other peace agents have overwhelmingly ignored religion and have not met publicly with religious leaders or communities. I understand why – terrible things are done in the name of religion, and religion is often seen as a central source of the problem. However, if religion often is part of the problem, the solution is not to disregard it but to make it part of the solution. If you disregard religion, you disregard the most profound basis of people's identities in this region.

Most conflicts in the world today are related to identities, and identities are overwhelmingly rooted in religious heritages. Therefore, trying to solve conflicts while disregarding the psycho-spiritual foundations of the people and of people's identities will not work. In fact, the vast majority of religious believers and religious leaders believe passionately in peace. But they don't believe that peace should be pursued at the expense of their own attachments. So, if you give them the perception that this peace process is seeking to deny those attachments, then you convince them that it is not really their peace you are pursuing. Then, you also risk stultifying the overwhelmingly, predominantly moderate voice. As a result, you actually encourage what you are trying to avoid, which is, you invite the extremists to assume the public voice of religion because you are not enabling the moderate voice to be heard. Any peace initiative that ignores the religious dimension of a conflict, at least in my context, will fail because the religious dimension reflects the deepest attachments of the community that is involved.

There are of course also risks attached to the involvement of religious actors in peacebuilding. For example, some religious people think religion is the key to solving the problem and that religious leaders alone, and not politicians, are the ones to solve the conflict. I believe this to also be a mistake. Generally speaking, religious leaders by themselves cannot bring about peace.

In most places in the world, religion is not prophetic, in the sense that it is not seen by the vast majority as a voice that challenges political authority. Rather, it is seen as a voice that is linked to political authority. Many political leaders are appointed by the state or political structures, and hence are subject to, and even subjugated by, the political authority. Therefore, it is naïve to think that religious institutions alone will challenge political authorities in such a way that brings about transformation. However, when there is a political will, then the importance of religious participation is critical. That gives the process legitimisation. Religion has to be a critical handmaiden of a political and diplomatic process. It should not replace it.

Also, religious leaders should not do the work for diplomats because they very often do not have the necessary detachment from the conflict. They often are too engaged emotionally. So there needs to be a partnership between political and religious leaders.

How is it possible that some people justify violence based on sacred texts or traditions, while others use the same texts or traditions to promote or legitimise peace work?

I don't think that any religious text that is used to justify actions that we call horrendous would for anyone be based on a view that violence is a desirable ideal. People justify violence on the basis of what they claim to be legitimate and necessary self-defence. Therefore, the crucial question is: who, what and when is legitimate self-defence? Some religious traditions take a pacifist position and say that you can never justify violence. That is not the case in most Abrahamic religions, for whom never allowing any form of violent response would ultimately be to give up on your responsibility – not only towards your own life but towards the lives of others within your community. That would be considered an immoral response. The problem of course is that human beings will never agree upon the question of what, who and when is legitimate self-defence because each one sees it so differently. Those who act violently will always say they act in self-defence.

Ultimately, violence has to do with security, or rather the feeling of a lack of security. In some contexts, especially contexts of violence, some people feel threatened and not welcome. Therefore, if we are going to overcome the abuse of religion, the critical thing is precisely what interfaith dialogue teaches us: one has to engage with those 'others', those who feel threatened or vulnerable, be it within or outside your own religion. This is intrinsic to intra- as well as inter-religious dialogue. One needs to enable people to feel respected, and that they are actually welcome and an integral part of the wider society.

Of course, there is a balance between confrontation and empathy here. On the one hand, you have to be responsible and offer counter arguments. And you need good security and good intelligence to protect society. On the other hand, to counteract attack with attack does not work. The only thing that works in the end, our traditions teach, is empathy and love. Now, to love somebody who is hostile towards you is very difficult. But a minimum of what you can try to do is to show the other that you understand his or her fear. And that often opens up the possibility of creating some kind of constructive connection.

When it comes to violent extremism, those who are radicalised are often ignorant of their religious texts and teachings. It is certainly important to address the texts and teachings that are perverted, but that is not good enough. Because when people become violent, they do not become violent because of the texts. The texts are used as justifications and rationalisations and support for their desire to be violent. The motives of their violence are far more profound and have to do with their fears and psycho-spiritual state of mind and heart.

How do you consider the role of women in peace work?

As a generalisation, we can say that the role of women is critical. All generalisations are obviously problematic, but to the degree that we can generalise, women – for example as child bearers, home makers and first educators in the home – tend to have the gifts of compassion, communication and of human connectivity in a much richer way than men. Therefore, they can have a particularly constructive and important role in peace work. Besides, as victims of male patriarchy, women have often been hindered in reaching status and positions. Thus, sociologically speaking, they can more easily traverse boundaries that are more difficult for men. So, in many contexts, women's groups make connections that men's groups cannot make. But what we need to aspire to is a greater integration of women in the general cultural and societal activities. That is, however, not always easy in traditional societies due to cultural norms and patriarchal traditions.

How do you understand and relate to the human rights regime?

The human being, according to Genesis, is created in the divine image. So, everything that allows human potential to be fulfilled is a religious teaching. In other words, the pursuit of human rights is fundamental and one of the most basic religious values of all. However, it is possible to pursue the ideal of human rights while disregarding certain other values, and in that case it is possible for a human rights culture to become almost quasi-idolatrous, in which one particular aspect is made supreme or sacrosanct. This often poses problems for community identity and collective life. Or, as in Western societies, in regard to personal freedoms, when people disregard how others might be impacted by those freedoms. So, the human rights culture is enormously important and I think it fulfils religion's most profound teachings, but it has to be tempered by a more complex understanding of social religious duties. Our religious cultures focus upon duties rather than rights. This does not, however, mean that we should minimise rights. If there is a precept that says I must not murder or I must not steal, that implies that the person has a right to life and a right to property. So we have to find a creative balance between a culture of rights and a society of duties and responsibilities.

6.2 CHRISTIAN LEADER: DR AGNES ABUOM

Dr Abuom is a Kenyan Christian organisational worker who has served as moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches since 2013, where she represents the Anglican Church of Kenya. She is the first woman and the first African to hold that position. She is also the Executive Director of TAABCO Research and Development Consultants, which works for civil society and aid organisations. She has worked with the All Africa Conference of Churches, the African Council of Religious Leaders (Religions for Peace) and the National Council of Churches of Kenya. She has also been involved in peacebuilding efforts in the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Within your religion, what motivates you to work for peace?

First of all, I think it is important to underscore that we serve both a God of justice and peace. Peace cannot take place without justice, and justice makes peace blossom. That is why the prophet Amos says, "Let justice roll down like waters". In the Old Testament, when the children of Israel were in exile, the prophet Isaiah reminds them to pray for the city of Jerusalem, so that when there is peace they can go about their business; they can build, they can grow vineyards, they can marry and build communities. In other words, there is no abundant life, as Christ promises, which is not premised on just peace.

Secondly, forgiveness is paramount to peacebuilding. In the Lord's Prayer, we are encouraged to forgive those who sin against us in the same way that God forgives our sins. But the other dimension is also crucial, namely that we acknowledge our contribution to conflict and hence seek the other person's forgiveness. This brings us to the third element of peace, that of reconciliation. Reconciliation is at the very heart of peace and peacebuilding. If you look at the Scriptures, and particularly the Pauline writings, we are told to reconcile and to live in peace with one another. But reconciliation is conditional according to Paul, who warns us of being yoked with those who do not share our vision of peace for instance. We are nevertheless called to seek, build and pray for peace.

What is the added value of religious actors in peacebuilding, and what are the risks of involving religious actors in peacebuilding?

First, I would like to stress that religious actors unfortunately are often ignored in peacebuilding. Peace processes are often seen as the domain of only governments and intergovernmental agencies. This is a pity, because religious actors are significant parts of a community. In many contexts, and particularly in African contexts, religious actors have a lot of trust among the people. Here, people – generally speaking – trust religious actors, sometimes more than they trust their governments. Besides, religious actors have authority and power. They sit on a pedestal in communities where secular agencies and governments do not have the same access and authority. This is because religious actors appeal to the spiritual, the physical and the mental faculties of individuals and communities. They touch on the very nerve and soul of the community. They can encourage people and call them to order when they have gone out of line to an extent that runs much deeper than any governmental appeal. Therefore, the facts that religious actors are part of the community, that they understand the community and have the trust of people make them essential as actors and partners in peacebuilding.

