

Peace in Religious Traditions: The Necessity of Understanding
Senior Thesis

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by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For centuries, humanity has used its belief systems as justification for warfare, violence, and oppression, while simultaneously using these belief systems to build societal values of virtue and justice. Within the past three centuries, it has become increasingly passé to discuss religion in a serious manner in the Western sphere, and as that sphere has exerted its hegemony over the rest of the world, it attempted to bring its disdain for “irrational” religions with it. Wars were still fought, but religious elements in those wars were downplayed, ignored, and recast as differences in civilization. Within the past forty years, however, there has been a resurgence of conflicts wherein religion plays a significant role. As these conflicts were growing more frequent, a new movement (with old roots) called “nonviolence” grew as well. This movement called for active peace to be built through dialogues and mutual agreements rather than through violence and oppression.

As members of this movement have attempted (with varying degrees of success) to transform conflicts that have religious elements to them, religion as a whole has become increasingly seen as a factor that cannot be used to transform conflicts and build peace. Scholarly articles have focused on how religions drive conflict or on other factors of the conflict, whether they are socio-economic, political, ethnic, or cultural.

This is a grave mistake, and does both human history and religion in general a disservice. Religions can generate negative change, certainly, but they can also improve societies immeasurably. Furthermore, it is essential that those peacebuilders who are working on conflicts with religious elements are able to understand how religion is playing a role in the conflict, how it can play a role in the conflict’s transformation, and especially how its believers understand its role in their lives. This last is of the utmost importance, because the lack of that understanding creates fear of religious individuals, which in turn generates the belief that religion can only be a negative influence on conflicts.

All too often, when people use the term “religion,” they mean different things, and talk past one another without really realizing it. Even outside of violent

conflicts, this phenomenon can lead to disagreements and strife. All the more reason, then, that one ought to strive to understand what others might mean when they speak of “religion.”

As such, for the purposes of this paper, the following definition of religion will be used: religion is defined however a religious individual wishes to define it, with the exception of those cases in which the religion is a self-aware mockery of other religious traditions. While at first glance, this definition seems distinctly odd, it is necessary, because denial of the legitimacy of the belief systems of others only generates conflicts rather than transforming them.

That being said, however, the above definition is so open-ended that it is practically unusable for the purposes of practical use in the transformation of conflicts. It would leave would-be peacebuilders seeking out what *this* individual’s religion might be, which might become an intrusive and fruitless endeavor if the individual in question does not wish to involve their beliefs publicly. Therefore, throughout the rest of this paper, the focus will be upon religious *traditions*, rather than religion as a whole.

Religious traditions can be understood as pre-established frameworks of understanding the deeper questions in life, such that each individual need not attempt to answer their own existential questions from scratch. This definition explicitly does not offer *all* of the answers to those questions, even when some individuals might claim otherwise, because each individual’s interpretation of their own religious tradition differs, even if it stays within the tradition, to say nothing of looking outside of it.

These two definitions are intended, in part, to radically transform conceptions of religion and religious tradition, such that a peacebuilder might better (temporarily) set their own preconceived notions of the terms aside. As mentioned above, the idea of religion is one that sparks many debates, but for the purposes of this paper, these are the definitions that will be used.

Naturally, an in-depth study of any given religious tradition is something that takes years, if not decades to complete. This is not only demanding, but also impractical – a peacebuilder might have a few months at best to prepare research

about a given conflict, and that includes all aspects thereof, not just the religious. Fortunately, there are a great number of resources available to discover the details of a given religious tradition, whether by experts, local practitioners, the educated elite within a tradition, or any other trustworthy source. Furthermore, this paper is written in such a manner that it constructs a framework and vocabulary for peacebuilders, that they might know the right questions to ask, and what the answers might mean for their situation.

Further, the paper focuses in great detail on clarifying the ideology and mental framework by which religious individuals may understand their world. This is of the utmost importance for peacebuilders working in religious conflicts to understand, as without this understanding, there can be no true communication.

The specific religious traditions that will be discussed in this paper are by no means the only religious traditions that exist, that drive conflict, or that can be used to transform conflict, to say the least. For this reason, this paper will focus on the most familiar religious traditions to Western scholarship – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (in that order), allowing for a level of presumed knowledge of the traditions.

Each of the traditions shares a great deal, yet each differs markedly from the next – to say nothing of different subgroups within each tradition. These three traditions are often referred to as “Abrahamic,” for the figure of Abraham, about whom all three have a great many stories. This term also suggests descent from Abraham, though whether literally, spiritually, or a mix of both varies between traditions and individuals within those traditions. The term Abrahamic is also often used in attempts to build bridges between the three traditions, with mixed results.

The three traditions have some common factors – a belief in a single God, in the legitimacy of prophecy (though each tradition has its own prophets), and each has sacred writings, scriptures, which are held to be authoritative. Further, each has a similar set of stories about the creation of the world and the times thereafter, a seemingly shared set of legends and mythos, with other similarities besides. All that being said, however, the three traditions are not identical.

Judaism, although often held to be the oldest of the three, only truly began to take the shape it holds today in the early centuries of the Common Era, when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem. As the Temple was the locus of the local religious tradition, the Jews had to find a way to adapt to its sudden removal from everyday life. It was in these times that the practice of writing texts interpreting the laws and traditions of the ancestors began to truly take root, and this practice has survived to the current day. The Jewish tradition has a wealth of literature and commentary on laws and ethical questions, and any peacebuilder working in a situation where the tradition might play a role should be familiar with terms such as the Sages (an anonymous collective of all the Jewish thinkers that have contributed to the collected law), *Halakha* (traditionally understood as the law, though more literally interpreted as the path), the Mishnah (a collection of commentaries on the Torah), the Talmud (a collection including the Mishnah and commentaries on it).

It is also important to note that the Jewish religious tradition is unique among the three discussed here, in that the term “Jewish” also applies to a people, a culture that is more than just religious – often, people who identify as “Jewish” may not accept the significance of all of the terms mentioned above. This can be true of the other traditions as well, but it is not nearly as confusing because those traditions often are associated with identities that, while not religious, are also not identically named to the tradition.

Christianity is the most familiar religious tradition to modern Western scholars, perhaps so much so that there is an unfortunate tendency to treat all religious traditions as though they act in the same ways as does the Christianity. In modern scholarship, it is commonly held that Christianity (as a religious tradition of its own, rather than as movement within Judaism) truly began in the first few centuries CE, though its own beliefs see its origins at the turn from BCE to CE (and indeed, that is the reason why those two means of measuring time exist). Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, is a broad umbrella term for a wide variety of practices and beliefs, but generally, all Christians accept that the man known as

Jesus Christ was God's Son, the Messiah, and that he died on the cross in order to redeem all the world's sins.

However, as mentioned above, Christianity is far from a unified tradition, and there are several different groups that all see themselves as practicing the true way of Christ. These include the better known groups such as Protestantism (which is itself divided into many denominations), Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, but also include the lesser-known Apostolic Church of Armenia and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

Islam is the least known of the religious traditions discussed in this paper, at least to the West. For centuries, it was feared and hated by Christians, vilified by their Churches, and generally misunderstood by all who lived in the Western world. Nowadays, such feelings continue, but it is increasingly clear that this attitude is insufficient to build peace.

Islam understands itself as having been revealed throughout history through various prophets, but the final prophet, Muhammad, is understood to have experienced his revelation in Mecca and Medina on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century CE. Islam quickly spread throughout North Africa and the "Middle East" (a term used for familiarity's sake and not to encourage a Eurocentric worldview) and beyond. Now it is most commonly found in those locations, as well as in the northern Indian Subcontinent and in Southeast Asia, though one can find members of any religious tradition almost anywhere.

Islam's revealed text is called the Quran, though the tradition also works with a collection of oral laws and teachings passed through word of mouth (for the most part) known as *hadith*. There are smaller branches and groups within the Muslim tradition, much like all religious traditions. The best known (to the West) are perhaps the Sunni, who are the most populous group, but also known are the Shia, the Ismaili, the Sufi, the Khajirite, and the Ibadite branches, some of which are smaller divisions of other umbrella terms.

These three religious traditions are often perceived as being both the most militant of all the world's religious traditions, and the most interrelated, as mentioned above. The truth of these perceptions is beyond the scope of this paper

to determine, but they are both doubtless incomplete, at best, and this paper shall strive to offer other insights into the three traditions.