Religious actors certainly also face several risks in peacebuilding. For example, the fact that they are part of the conflicting community is also a challenge. This makes it necessary for them to step back a bit and assess the conflicts of interest if they are to play a constructive role. My experience is that religious actors often need facilitators to assist them to look at the conflict with some distance and level of objectivity. During the post-election violence in Kenya a few years ago, I served as facilitator to religious leaders and communities. I had to stress particularly three concerns in my communication

with them: 1) Try not to show favouritism; 2) Try to understand the causes and effects of the conflict and your potential role as religious actor. The capacities to analyse and assess the causes of a conflict can be difficult if you are too involved in it; 3) Use your spiritual power to bring together people. Both of the conflicting groups are affected, and people need to meet face-to-face.

Another major challenge of engaging religious actors in peacebuilding is that you risk spiritualising or theologising the conflict, and hence making it more difficult to solve. Again, this has to do with the proper analysis of the causes of a conflict. Finally, I would also add the risk that many faith communities employ mainly elderly people and mainly people in authority who themselves tend to perpetuate the conflict. New thoughts, for example, are not always brought to the table by religious leaders. To question leadership is not an easy thing to do, especially religious leadership, because there is a notion that you are not supposed to do so. Being a religious actor myself, it is important for me to stress that we need to encourage and nurture cultures of democracy and criticism. That is also part of peacebuilding. It is essential to observe that, due to the marginal position of women in religious organisations, including the self-understanding of women by some of the actors, religious actors tend to omit a critical input.

How is it possible that some people justify violence based on sacred texts or traditions, while others use the same texts or traditions to promote or legitimise peace work?

History is full of conflicting religious interpretations and practices. I think it is important to look at holy texts within their historical context. Some texts in the Bible, for example, are written within contexts of cultural or economic conflict. If they speak of violence, we need to understand them in light of the contexts in which they were written. I would emphasise that there exist many false theologies, for example on violence or linked to economic or racial supremacy. Those in power most often want to sustain the power, and they use biblical texts for legitimising this. A clear example is the Boer white South African government that justified apartheid for so many years by misusing some biblical texts. Genesis, and in particular the story of Noah and his son Ham, has for example, been used to justify that God condemned Africans to be labourers. On the other hand, biblical texts have been used to liberate people and to rise up the poor and marginalised, for example in Reggae music. So, in order to assess holy texts and their reception we must understand them as part of particular economic, spiritual and political paradigms of power to see how they are used or misused to either sustain or subvert power.

How do you consider the role of women in peace work?

The role of women in peace work is critical and essential. Women cannot be missed out if one hopes to achieve genuine peace as well as benefit from peace dividends. There are many reasons for that, and I will highlight a few here. In a particular conflict I know about, women were the backbone of some of the communal violence. If the men wanted to withdraw, the cultural framework did not allow them to do so. In this way, they were propelled to continue the conflict by their female counterparts. Women are the people who nurture the boys and men who go out and fight. Women can be community actors who transform cultural norms but also actors who perpetuate negative masculinity and femininity. I believe this is an important point, because for a long time people just assumed that women are peacemakers. However, if one looks at cultures, one notes that women have prominent roles in both promoting peace and in enhancing or acting as drivers of violence or negative sentiments/profiles of the other.

Cultures have specific understandings of, and specific ways of dealing with, conflict, war, domestic violence, inter-communal violence and intra-communal violence. Particularly in situations of intra-communal violence, women and children are abducted and integrated in the conquering power from the vanquished community. This makes women very critical elements in peacebuilding. If they are not invited to the table, one can be sure that communities will hardly realise sustainable peace.

Another and perhaps more obvious reason for the necessity of involving women in peacebuilding is that without including women in peacebuilding processes, you miss half of the community and therefore also the possibility of changing that community. Besides, you miss the expertise, the

capacities, the wisdom and the critical participation of women. To leave out women is like trying to see with only one eye – what only one eye sees is partial. When merely men partake in peace processes, the effort of peacebuilding is built on a limited and partial perception. That is why the inclusion of women is crucial on all levels of peacebuilding, not only on lower levels but also on tracks 1 and 2.[41]

My final point on women is that peacebuilding must be accompanied by trauma healing. Communities in conflict in most cases face cycles of trauma, and the people who deal with the consequences of these traumas on a daily basis are women. Therefore, women must be engaged in the official healing processes, in negotiations between warring factions and in processes of resettlement. Resettling people should be holistic; physical, mental, emotional and spiritual sides need to be taken into account. Unfortunately, this approach is yet to be fully realised. Women – and not only in traditional cultures – are often seen as the custodians of spirituality, which is a crucial element of culture, and the growth of spirituality within the family. The man is also there, but the foundation is really the woman. That is one of the reasons why women can be transformative agents.

How do you understand and relate to the human rights regime?

For me, the concept of human rights points to my Christian belief that we are all children of God, made in the image of God. In other words, human rights is simply securing what the act of charities in Matthew are about, namely the services when I am sick, when I am hungry, when I am cold and naked. In this way, human rights is a very vital thing – the right to live. When Christ talks of abundant life, it is not only about material wealth but also about the quality of life, the longevity of life, and the communal aspect of life. This is why Africans often speak about communal rights or people's rights, because my rights relate to the rights of others. The whole notion of *ubuntu* (humanity towards others) comes in here. I cannot enjoy life in isolation from others, or by oppressing others. If we look at Genesis again, God creates human beings and nature, looks at it and finds it beautiful. Anything that violates that beauty violates the right to exist in fullness and the right to live a life that Christ promises us when he died on the cross. So, while we still are on this Earth, I think as a Christian that my human rights and the dignity and rights of others are so interconnected and interwoven that our lives are like a web – a web of life that brings all creation together. In this way, human rights are for me a holistic approach to the wellbeing of a person and community. That is what Christ comes to fulfil: that they may have life and that they have it in full. We are all children of God and we can leave no one behind. The language of human rights can help us remember this universality. It does not matter whether you are Hindu, Muslim or Christian – we are all God's creation.

6.3 MUSLIM LEADER: DR QIBLA AYAZ

Dr Ayaz is the chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan, a constitutional body of Pakistan that is responsible for giving legal advice on Islamic issues to government and Parliament. He holds a PhD in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Edinburgh, and he has published five books and numerous research articles.

Within your religion, what motivates you to work for peace?

First, belief: Islam is a religion of peace. The word *Islam* has several meanings. *Salama* means peace, protection, security. All these meanings come from the root of the word Islam but the most prominent meaning is that of peace. Islam is fundamentally about peace.

Second, the Quran, our holy book. The Quran is full of verses that promote peace among human beings and in society. I can point to many such verses, but here I will highlight the surah Quraish – the chapter of the tribe Quraish, which was the tribe in which the prophet Muhammed *(pbuh)* was born. In this surah, Allah says that "we all should worship Allah, who gave you food at the time of hunger, and peace in a situation of fear." In other words, peace is a divine blessing. It is ultimately considered a blessing, a bounty, from God to humanity. It is also a gift that affects society at large; if there is peace, then there is trade, and then the economy improves and makes the lives of human beings better.

Third, the life of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh). In his time, there were many wars and tribal conflicts. But the Prophet (pbuh) tried his best to gather the tribes and establish the city state of Medina, in which peace prevailed, the economy grew and people had good lives. All these glorious traditions motivate Muslims to strive for peace and improved relationships with others.

In this way, peace is a very broad term, referring both to peace on a personal level, within a group and society, but also between different societies and nations.

What is the added value of religious actors in peacebuilding, and what are the risks of involving religious actors in peacebuilding?

Wars and violence bring disaster. They bring conflicts and damage to society, to the economy, to the lives of people and to future generations. Therefore, peace is the ultimate objective that makes the world in which we live a better place.

One of the biggest challenges is that there are groups that are in favour, or seem to be in favour, of war. Such pro-war groups can be found in the present time as well as in history. Among Muslims, for example, these groups make their arguments on the basis of some specific verses in the Quran and some practices of the Prophet Muhammed (pbuh). There were wars in the lifetime of Muhammed (pbuh), and he also faced certain conflicts. Further, there have been many wars in the history of Islam, as is the case in the history of Christianity and Judaism. Unfortunately, all these wars and conflicts in history provide a base from which some people develop a pro-war ideology or theology. This is certainly a challenge as one cannot deny the existence of violence in history. In this way, there exist two narratives: one that legitimises violence and one that seeks peace.