This paper will work to demonstrate how religious traditions can drive conflicts, and, in turn, how they can be used to transform conflicts, using five different categories to help clarify how a particular conflict might apply. These categories are religious tradition as a community, as a practice, as spirituality, as a set of teachings, and as discourse.

Each category will be explored through a variety of sources and case studies, in an attempt to demonstrate the essential nature of using the traditions to build peace in those conflicts that are driven, at least in part, by religious traditions and beliefs.

Naturally, religious traditions are not the sole means of transforming conflicts. Sometimes a religious tradition has caused too much pain in given individuals to help heal their suffering, and in some cases, the difficulties arise from the nature of the conflict transformation. Whether or not religious traditions are the best tools to deal with a given conflict, it is always necessary for the would-be peacebuilder to have a certain level of knowledge of the religious traditions involved in a conflict with religious elements.

Chapter 2: Literature Section

Throughout this work, it should be remembered that there is a great deal of literature in existence on the subject of religion's role in both driving and transforming conflicts. What follows is a brief list of sources that have inspired this work.

This work relies heavily upon *Approaching Religion in Conflict Transformation: Concepts, Cases, and Practical Implications*. Written by Owen Frazer and Richard Friedli for the Center for Security Studies in Zurich, this paper establishes the framework that will be used extensively in the core of the argument. In it, Frazer and Friedli outline five different ways of considering religion's role in conflicts: as a community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, and as discourse. Each of these categories is able to be used in positive and negative ways, and is an essential part of the toolbox of a mediator in many situations.

After this outline, the authors turn to five case studies – the Iraqi Inter-Religious Congress, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy's faith-based center in Kashmir, the An-sifûna initiative of Morocco, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, and secular-Islamist confrontation in Tajikistan. Each of these cases is of great interest and provides examples of how to understand religion's role in conflicts. Frazer and Friedli will provide the framework for understanding the rest of the documents discussed in this paper.

Another, related work is "Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualization," which, noting the prevalence of case studies when it comes to the subject of peacebuilding and religion, attempts to create a framework for how to understand religious roles in conflict transformation. Its authors, John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins, and Francis Teeny, attempt to illustrate how comparative analysis can illuminate case studies in a beneficial way. Although it will not be as central to this work as the framework described above, Brewer et al.'s insistence on comparative study will be instrumental in the construction of this argument.

One highly practical guide to the techniques and tactics one can use to transform conflicts that have religious elements to them is *Creative Approaches to Conflict Transformation in Societies Affected by Extremist Religion*, a manual written

by Dr. David Steele. This work offers both a structural outline whereby one can understand the role a tradition might play in a given conflict, and offers tools for the peacebuilders working in those societies.

Another excellent source is *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*. In it, Karen Armstrong outlines what she sees as a history of fundamentalism from the 1492 expulsion of Jews from Spain to 1999. The thesis of the work claims that the secular and fundamentalist worldviews have misunderstood one another for centuries, as they cannot comprehend one another without outreach. Further, she argues that fundamentalism and religious literalism is a purely modern phenomenon, as they hold to scientific ideas generated during the Enlightenment, but instead of dismissing the truth of their sacred texts, they take them as literal proof.

While the veracity of her historical arguments are beyond the scope of this work, Armstrong's powerful prose enables her (presumably non-fundamentalist) reader to *understand* a fundamentalist's point of view. This understanding is utterly imperative for any peacebuilder who would attempt to engage conflicts involving religious actors.

Armstrong follows the fundamentalism of the three so-called Abrahamic faiths – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – from 1492 until 1999. While some of her conclusions are somewhat problematic for a peacebuilder, the main thrust of the work allows a secular peacebuilder to begin to comprehend how to build a language that will not cause their would-be audience to react negatively.

Another source that represents the peacebuilding aspects of religious traditions is “A High-Level Summit of Buddhist and Muslim Leaders: *Overcoming Extremism and Advancing Peace with Justice*,” which describes the resolutions of a summit between Muslim and Buddhist religious authorities in Indonesia. Many organizations, such as Religions for Peace, JUST, and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, worked together with their hosts the Indonesian Council of Ulema and the Indonesian Buddhist Association to prepare a document that represented both groups interests in the world and peacebuilding.