The challenge to the followers of peace is to counter the narrative of those who are supporting violence and war. Of course, such countering cannot be violent. One should try to involve and engage these people in dialogues and with arguments. The wars of history should be interpreted as actions of their time. For example, the wars of Muhammed (pbuh), in Mecca were self-defensive wars – to protect the community. Many of the Islamic wars in history have been defensive wars that sought to defend the Muslim community. However, other wars have not been self-defensive. Some took place among Muslims themselves, and some have had nothing or little to do with religion. Many wars were to control a piece of land or resources or economy. One needs to discern what makes a war or violence just and what makes it illegitimate. Such discernment can be an added value from religious actors.

Another added value is the production of counter narratives to violent narratives. Many religious people contribute to peace, decency and hope around the globe – in preaching, in education, in the way they live. In Western societies, for example, muftis and imams contribute a lot to peace by telling their fellow Muslims to respect and follow the laws and rule of the country in which they live.

How is it possible that some people justify violence based on sacred texts or traditions, while others use the same texts or traditions to promote or legitimise peace work?

As I pointed to above, there are different narratives within religion. Some emphasise peace while others emphasise the right or need to violence.

Those who are for peace must argue convincingly why peace is the ultimate preferable way in Islam. One must, for example, convince Muslims that we are not under attack from Christians or Jews, although the global system is not fair. If you go to the West, you will find well-integrated Muslims who live good lives, who are secure and who partake in society. In Oslo, for example, many Muslims gain welfare services. When I studied in Edinburgh, my Mosque got water from the neighbouring church. These stories and examples are important. We need them to counter the narratives of those who believe there is a religious war between the West and Islam.

How do you consider the role of women in peace work?

The role of women is very important, also in peace work. Women have a special place in the household and in society. Unfortunately, women have not always been given a proper and due role in our part of the world. Their role is often limited, and they should be given a wider role in society at large in the time to come.

In some contexts, however, women are very active and contribute a lot to society even if the culture does not allow them too much of a public role. Due to cultural norms, women are treated differently and play different roles in different contexts. This has historic reasons. It is changing, however, because education is changing. Today, women are reaching universities and are often well educated. Hopefully, the cultural norms concerning women will change. Civil society is still male-dominated and has to provide wider space to women. We all have a job to do on this issue, both here in Pakistan and elsewhere in the world.

How do you understand and relate to the human rights regime?

Some Muslims say that human rights is a Western concept. However, if one looks closer at Islamic teaching, one finds strong assertions of the value of human life and human dignity, and thus for human rights.

In Islamic teachings, Allah may forgive you if you fail to pursue the duties or rights that concern God. But Allah will not forgive you if you sin against others and violate human life, rights and dignity.

In the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, human rights for all is one of the principles. There are, however, many human rights violations in our country and society, as in many other countries. More work is needed to make both states and common citizens adhere to human rights.

I believe the Islamic religion embraces human rights. Islam has specified the rights of men, women, daughters and sons. There are, however, also some tensions between interpretations of UN human rights documents and interpretations of Islam. Apostasy, for example, is punished within traditional Islam, which can be viewed as an area of tension between Muslim societies and UN human rights. At the same time, religion should not be forced on anyone. Islam is clear on that. Another tension is that of freedom of religion and marriage. A Muslim man can marry a Christian or Jewish woman, but a Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian or Jewish man. In such a case, there is a problem on a theological level as well as in culture. This has to be further reflected upon. The same goes with other religious belongings. In India, for example, there are debates among Muslim scholars about to what extent Muslims can marry Hindus and whether Hinduism can be considered a religion with a divine outlook.
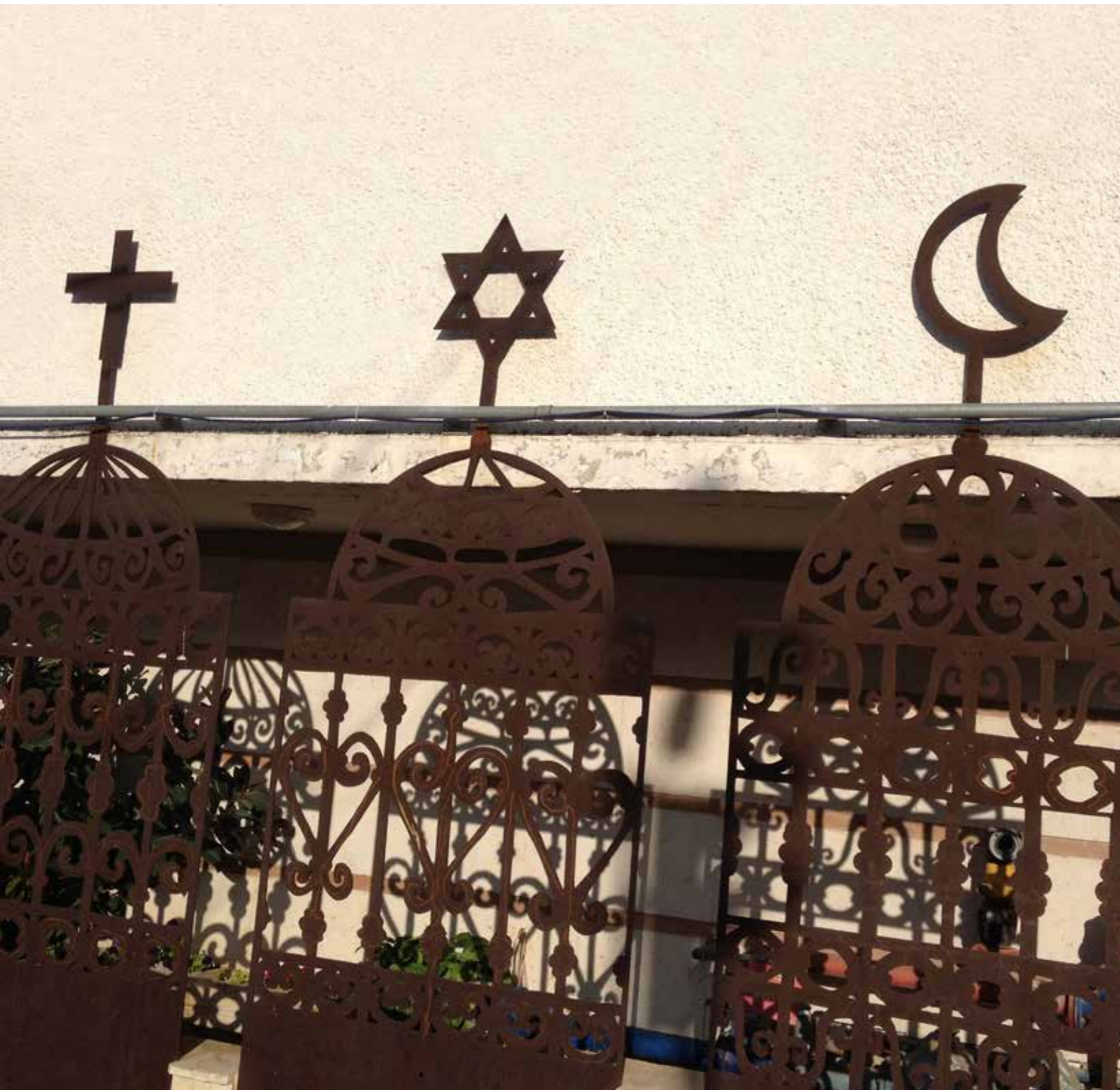
Symbols of the main monotheistic religions of the world in iron fences in Haifa city, Israel.

Photo: iStock

7. WELL-KNOWN CASES OF FAITH-BASED VIOLENT EXTREMISM

As the interviews in Chapter 6 make clear, sometimes people legitimise violence based on sacred texts or traditions, while at other times people use the same texts or traditions to promote or legitimise peace work. Despite all the resources for peace within Judaism, Christianity and Islam, history also tells a story of violence that is connected to religion. However, this association is complex. These three faiths all justify violence to some extent, at least in the case of righteous warfare and self-defence. Their sacred texts are also replete with violent images, metaphors and scenes.[42] At the same time, all three religions emphasise peace and have immense resources for non-violence and peacebuilding, as shown in Chapter 5. This calls for further reflection.

This chapter briefly discusses three well-known cases of religiously motivated violence in relation to peacebuilding.