Jihad and the Islamic Law of War, by contrast, was assembled by the Royal Aal-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought at around the same time. Unlike the previous article, *Jihad and the Islamic Law of War* represents a non-Western institution's attempt to understand the role of war in Islam. It establishes the precedence of the non-violent *jihad* over that of the violent *jihad*, and points out that while Christianity lacked the idea of a just *means* of war, Islam had that from the beginning. While the core acceptance of war is not something that this paper embraces, the deconstruction of Western perceptions of Muslim tradition is highly useful.

The next work is Andrea Bartoli's "Christianity as a Resource for Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding," an article published in *Die Friedens-Warte* by the Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag in 2007. This article focuses exclusively on Christianity's possible role in conflict transformation, though it also is careful to address the fact that Christianity can play very negative roles in conflict transformation. Bartoli gives examples like Francis of Assisi and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as members of Christian communities that worked to build peace in times of great violence, but also notes how Christians have just as often been the *causes* of such violence.

Other sources that have influenced the writing of the paper but are not themselves directly quoted include the following.

For example, Muhammed Abu-Nimer's "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding" published in November 2001 in the *Journal of Peace Research*. Though it was written before the events of the 11th of September of that year and the ensuing public focus on the upsurge of conflict marked with religious identity markers, it provides a useful examination of how people of various religions (and none) can build bridges between their communities, and how they can be trained to do it on their own. Abu-Nimer further outlines the goals and tools of an interreligious peace building training, providing a very useful tool for would-be peacebuilders.

In *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, Ibrahim Kalin discusses the roots of misconceptions that the western sphere holds about Islam

and argues that such misconceptions and flawed thinking have led to incredibly unfortunate errors on the part of policy-makers.

Dr. Ina Merdjanova, an active voice for peace in the lands once held by Yugoslavia writes in her article “Overhauling Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding” of her sociological understandings of how interreligious dialogue ought to be handled, especially in the Balkans.

Another set of concrete examples of how interreligious dialogue and existence might affect a conflict comes from “Contact, Culture and Context: Evidence from Mixed Faith Schools in Northern Ireland and Israel” by Caitlyn Donnelly and Joanne Hughes. This article outlines how the two did their research and why they chose Israel and Ireland. The article discusses the more abstract political and social implications of the interreligious schools.

Complementing this article is “Working toward the De-essentialization of Identity Categories in Conflict and Postconflict Societies: Israel, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland,” by Zvi Bekermann, Michalinos Zembylas, and Claire McGlynn, who have observed that children raised in multi-religious schools lack the strong sense of identification with their parents’ “in-groups” that their elders are burdened with. This is perhaps a useful solution that peacebuilders might endorse to the conflicting parties.

Though the United States Institute of Peace is not without conflicts of interest in certain circumstances, the report it assembled in January 2009 titled *Islamic Peacemaking Since 9/11* represents an attempt to open eyes to the presence of Muslim peacebuilders in the world. The report is not without its issues, and has a somewhat distressing tendency to divide Islam into “good” Muslims (with whom there is no issue) and “bad” Muslims (who cause all of the problems), but is overall useful.

One incredibly powerful source is “Reconciliation from Below: Indonesia’s Religious Conflict and Grassroots Agency for Peace,” by Sumanto Al Qurtuby. In it, Al Qurtuby describes how, despite popular coverage of religious or sectarian violence in post-Suharto Indonesia, there were also a number of locations where diverse religious groups decided that they did not wish to see the same sorts of violence

spread to their homes, and developed strategies of interreligious dialogue despite the relative decentralization of the movement. Because there is no great figure, man or woman, that took a central role in this, it illustrates how powerful a grassroots movement can be.

Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament, and Carl E. Thorsen, compiled the work *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, which is an incredibly valuable source for any peacebuilder, in any conflict. Its second chapter is most relevant to this paper, as it deals with religious perspectives on forgiveness. It allows the secularist or other outsider to a given religious tradition the knowledge of the right questions to ask.

Nekhet Ahu Sandal, in "Religious actors as epistemic communities in conflict transformation: the cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland," attempts to bring to light, from an international relations' perspective, how religious actors can play a role in conflict transformation.

"Rethinking 'Home' Abroad: Religion and the Reinterpretation of National Boundaries in the Indian and Jewish Diasporas in the U.S." is a work that attempts to understand how diasporic elements of a religion that sees itself as having a home in an existing state can affect positive change on the state itself. Traditionally, diasporic influences have been considered negative, but Atalia Omer argues that they can positively impact the home country as well.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This paper will principally be relying upon the framework outlined in Frazer and Friedli's *Approaching Religion in Conflict Transformation: Concepts, Cases, and Practical Implications*, which breaks down the roles religion can play in conflict into five separate categories. These categories include religion as a community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, and as discourse. None of these categories are exclusive, but are rather tools whereby one can understand what a given individual *might* mean when they speak of religious tradition. Further, most if not all of these categories can play both positive (transformative) roles and negative (conflict-driving) roles.

First off, religious traditions can play a role as a community in a conflict. This is perhaps one of the better known and more often discussed roles religious traditions can play in a conflict, especially when it comes to contributing to said conflict. Sometimes referred to as "religious identity markers," religion plays a role as a community when its practitioners see it as a way of identifying themselves, often in contrast to others. In these situations, those who are identified as part of the religion (whatever the reasons) are seen as part of an in-group.

However, sometimes a peacebuilder can redefine the primary (in-group) identity in more flexible terms – whether that is divorcing the religious identity from the national identity, shifting the goals within the primary identity, or defining oneself as a larger unit – for instance, going from being "Jewish" to being "a practitioner of one of the religions of Abraham."

This rationale is what why the term "Abrahamic religions" or "Abrahamic faiths" was coined in order to reemphasize the similarities between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. This usage can be useful for a peacebuilder, but there are a few problems with it. Firstly, the term implies a fair amount of similarity between the three traditions, but it does so, almost by default, from without. With roots in a Western effort of pluralism, the term can be seen as imposing Western understandings upon Judaism and Islam, something that not all practitioners are willing to accept.

The next category that Frazer and Friedli describe is religion as a set of teachings. In this role, religions are understood as sources from which one can cite bases for their actions. Whether quoting *hadith*, oral traditions of what the Prophet or in some cases his closest followers said about certain situations, pointing to the Talmud, or calling on the New Testament's teachings, religious traditions can provide ways for people to justify and motivate themselves. Obviously, this understanding of traditions can be used to both drive and transform conflicts.

Fraser and Friedli identify the third role that religious traditions can play in conflicts as spirituality. Spirituality in this context refers to the intensely personal feelings and experiences of a given individual. This can be communal – a group meditation, for instance, or individual, such as always lighting a candle on someone's *yahrzeit*. This role is often difficult to use, because it has a very personal meaning for the individual who experiences it, and often the spiritual element is a motivator for joining the peacebuilding movement or for participating in a violent conflict, rather than something that can easily be used to transform conflicts by secular peacebuilders.

Religion as practice is the actual traditions, rituals, and practices of a given group or individual. This particular aspect of religion can be hard for people brought up in the secular, Protestant-influenced West to grasp. Historically, the early Protestants looked to cut away all extraneous ritual that they saw as being a wall between humanity and God, and this disassociation from ritual and practice as a whole only developed further once the Enlightenment arrived and the highly educated in the West began moving away from religious worldviews and towards secular one.

This brings one to the final and possibly least intuitive role religious traditions might play in conflicts – that of discourse. Fraser and Friedli acknowledge that at first glance, differences in discourse can seem solely to be differences in vocabulary as attached to ritual, belief, and the like. This alone is a worthy way religious traditions can play a part in conflicts, as it might provoke conflict when the two discourses do not understand one another, as they begin to feel offended because of how utterly little sense the other seems to make.

However, they further point to a meaning beyond this, writing, “discourse is a whole system of language, thought, practices, and ideas... [that has] important implications for power and knowledge.” Every action and idea is assessed in light of how it consistent it is within the given discourse. This means that not only on a basic level of terminology, but also on a deeper level of worldview, religious traditions can play a role in discourse.

One particularly prominent example of a religious tradition playing a positive role in societal change comes from Latin American Catholic Liberation theology. While it functions as an example of all five of the above categories, it is not necessarily a useful example when it comes to building peace between separate groups.

The reasons for this are quite simple, and have nothing to do with how effective the phenomenon is. In short, liberation theology is an almost prophetic condemnation of the current status quo, matched with a passionate demand for change. This means that the rhetoric of liberation theology is highly adversarial and confrontational – a necessary measure, because it demonstrates to those who are in power the sincerity and commitment that liberation theologians have.