7.1 JEWISH RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE: JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE, GUSH EMUNIM AND KACH

Some religious and millennial Zionist groups have legitimised violence in their efforts to 'secure' the coming of Messiah. Baruch Goldstein is one example. He was a religious settler and graduate of a prestigious Jewish seminary who massacred 29 worshippers in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron on the feast of Purim in 1994. Goldstein was a member of the Jewish Defense League, a right-wing terrorist organisation now outlawed by the Israeli government. The organisation holds that Palestinians have no right to exist in Israel, that Israeli citizenship should be limited to Jews and that Jewish law should be adopted in public life. According to Jewish scholar Simon Dein, Goldstein believed that a dramatic and 'heroic' act was necessary to stimulate the 'redemptive process' of the Jewish nation, and he saw his act of violence as kiddush hashem (sanctification of God's name).[43]

Other well-known religious Jewish groups that have legitimised or even encouraged to violence are Gush Emunim and Kach. Both groups strongly oppose any peaceful coalition with Arabs. According to Dein, Gush Emunim rabbis have stated that Jews who have killed Arabs should go unpunished, while members of Kach have been encouraged to resort to violence against Israel's enemies, and have frequently been involved in harassment, violence and vandalism against Arabs or Jewish opponents. Kach holds that Israel should become a theocracy and that all of its Arab citizens should be forcefully removed from the country.[44]

7.2 CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE: FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Many churches, church leaders and clergy contributed to escalating violence before and during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Catholic and Orthodox churches and clergy in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia contributed heavily to the formation of Serb and Croat identities in the 1980s. Religion was the single most important identity factor in ethnic differentiation between Serbs and Croats before the wars: 84% of the adult population of the former Yugoslavia expressed a confessional identity by 1990, according to David Steele.[45]

Many church representatives also greatly supported nationalistic parties or helped form nationalist organisations.[46] By making declarations, attending meetings, being available for photos or lobbying for legislation, they advertently or inadvertently legitimised political actions and programmes that escalated violence. Many clergy also actively participated in developing and propagating national myths. Sermons, speeches and religious media were used to reinforce images of the enemy and to depict their own church as the nation's defender. A segment of the Serbian and Croat clergy even actively participated in military activity, either by blessing military initiatives or taking up arms themselves.

7.3 MUSLIM RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE: ISIS

ISIS has become notorious for its brutality and violence. Although most Muslims worldwide reject the terror group, ISIS partly sees itself as an Islamic apocalyptic movement.[47] According to sociologist and scholar of religious studies Mark Juergensmeyer, at least three different worldviews feed into ISIS. For some, ISIS is a movement for Arab empowerment, for some it is a global jihadi movement, and for others it is an apocalyptic movement.[48] ISIS core leadership has included a group of apocalyptic extremists for whom battle is not only part of a war but also part of the struggle between good and evil that heralds the planet's last days and the arrival of the Islamic saviour, the Mahdi. However, only some fighters have been propelled by this belief, and few ordinary Sunnis in ISIS-controlled territory have shared it, according to Juergensmeyer. ISIS' strict code of behaviour and extreme brutality in dealing with perceived enemies are aspects of this apocalyptic image and the movement's grounding in medieval Islamic history and practice.

However, it was local Sunni Arab support that made ISIS viable as a political regime in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria in 2014–17. Although this support was mainly opportunistic, it was also coloured by an image of cosmic and religious war. This image was made possible by three things. Firstly, the perception of a social conflict that threatened Sunni Arabs' cultural survival. Secondly, the sense that there was no other path to survival than battle. Thirdly, the religious-based hope that, with God's help, they would succeed. These three conditions, according to Juergensmeyer, led Sunni Arabs in Western Iraq to support the rise of al Qaeda and later ISIS. Without them, it is unlikely that the apocalyptic theology of al Baghdadi (former ISIS leader) would have had any appeal among the masses.

7.4 REFLECTIONS ON COUNTERACTING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

All three of these examples of religious violence are complex, and it is debatable how far the violence they represent was caused by religion. In one sense, they are hideous distortions of the religions' 'true' teachings. They are also inexplicable without reference to the wider political circumstances in which they emerged. On the other hand, however, the examples are also inexplicable without reference to religious worldviews, practices, identities and institutions.

An important argument concerning the nexus between religion and violence is that doctrines and authoritative texts of all three religions provide legitimising *scripts* for violence.[49] This is the case even if the violence has deeper social, economic, psychological and political roots, and even if the religious scripts are not sincerely held by those who claim adherence to them.

In counteracting religious extremism and extreme groups' use or misuse of religion, broad layers of people within faith communities, institutions and religious leaders must protest against extremists' use of their religion and offer alternative interpretations and corrections. This is of course demanding and time-consuming work. Whether it is the responsibility of mainstream religious actors to counteract religious extremism in their neighbourhood, and thus get caught up in it is questionable, but they seem to have no other option.

The term 'extremism', derived from the Latin *extra torres* (outside the towers or gates) carries an essential relational logic: what is unacceptable must be demarcated from the 'mainstream' or 'acceptable'. To be conceived and judged as extreme, someone must declare a practice or interpretation to be outside the community's 'gates' of acceptance. In this way, religious communities are 'political' communities, as they are characterised by hegemonic power struggles in which different actors strive to offer rivalling interpretations of the 'true' faith, in order to legitimise their practices, institutions and worldviews.

This also means that intra-religious polarisation in violent contexts, cannot be countered simply by addressing power imbalances or even by settling socio-economic injustices, although both have a major role to play. Countering such polarisation also requires theological arguments. Countering such polarisation also requires theological arguments, which results in argumentation and confrontation within the religious group.[50] At the same time, as Rosen explains in his interview in this report, to making people change their worldviews requires confrontations that are accompanied by gestures of empathy and trust, so that transformation and eventually reintegration are possible.

This fundamental logic underscores how demanding, necessary and long-standing counter-interpretations and resistance towards religious violence are. But it also highlights that, eventually, religious worldviews and dominating interpretations can change. Cultural and religious images and interpretations can vanish as quickly as they appeared. Dominant religious and cultural worldviews are not etched in stone. They can change and even be healed by time.[51] In Northern Ireland and India's Punjab, regions that were racked by terrorist violence just 20 years ago have become relatively calm. Although the idea of struggle for a grand religious and ethnic cause persists within former fighting communities, those images have been pushed into the background. This is partly because other interpretations and strategies have been offered, and partly because most people are involved in getting on with life and co-existing with people who they previously regarded as the enemy.

Religious Peace Dialogue Pakistan. Members of a youth group from different religions in Lahore, working together for peace and reconcilaton. From the left, Amir Hussain Guresi (Muslim), Manjet Singh (Sikh), Dasval Kumar (Hindu), Poonam Ajmal (Christian).
Photo: Håvard Bjelland / NCA

8. THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN, YOUTHS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN PEACEBUILDING

This chapter briefly thematises the importance of women, youths and human rights in peacebuilding and suggests some resources that might be useful for NCA and its partners.

8.1 THE RELEVANCE OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING WORK

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325, focused on women, peace and security. This resolution recognises that women have important roles to play in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and that armed conflict affects women in particular ways.

Many scholars and practitioners recognise that peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be sustainable and successful if they include women generally, and that focusing on women deepens and broadens views of peace work.[52] There are several other reasons why the role of women should be more prominent in religious peacebuilding. Women and men have different experiences in violent conflicts, and thus bring different interpretations and narratives to the table. Women's engagement in religious peacemaking is often invisible because, in much of the world and in many faith traditions, men tend to dominate formal leadership, including religious leadership. Historical male domination in security matters – specifically violent conflict – also accentuate women's invisibility in this area.