In situations where there is already violence, however, liberation theology’s anger at the injustice of the situation can quickly become anger at the opponents, which only further damages the situation, to say nothing of how it might appear to those outside the religious tradition.

Furthermore, liberation theology, whether Catholic or otherwise, must come from within that tradition – it *cannot* be brought in from an outsider, because an outsider will simply seem to be dictating others’ understandings of their faith backgrounds *to* them. Thus, the rhetoric of liberation theology is not one that should be used in the peacebuilder’s toolbox.

The framework established by Frazer and Friedli is far from absolute, and this paper’s focus is not the only way religion can promote positive or negative social change. Other frameworks and phenomena exist, such as that outlined in “Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualization.” In this article Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney attempt to comprehend religion’s role from a sociological point of view

in the peacebuilding process as well as its role in driving conflict. This framework is useful in that it does not relegate religion to a separate sphere from anything else – religion is not some individual factor, separate from economic, societal, or political factors, but one that can be seen throughout the entire society, even if it is disguised. For instance, the discussion of clashing civilizations that became prominent in the 1990s identified the West as a secular world, while marking the Islamic world as one identified with religion, ignoring the continued influence of religious traditions – specifically, Christianity, in the Western world.

However, this framework will not be used as the guiding method for this paper because it is intended for social scientists who are attempting to understand the role religion plays in conflicts – this is less useful than Frazer and Friedli’s when it comes to getting tools into a peacebuilder’s metaphorical toolbox. While the framework does help one understand, it does so on a very macro scale – attempting to understand religion at such a level is a good idea, and is useful enough that many peacebuilders should at least consider the arguments made... but it can be hard translating that understanding from conceptual to practical.

The macro scale *is*, however, useful in demonstrating that religious traditions as a whole are not *solely* forces that drive conflicts, despite dismissive secular claims and more sympathetic secular fears otherwise. It is in this role that their work will be employed in the paper.

Having said that, the idea of treating all religious traditions as having enough similarities to one another that a single matrix can be drawn about all of their roles in conflict is problematic – both Fraser and Friedli’s matrix and that of Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney treat “religion” as though all religious traditions can fall under one framework, and while it is certainly true there are many similarities, to treat them as one and the same is not something that is recommended, because it leads to erroneous assumptions and mistaken actions.

Nevertheless, as it is necessary to speak broadly of religious traditions, and as Fraser and Friedli’s framework seems most useful for working with religious traditions, theirs is the framework that shall be used.

Chapter 4: Argument

As has been established, the past few decades have seen a resurgence of religiously motivated violence, and since that time, the peace movement's secular members have struggled with how best to deal with this. In order to understand how religious tradition can both drive and transform conflicts, it is important that a peacebuilder understand the religious traditions in question.

As most peacebuilders are no doubt aware, there are also several risks involved in dealing with religious traditions that are less present in other elements of conflicts and their transformation. In many conflicts, identities are deeply held and vitally important for the continuation of a conflict, and errant words from a peacebuilder might trigger negative responses because the individuals in question feel the statement threatens their identities.

In the case of religious identities, this risk is present as well, but the specific words that might trigger the feeling of that identity being threatened are often less clear to a secular peacebuilder, which has historically led some to dismiss the value of religion in the peacebuilding process. However, when the peacebuilder has a better understanding of the mindset of the traditions in question, it becomes much easier to comprehend how one should address these concerns.

According to Karen Armstrong in her book *The War for God: A History of Fundamentalism*, many fundamentalists feel incredibly, existentially threatened by the phenomena of modernity and secularism. Furthermore, she claims that the triumph of the *logos* – that is, the logical mind that discerns facts – over the *mythos* – the imaginative and metaphorical truths held in legends – during the early modern period has led the fundamentalist mind to confuse the texts meant to be understood mythically as being logically factual accounts. Fundamentalists, then, are just as much a product of the early modern period as the current secular Western thought.¹

She also argues that because modern and secular science seems to disprove religious truths as they have been passed down in various traditions, fundamentalists feel as though the very existence of these phenomena threatens

¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), xv.

their religious identity. As an example of this, she points to the Scopes trial of 1920. At that time, a Democratic politician of Presbyterian Christian tradition had been attempting “a crusade against the teaching of evolution in schools and colleges.”² Having been influenced by several books that argued that Darwinism had been responsible for the horrors of the First World War, Bryan determined that “evolutionary theory was incompatible with morality, decency, and the survival of civilization.”³ This, in turn, informed his choice to go about the United States holding lectures against the teaching of evolution.