Even so, a growing number of observers acknowledge that women are crucial in peacebuilding, and that these women's inspirations, motivating frameworks and active community roots often have faith dimensions. Paradoxically, marginalising women – in society and within religious institutions specifically – can give women opportunities, and in some cases an advantage over men, in peacebuilding. Perceived as outsiders to power structures, women are often considered more impartial. Director of the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at London School of Economics, Sanam Anderlini, argues, "because women are regarded as less threatening to the established order, they tend to have more freedom of action."[53] Similarly, peace process scholar Virginia Bouvier suggests that women's marginalisation from leadership in social or political institutions often encourages them to reform these institutions: "Women tend to have different institutional limitations – the fact that they are often not at the top levels of institutions may mean that they are more open to institutional change."[54]

Women's roles in conflict situations are by no means universally positive or consistent, as Dr Abuom makes clear in her interview. Women are not always caring, progressive or soft-centred, but can also be armed fighters, biased, in favour of the status quo, or transmitters of destructive religious and cultural traditions. A danger of defining women's peacebuilding skills is that one can solidify existing overly broad generalisations about women, helping to perpetuate their disempowerment. Professor of religion, Karen Torjesen, has suggested one way to navigate this tension – to make it clear that social realities, and not inherent characteristics, are responsible for the different qualities women often bring to peacebuilding work. She notes, "It is not women's nature, but women's social place, their connectivity, and the resulting sensitivities that offer different perspectives and tools."[55]

Any peacebuilding process should aim to involve representatives of all parties to the conflict. That involves reflecting genders, but also other significant identity factors such as age, class, ethnicity, religiosity, and roles within society or faith community. Women make up (often more than) half of the population in conflict-affected areas, so women should be part of any peacebuilding process.

The report *Women in Religious Peacebuilding* (2011) concludes:

- "Women involved in peacebuilding around the world often draw inspiration and support from religious sources and organisations.
- Across religious traditions, women are often marginalised in formal religious spaces and rarely hold leadership positions … This marginalisation, however, has freed women from institutional constraints, and behind the scenes, they have worked creatively to build peace.
- Women involved in peacebuilding tend to gravitate to efforts that entail sustained interfaith and intra-faith relationship building, approaching peace work from a holistic perspective that highlights the community.
- Because the peacebuilding work of women is relatively unrecognised, support from outside sources, including resources and training, has been lacking. [This has also] … led to failures in understanding the nature of the conflict and has hidden from view potential avenues for resolving conflicts and promoting post-conflict healing and reconciliation.
- international actors could be better educated about the peace work that women do within faith communities and the ways that their work could be amplified. Building bridges among women's organisations and networks, especially secular and religiously inspired, offers considerable promise."[56]

8.2 THE RELEVANCE OF YOUTHS IN PEACEBUILDING WORK

According to professor of peacebuilding Alpaslan Ozerdem and the Oxford Research Group, young people are frequently 'othered' in discourses about peacebuilding and conflict.[57] This is potentially dangerous as youths can play a very positive role in support of peacebuilding in societies recovering from conflict.

Youths are often viewed as vulnerable, powerless and in need of protection, yet they are also often feared as dangerous, violent, apathetic and as threats to security. Recent literature on youth in post-conflict societies marks a shift in this thinking, arguing that young people should be conceptualised and studied as agents of peace.[58] Without recognising youths as political actors, their roles in peacebuilding are likely to be ignored, wasted or at least under-used.

There are many examples across the world of young people's contributions to peacebuilding, such as strengthening community cohesion and reconciliation in South Sudan, raising civic awareness around

peaceful social relations and development programmes in Nepal,[59] trust-building between different ethno-religious groups in Sri Lanka,[60] and community entrepreneurship and livelihoods programmes in Burundi.[61] A 2016 UN Inter-Agency Network on *Youth Development Report, Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note*, presents a number of policy and programme examples from different conflict-affected countries that would facilitate youth participation.[62]

NCA and its partners should explore this tool and assess its usefulness in contexts of peacebuilding.

8.3 RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS: 'FAITH FOR RIGHTS'

The relationship between religion and human rights is both complex and inextricable. While most of the world's religions have supported violence, repression and prejudice, each has also played a crucial role in the modern struggle for universal human rights.

On one hand, human rights need the norms, narratives and practices of religions. Abstract human rights ideals of the good life and good society depend on the visions and values of communities and institutions to give them content and coherence. Being a fundamental part of life and community, religion has a role to play in this. On the other hand, religious narratives need human rights norms both to protect them and to challenge them. John Witte and M Christian Green, editors of *Religion and Human Rights*: An Introduction, have encouraged religious communities to reclaim their voices in secular human rights dialogues, and to reclaim the human rights voices within their own internal religious dialogues.[63] The theory and law of human rights are neither new nor secular in origin. According to Witte and Green, human rights are, in no small part, the modern political fruits of ancient religious beliefs and practices.[64] Therefore, religious communities should be open to fresh ways of interpreting their sacred texts and traditions to reclaim their roots and roles in cultivating human rights.

The book provides accessible assessments of the contributions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to human rights ideas and institutions. It also probes some of the major human rights issues that confront religious individuals and communities around the world today, and some of the main challenges that the world's religions will pose to human rights in the future.

The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights has developed a specific Faith for Rights framework, to provide space for cross-disciplinary reflection and action on the deep connections between religions and human rights.[65] In 2017, the UN High Commissioner gathered faith-based and civil society actors at a conference in Beirut. Building on the 2012 Rabat Plan of Action, this conference adopted the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on Faith for Rights. This declaration considers that religious, atheist and other believers should join together to articulate ways in which faith can stand up for human rights more effectively, so they can enhance each other. Article 1 states:

"Faith and rights should be mutually reinforcing spheres. Individual and communal expression of religions or beliefs thrive and flourish in environments where human rights, based on the equal worth of all individuals, are protected. Similarly, human rights can benefit from deeply rooted ethical and spiritual foundations provided by religion or beliefs."[66]

The 2020 #Faith4Rights toolkit translates the framework into practical peer-to-peer learning and capacity-building programmes, with a learning module relating to each declaration commitment.[67] NCA and its partners should explore this tool and assess its usefulness in contexts of peacebuilding.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 POTENTIAL ADDED VALUE OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN PEACEBUILDING WORK

This section outlines some general and potential added values of religion and religious actors in peace-making. The list is not exhaustive but a selection from relevant literature and the interviews in this report.

As noted above, it is essential to look at the role of religion as an integral part of a wider conflict, rather than separate from it. Bringing in religious actors, or addressing religious questions, will never address the entire conflict picture. However, engaging and emphasising religion as one of several components of peacebuilding work may have substantial potential by opening up new paths to discuss fundamental assumptions held by conflicting groups.

RELIGION'S ADDED VALUE AS A SYSTEM OF NORMS

A COMMON PLATFORM: Many aspects of religious normative traditions are directly relevant to central elements in peacemaking, such as social justice, re-establishing people's honour and dignity, and visions of a peaceful future. Religious values and practices can provide a common platform and shared framework for peacemaking, which could foster moral relationships, mutual recognition and long-term commitment between parties in a conflict resolution process.[68]

The culture of diplomacy and peacebuilding is largely cosmopolitan and secular.[69] As religion is fundamental to how many people understand their lives, religious actors often express themselves differently from strictly secular actors. Secular diplomatic jargon may therefore not get through to religious people engaged in conflict or peacebuilding, and it may not be able to address core aspects of a conflict appropriately.

A RESPECTED SET OF VALUES: Time spent identifying values and virtues that are shared across religious lines can contribute to effective peacemaking. In conflicts that follow religious lines, it can be significant in generating inter-religious meeting places for people to get together and experience religious or universal commonalities. For example, recognising that many values – particularly values that can contribute to peacemaking – were shared by Islam and Christianity was a revelation to Christian and Muslim participants in an inter-religious youth leadership training programme in Nigeria.[70]

RITUALS AND TEXTS: Central religious materials like authoritative texts and rituals can also play a role in peacebuilding. This has been the case in Sudan, between Christians, and between Christians, Muslims and Animists.[71] The South Sudan Council of Churches, for example, brought together Nuer and Dinka tribal leaders, and invited them to visit each other's villages. During these visits, they got to know each other, washed each other's feet and carried each other on their shoulders to convey humility and a willingness to reach out to the other side.

Rituals can contribute to social cohesion and bringing people together in societies divided by conflict. Further, the environment created by religious actors in peacemaking can facilitate expressions of empathy, hospitality, apology, repentance and forgiveness. There are many examples of rituals and gestures of repentance and forgiveness by religious leaders being transformational moments in peace dialogues. This is probably one of the most distinctive features of religious peacemaking, as such personal or communal expressions, often performed in rituals, are less likely to occur in secular than religious contexts.

REHUMANISATION: Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions share visions of peace, social justice, loving neighbours and human dignity, all rooted in their faiths and theologies. In deep-rooted conflicts, openness to listening and responding to the suffering of people on the other side can foster healing and reconciliation, or at least understanding and trust. In this way, religion and religious actors may have the potential or ability to rehumanise people or communities that have become dehumanised over the course of protracted conflict.[72]

RELIGIOUS CREATIVITY: Religious actors can contribute different perspectives to those of secular or political peace brokers. Integrating the dynamics of faith with international peacebuilding could combine reconciliation and conflict resolution in creative ways. Different perspectives on issues may be at the root of a conflict, so offering alternative ways to meet may be a fruitful way to involve religious actors in many conflict situations.[73]

RELIGION'S ADDED VALUE AS IDENTITY

RECOGNISING A KEY PART OF HUMAN IDENTITY: Religious traditions explicitly or implicitly underpin collective ways of life in numerous cultures, and religion is often a main factor in identity among parties to a conflict (intertwined with other identity factors). Any peacebuilding initiative must relate negotiations and dialogues to core aspects of the conflicting parties' identities. As religion often is used to divide people, it is essential for people of different faiths to come together, counteract religious othering, start rehumanisation processes, and speak openly about their desires, concerns and hopes for peace and justice.

PREVENTING EXCLUSION: In many contexts, religion is an integral part of a conflict in one way or another. In such cases, peacebuilding processes must consider the different parties' *religious* and cultural feelings, attitudes, yearnings and symbolic images. If a conflict involves religious elements, and these are not properly recognised in the peacebuilding process, there is a risk that fervent religious believers on all sides will feel excluded and threatened by the peacebuilding process. Failing to recognise religious elements in peace work also risks missing the opportunity to address religious actors in their own symbolic language, helping to develop broad ownership of the peace process.

OFFERING A COMMON IDENTITY: When all groups in a conflict have faith-based identities, religion has the potential to highlight these groups' common values. Being religious can itself be a shared value that can enable cooperation and pave the way for a negotiating relationship based on conflict issues rather than identity issues.[74] In the National Dialogue Initiative in Tanzania, for example, different religious agents contributed to defusing a tense situation because of their religious mindset. In this case, faith-based organisations and religious leaders could analyse the situation involving believers of different faiths, because as people of a religious mindset they could understand the issues at stake and the patterns of reactions among believers.[75]

DEPENDING ON CONTEXT: When communal identities, particularly religious identities, are causal factors in violent conflict, traditional diplomacy may be of little value in seeking peace or conflict management. Based on multiple conflicts, Douglas Johnston, former president of the International Center on Religion and Diplomacy, has identified contexts that lend themselves to faith-based intervention:[76]

- Religion is a significant factor in the identity of one or both parties to the conflict.
- Religious leaders on both sides of the dispute can be mobilised to facilitate peace.
- Protracted struggles between two major religious traditions transcend national borders.
- Practical political forces have led to an extended paralysis.

THE ADDED VALUE OF INVOLVING RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN PEACEBUILDING

LOCAL PRESENCE AND OWNERSHIP: It is vital to promote local ownership of conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives as early in the process as possible. Religious institutions are often locally based, so they can have immediate influence within their community.[77]

Peace must be made among people, not just between governments or leaders. No single step can change overnight what lies in the hearts and minds of thousands or millions of people. Although shared principles on territory, security, the common good, the distribution of and access to power, and co-determination, are essential to any sustainable peace, it is also crucial to ask what can be done to build trust between conflicting groups. Peace begins not in political leaders' plans, but in the hearts of people and in the daily connections that take place among people who live together in a troubled community.

GLOCAL INTRA-CONFESSIONAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS NETWORKS AND MOBILISATION: Most Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups are to some extent part of intra-confessional and/or inter-religious networks of religious organisations. Inter-religious networks may serve as a strong basis for dialogue in contexts where conflicting parties have different religious identities. Intra-confessional networks are based on cooperation within groups of the same faith, and commonly transcend state borders.

Religious organisations tend to span multiple levels, from the local to the international. Their ability to play on international organisational linkages is often key to mobilising resources for engagement in peacemaking, as well as protecting key individuals and local organisations. In this way, religious institutions have the capability to mobilise community-based, national and international support for a peace process.

Without credible local partners, no international actor can make much of a contribution to conflict resolution. Local institutions must provide guidance on the most effective methodologies. They can successfully integrate and modify international conflict resolution methodology with religious practices and local customs.[78]

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES: A faith community's organisational and administrative structure has a decisive impact on the role that religion plays in the lives of its believers as well as in wider society, and therefore also for its potential as a constructive force in peacebuilding. In many cases, religious communities and organisations have organisational and administrative resources such as staff, volunteers, buildings, offices, land, domestic and international networks, media access or their own media platforms, schools and even hospitals.

In conflict-affected contexts, state structures and other public structures are often critically weakened or even absent, as a result of conflict. Sometimes local religious institutions facilitate the best-functioning public infrastructures in these areas.

NUMBERS VERSUS COMMITMENT: A decisive factor in the role of a religious institution in a peace process is not necessarily its number of adherents, or its well-functioning administrative structure but how committed its individual members are to the institution. Leaders of large umbrella organisations, for example, may face problems when seeking to reach their members with key messages. Conversely, although the membership of cult and sectarian organisations may be small, members' commitment to these organisations is strong. This can make these forms of religious organisations particularly robust. While their leaders have a particular opportunity to reach their members, these members are in turn particularly determined to realise their organisations' goals.[79]

LEGITIMACY AND MORAL AUTHORITY: By virtue of the organisation and norms they represent, religious actors may have trust and credibility in peacebuilding processes that is difficult for non-religious actors to acquire. Consequently, faith-based organisations may carry moral authority that contributes to peace negotiations and policies.[80] In mid-1970s Mozambique, for example, the Catholic community Sant'Egidio became a key conflict mediator. Sant'Egidio's successful involvement is commonly considered as a consequence of both the community's neutrality in the conflict and also the shared norms the community's ethos offered to the parties.[81]

LEADERSHIP: Nearly all forms of Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious organisations conventionally include a hierarchy, with leaders that have the moral authority to direct members and to act on their behalf. Who occupies religious leadership positions, and their qualities, are therefore immensely important. Religious leaders may have significant resources for influence. They can have a well-established and pervasive influence in a community, they may have a reputation as a trustworthy force for change based on a respected set of values, they have unique leverage for reconciling conflicting parties, and the capability to mobilise local, national and international support for a peace process.[82] Besides, an effective interfaith collaboration among leaders offers a powerful model. Religious leaders' moral authority is enhanced if they address an issue together, across religious differences.[83]

Although Judaism, Christianity and Islam are marked by patriarchal structures, there are multiple leadership roles within most faith community structures. Women and young people may also hold leadership positions, which is highly relevant in peacebuilding efforts.

POTENTIAL OF ADDRESSING DIFFICULT ISSUES: In certain conflicts, it can be more productive for religious leaders to consider emotionally divisive issues than for political or secular leaders to debate such issues. This is particularly true in contexts where governmental and religious authorities overlap, or when two communities share a faith commitment. In some situations, religious leaders who are trusted by conflicting parties have been able to address difficult issues with moral and linguistic integrity, without being perceived as partisan, politicised or biased.[84]

9.2 POTENTIAL RISKS OF INVOLVING RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN PEACEBUILDING WORK

This section outlines some general and potential risks of involving religion and religious actors in peacemaking. It is not exhaustive but based on a selection from relevant literature and the interviews in this report.

As conflicts, conflict-affected contexts and religious practices are so different, all the aforementioned potential added values of involving religion and religious actors in peacebuilding can also represent potential risks and challenges in peacebuilding work.

POTENTIAL RISKS OF RELIGION AS A SYSTEM OF NORMS

THEOLOGISING A CONFLICT: Involving religion and religious actors in peace work around conflicts that are not religious, or conflicts where religion only plays a minor role, risks making these conflicts more difficult to solve. Religion can blur the focus and distract attention from other, perhaps more substantial, aspects of a conflict. There is also a risk of theologising a conflict by including religion and religious leaders in peacebuilding. If a conflict is perceived as a struggle between good and evil forces, it becomes more difficult to solve than if it is perceived as a negotiable conflict over resources or access to rights or privileges. In Egypt, for example, state authorities have often involved Christian and Muslim religious leaders as negotiating and reconciling agents in local conflicts between Christian Copts and other Egyptians. Many of these conflicts have primarily economic or social causes, so involving religious leaders has helped to make the conflicts more religious than necessary.[85]

IF RELIGION IS PART OF THE PROBLEM: As described earlier, religion can be used to legitimise a huge spectrum of viewpoints and practices – and encourage violence, discrimination, ethnic or cultural discrimination, gender exclusion or the dismantling of human rights conventions. While this can be an argument for mobilising 'peace-willing' religious actors to counteract destructive religious interpretations, it also demonstrates a fundamentally ambivalent role of religion in any peacebuilding work. In conflicts where religion is part of the conflict picture, peace efforts should involve not only so-called progressive religious forces but also mainstream religious groups that might be less embracing of openness, human rights and pluralism, among other issues. In addition, in many conflict situations seeking to isolate the religious dimension is rarely viable and is perhaps more likely to lead to the development of faith-based 'spoiler groups'.[86]

NOT MONOLITHIC SYSTEMS: Religions and religious communities are not monoliths and should not be treated as such. In many conflicts, sharp divisions open up within faith communities. For example, frictions within the Christian, Muslim and Jewish leadership groups in Israel and Palestine have interfered with various regional interfaith peace initiatives. Divisions in the Macedonian Orthodox hierarchy and among Macedonian Muslim leaders slowed the creation of a Macedonia Council for Interreligious Cooperation, even though these divisions had nothing to do with the proposed council.[87]

POTENTIAL RISKS OF RELIGION AS IDENTITY

EXPORTING CONFLICT: A sense of religious belonging is an element of many conflicts, including transnational ones. Underscoring the religious aspects of a conflict or making a conflict more religious risks spreading a conflict to religious groups elsewhere, either internationally or in a neighbouring city. As with other forms of conflict, spreading faith-based conflict is easier than ever in the social media age.

COMMON GROUND OR RIVALS: In conflicts where religion plays a key role, religious peacemakers may have an advantage in understanding the main issues and identifying common ground. However, religious actors often struggle to gain sufficient confidence from both parties in religiously charged conflicts, often because the broker is somehow identified with one of the parties. It is paradoxical that when the need for religious peacemaking may be the greatest, the challenges also seem to be the largest.[88]

COMPLEXITY AND OVERLAPPING DIVISIONS: Complications arise when religious divisions overlap with ethnic, political, economic or other divisions, as is often the case. Religious divisions can easily reinforce other divisions, as in Kashmir, Israel and Palestine, Nigeria, Sudan and the Balkans. Whether to actively involve religious actors in peacebuilding processes is a complicated decision that needs to be assessed thoroughly in each situation.

POTENTIAL RISKS OF INVOLVING RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN PEACEBUILDING

LIMITED LEADERS: Just as religious leaders in some contexts may have the power and ability to address emotionally divisive and politically difficult issues, the opposite can happen. In some cases, as Dr Abuom highlights, religious leaders are too emotionally or theologically engaged in a conflict to have the necessary detachment. In other cases, religious leaders are seen as linked to political authority, as Rabbi Rosen underlines.

In several contexts, religious leaders are related to state structures and power, and are seldom 'neutral'.[89] Yet in other contexts, religious leaders do not have sufficient tools, their power is too soft, or they rely on the goodwill of the state or their members to such an extent that they do not have the courage or ability to address underlying or difficult elements of a conflict. Examples from Ethiopia show that religious leaders were only able to engage in peacebuilding activities that were acceptable to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front regime. They could not launch ideas that were understood to challenge that regime's political strategies.[90]

When they fail to address important politically contentious dimensions of conflicts, religious actors' contribution to peace is much weaker. While encouragement to love enemies and neighbours might help to bridge social bonds between religious groups in violent conflicts, referring to the religious value of love without simultaneously emphasising justice will not contribute to sustainable peace.[91] Although religious leaders sometimes have the power to call for violence to stop or diminish, this does not necessarily make them capable of solving the underlying issues required for sustainable peace.[92]

RELIGION ALONE IS NEVER SUFFICIENT: Religious organisations are unlikely to be the only actors involved in trying to settle a conflict. In general, religious actors seem best suited for track 2 diplomacy, particularly in the early stages of peace processes, when the main challenge is establishing common ground and fostering confidence among the parties. How to interact with other actors without threatening the integrity of the religious organisation is always difficult.[93]

So it is critical to link faith-based peacemaking with secular and political processes and authorities. According to David R Smock, faith-based peacemaking almost never creates peace without this cross-sector collaboration.[94] Even in a particularly impactful example of faith-based peacemaking, that of Sant'Egidio in Mozambique, religious peacemakers only succeeded by engaging the UN and the governments of Italy and the US as partners. Similarly, the Nigerian peace agreement mediated by the Inter Faith Mediation Center in Yelwa-Nshar had to be coordinated with, and sanctioned by, the Governor of Plateau State. The same holds in Kashmir, Iraq, Sudan and Macedonia.

RISKS OF BRINGING IN FOREIGN AGENTS: International religious actors can exacerbate local conflicts, by helping to polarise a conflict, being perceived as biased, or paying insufficient attention to key local customs and concerns. In addition, foreign religious organisations proselytising in religiously divided countries can do serious damage.[95] This is true of both Christian and Muslim organisations.

INSTITUTIONAL IMBALANCE: Another risk of bringing in foreign religious organisations is damaging the institutional religious balance in a particular conflict. According to David R Smock, the most successful faith-based peacemaking occurs when the religious communities in an interfaith dialogue have almost equal institutional strength.[96] If one faith-based community is much better resourced and organised than the other, this presents a serious handicap.

EXCLUDING WOMEN AND YOUTHS: Obtaining sustainable and just peace requires including broad range of groups and people, including women and young people. As noted above, religious institutions (and also secular political structures and diplomacy) are often patriarchal and tend to ignore the role of women and young people in peacebuilding work.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognising the immense variation within and between various religious traditions and conflict contexts, this chapter makes some general recommendations for NCA and its peacebuilding partners.

NCA PEACEBUILDING SYSTEMS AND APPROACHES

CONDUCT THOROUGH ANALYSES: Any NCA or partner involvement in peacebuilding processes must rely on thorough conflict analyses. Whether and how to involve religion or religious actors in peacebuilding processes are complex decisions that need to be assessed thoroughly in each context. Analyses should be conducted in cooperation with local partners and external experts, and should involve questions including:

- How far is religion part of the conflict?
- How far do religious divisions overlap with ethnic, political, economic or other divisions?
- How much 'wiggle' room do religious actors have in this conflict, and what are their relationships with state and political authorities?
- Will any involvement of NCA or its partners disturb the balance of religious institutions in the conflict?
- What are the potential benefits and risks of engaging religious actors in the peace process?

SYSTEMISE BEST PRACTICES: NCA is a well-established international actor in relief, advocacy and peace work, with a broad and rich network of international and local partners. Together with these partners, NCA has significant experience around religion and peacebuilding. In addition to utilising external expert knowledge, NCA should systemise knowledge, experiences and best practices from its own work to contribute to effectively involving religious actors in peacebuilding.

PRACTISE TRANSPARENCY: NCA should continue to be a transparent actor in its peacebuilding work. In order to do this, NCA must be open about its religious identity and legacy, and be clear on the advantages and disadvantages this could hold for peacebuilding.

NCA PEACEBUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEACEBUILDING PARTNERS: Religious institutions and leaders may have significant influence on peacebuilding processes. They may have a well-established and pervasive influence in their community, are often viewed as apolitical and nonpartisan forces for change based on a respected set of values, have unique leverage in reconciling conflicting parties, and can mobilise local, national and international support for a peace process. Forming partnerships with appropriate religious actors is therefore critical to the success of NCA's peacebuilding work. Thorough context analyses should help NCA to identify the most influential, effective and appropriate partners.

VALUE THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL PARTNERS: NCA should continue to invest in local partnerships. Without credible local partners, no international actor can make much of a contribution to conflict resolution. Local partners and institutions must provide guidance on the most effective methodologies. They can successfully integrate and modify international conflict resolution methodology with local customs and norms. At the same time, NCA needs to be a critical partner and occasionally challenge certain religious and local customs when appropriate.

LINK RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR ACTORS AND PROCESSES: NCA should contribute to building bridges and creative partnerships between religious and non-religious networks and actors in peacebuilding processes. It is critical to link faith-based peacemaking to secular and political processes and authorities, and to cultural, civil, economic and political actors in wider society.

COMMUNICATE NCA'S OPPOSITION TO PROSELYTISING: Christian or Muslim proselytising, and fundraising for related activities, plays a significant role in many conflict contexts around the world. NCA should continue to be clear that it does not support proselytising, and should regularly communicate this to its partners. The Oslo Coalition's Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities might be helpful in handling sensitive or problematic issues relating to this.[97]

RECOGNISE AND USE RELIGIOUS' ACTORS' STRENGTHS IN PEACEBUILDING

USE RELIGIOUS ACTORS' GLOCAL STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE: The glocal aspect of many religious actors and institutions is a valuable and strategic asset that NCA should explore further. Religious institutions are often locally based, and can help to ensure necessary local community ownership early in peacebuilding processes. As religious organisations can incorporate global levels, they can also draw on international organisational links, which can be central to mobilising peacemaking resources. As religious actors, NCA and its faith-based partners are capable of mobilising local communities, national institutions and international networks in support of peace. NCA should reflect more deeply on how its glocal networks can be most effectively mobilised in peace processes.

EMPLOY RELIGIOUS ACTORS' IDENTITY IN CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS: Any peacebuilding initiative must relate negotiations and dialogues to core aspects of the conflicting parties' identities. As identity plays an increasingly prominent role in many conflicts, and that religion is often used to divide people, engaging religious actors in peacebuilding can be impactful. NCA's peacebuilding work must contribute to bringing people of different faiths together to counteract religious othering and start rehumanisation processes.

ENABLE INTERFAITH COOPERATION: Inter-religious networks may offer strong foundations for dialogue in conflict-affected contexts where the conflicting parties have different religious identities. Effective interfaith collaboration among religious leaders may offer a powerful and replicable model for peacebuilding. NCA should help establish, support and/or partner with inter-religious networks that can play a constructive role in peacebuilding.

HARNESS RELIGIOUS' ACTORS' ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES: Religious organisational and administrative structures have a decisive impact on the role that religion plays in its believers' lives, in society, and therefore also for its potential contributions to peacemaking. Sometimes local religious institutions facilitate an area's best-functioning public infrastructure. In many cases, religious communities and organisations have organisational and administrative resources such as staff, volunteers, buildings, offices, land, domestic and international networks, media access or their own media platforms, schools and even hospitals. In every case, NCA needs to explore how its religious partners' institutional and organisational elements can be used most effectively and creatively.

BUILD ON RELIGIOUS RITUALS OF RECONCILIATION, TRANSFORMATION AND REINTEGRATION: Religious actors have significant experience of, and competence in, rituals, enabling them to contribute to social cohesion and bring people together in societies divided by conflict. The environment created by religious actors in peacemaking can facilitate expressions of empathy, hospitality, apology, repentance and forgiveness, and can stimulate key moments of transformation and reintegration. This is one of the most distinctive features of religious peacemaking. Such personal or communal expressions, often performed in rituals, are less likely to occur in secular contexts. NCA and its partners should further explore the potential of these kinds of rituals in their peace work.

WIDEN PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE: NCA recognises the importance of involving youths in peacebuilding processes yet this potential could be harnessed further. NCA should develop explicit strategies to enable the organisation and its partners to more effectively recruit and involve young people in peacebuilding work, including in contexts and cultures where youths traditionally have little formal status.

INVOLVE WOMEN AND SECURE GENDER JUSTICE: NCA recognises the importance of involving women in peacebuilding processes but it should intensify its focus on gender justice and including women in peacebuilding. NCA and its partners should develop concrete strategies to include and empower women in peacebuilding and related training more effectively. NCA should learn more about women's previous and existing peace work within faith communities and how this could be maximised, scaled up and/or replicated. In particular, NCA should prioritise helping to building bridges between women's organisations and networks, especially between secular and religious ones.

INCORPORATE NEW UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETATIONS IN PEACEBUILDING

HUMAN RIGHTS: Religion and human rights should be seen as mutually supportive and interdependent. Human rights need the norms, narratives and practices of religions, and religious narratives need human rights norms to both protect and challenge them. NCA and its partners should encourage, facilitate and engage in hermeneutic processes to develop sensitive and appropriate new interpretations of sacred texts and traditions to help people (re)claim their faith-based roots and roles in cultivating human rights. NCA should also consider using, and sharing with its partners, the Faith for Rights resources developed by the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights.[98]

RELIGION AND VIOLENCE: NCA should further explore the complex association between religion and violence. It should develop ways to enhance theological understanding and interpretations of peace and support the production of theological counter-narratives to violence. NCA should also provide arenas for, and involve religious actors in, tangible and context-specific dialogues on issues like religion and violence, the relationship between confrontation and empathy, and about exactly what actions, methods and timings constitute legitimate self-defence.

Sisters from the Society of Daughters of Mary Immaculate conduct peace consultations in South Sudan.

Photo: Håvard Bjelland / NCA

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12. ENDNOTES

1 This is a rather conventional approach to religion. See for example: Lincoln; Horsfjord, Kloster, Lende and Løland; Harpviken, and Røislien.

2 Cowdell, Fleming, Hodge and Osborn.

3 Gopin. Between Eden and Armageddon. P.11.

4 Harpviken and Røislien.

5 Rabbinic Judaism has been the mainstream form of Judaism since the sixth century, after the codification of the Babylonian Talmud. Its roots lie in Pharisaic Judaism and it is based on the belief that at Mount Sinai Moses received two items from God: the 'Written Torah' (the Pentateuch, the Torah itself); and the 'Oral Torah' (explanations of the Written Torah transmitted by word of mouth). The Talmud is the central text of rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology. It contains commentaries on the Torah, and discussions and opinions relating to many oral laws believed to have been transmitted to Moses.

6 Talmud, Gittin 59b. Available at Sefaria online library: https://www.sefaria.org/Gittin?lang=bi (last accessed 13 December 2021).

7 Gopin. Between Eden and Armageddon. P.77.

8 Ibid. P.78.

9 Ibid. Pp.136–137.

10 Appleby. 'Retrieving the Missing Dimension of Statecraft'. Pp.243f.

11 Gopin. 'Judaism and Peacebuilding in the Context of Middle Eastern Conflict'.

12 Gopin. Between Eden and Armageddon. Pp.91–95.

13 Jewish Peace Fellowship website: https://www.jewishpeacefellowship.org/index.php (Downloaded 15 January 2021)

14 Like NCA, the UN and many UN member states including Norway, this report recognises the State of Palestine although its borders are contested.

15 Tag Meir website: https://www.tag-meir.org.il/en/ (Downloaded 1 September 2021)

16 Calabrese.

17 Oz VeShalom – Netivot Shalom website: http://ozveshalom.org.il/blog/about-us/ (Downloaded 30 March 2021)

18 Zohar.

19 Himes. P.268.

20 Schreiter. P.370.

21 Opongo. Pp.176–77.

22 Bartoli. P.50.

23 Tearfund.

24 Nicosia. P.16.

25 Schreiter.

26 Mennonite World Conference.

27 See the Christian Peacemaker Teams website: https://cpt.org/ (Last accessed 13 December 2021)

28 Pax Christi International website: https://web.archive.org/web/20180617192714/https://www.paxchristi.net/about-us/why-pax-christi (Last accessed 13 December 2021)

29 Ibid.

30 LWF website: https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/global-peace-messengers-training (Last accessed 13 December 2021)

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32 Cahill. P.306.

33 Professor Osman was Director of the Institute for the Study of the Role of Islam in the Contemporary World (US). He was also scholar in residence at the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab Foundation, and held academic positions in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Egypt, the US and Algeria.

34 Osman.

35 Osman. Pp.60–65.

36 Huda.

37 Abu-Nimer. P.79

38 Also known as Islamic State (IS) or Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), this extremist group aims to create a caliphate (Islamic state) in the region. From 2014–17 the group controlled Western Iraq and Eastern Syria.

39 Svenska Muslimer för Fred och Rättvisa website: https://muslimerforfred.org/sv/om-smfr/ (Last accessed 13 December 2021)

40 Kadayifci-Orellana and Sharify-Funk. Pp.193–195. See also Sakena Fund/AIL website: https://www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org/who-we-are.html (Downloaded 13 March 2021)

41 Track 1 diplomacy involves government actors and track 2 diplomacy involves non-state actors.

42 Juergensmeyer. Terror in the Mind of God.

43 Dein. P.157.

44 Dein. Pp.158–159.

45 Steele. P.125.

46 Ibid. P.128.

47 Cottee.

48 Juergensmeyer. 'Thinking Sociologically about Religion and Violence'.

49 Cottee.

50 Petersen and Wandera.

51 Juergensmeyer. 'Thinking Sociologically about Religion and Violence'.

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