This eventually led to the first anti-evolution laws in Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee, where one John Scopes was put on trial for violating these new laws and teaching evolution. Bryan was invited to defend the law, while one Clarence Darrow took the position of the law’s foolishness. The Scopes trial, as Armstrong puts it, was a clash between two “crucial American values; Darrow was for free speech, and Bryan for the rights of the ordinary people, who had long been leery of... learned experts and specialists.”⁴ The two were simply speaking past one another, unable to comprehend why the other felt so strongly, and utterly convinced of their own correctness.

The trial utterly destroyed what credibility Bryan had developed, however, and it seemed to the secular liberals that a great victory had been won as the irrational old madness of religion was disproven once again. Armstrong notes that rather than causing the fundamentalists to disappear, this simply made the views of the fundamentalists more extreme.⁵

The Scopes trial, with all of its secular triumphalism, provides a powerful example of why it is necessary for peacebuilders to work within the framework of religious minds and traditions when working with actors who hold to them. The feeling of constant existential threat by every modern, secular action is one that is only compounded when people attempt to make arguments using that language.

² Ibid. p. 175

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, p. 176

⁵ Ibid. p. 178

Armstrong's book focuses on fundamentalists, but there is truth to her argument about secularism threatening religious tradition even when it comes to even non-literalist religious individuals. There are some elements of modern society that do threaten religious self-identities, even if unintentionally, and thus, it is important to be careful with one's words when discussing matters of religious belief and worldviews.

Armstrong's analysis of the fundamentalist (and thus, in part, the religious) mind is an invaluable resource for comprehending what can be described as a siege mentality that is common among fundamentalists, but it is not without its flaws. Throughout the work, Armstrong argues that fundamentalism is a distortion of the religious traditions it springs from, and that it denies everything except the ideological extremes of its practitioners. While there may well be some truth to this assertion, as will be discussed below, it is not an argument that should be embraced wholeheartedly, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it is absolutely important when working with religiously motivated violence to make certain that the peacebuilder understands the perspective of these fundamentalists as they see it, rather than simply as someone who sees them "distorting" or "using" religion for their own ends.⁶ This is an almost regular occurrence – whenever a religiously motivated terror attack occurs, especially when the actors are Muslim, members of the faith community are called upon to answer for their tradition, which often comes in the form of condemning it as illegitimate. As with the Scopes trial above, such polemics only harden the extremism of the groups being criticized.

Further, Armstrong treats fundamentalism as a collection of commonly held beliefs in certain groups, and often fails to demonstrate that even within a given fundamentalist organization, there is a great spectrum of interpretive perspectives.⁷ It is important to recall that people are not always in agreement, even within a given

⁶ David A. Steele, *Creative Approaches to Conflict Transformation in Societies Affected by Extremist Religion* (San Diego: University of California, 2013), PDF, 30

⁷ Ibid.

organization, and from this, one might be able to find some level of agreement even with members of extremist organizations.

Having explored to some degree how religious individuals might feel threatened by certain terms, the specifics of what a peacebuilder ought to do in a given context should be made clearer. Below are several common difficulties that might arise in a peacebuilding context.

Firstly, the goal of religiously inspired peacebuilding is *not* to change the minds of the conflicting parties about their religious beliefs – this is the error discussed above with regards to demands to recant. Instead, the goal is to influence the conflicting actors to build up a positive peace and to transform themselves into people who can do so. The principal way of doing this is through a phenomenon that Dr. David Steele calls “Reframing Identity.” As he writes, this phenomenon can take many forms, including emphasizing different identities, whether that is by taking doctors or engineers, for example, from different religious traditions or by emphasizing previously forgotten identities such as being a parent talking about one’s family. Alternately, one might redefine the primary identity in more flexible terms – for instance, asking questions about parts of the religious tradition that are being neglected in favor of those that drive conflicts.⁸

This technique is hugely important in the context of conflicts with religious elements to them because religious identity is often perceived as being incredibly rigid. Despite this, it is not immutable, and indeed, many ways exist to change religious identities into something more positive than negative.

Above all, it is important to remember that the goal is not to convince the conflicting actors that they are wrong to conflict, but rather to build bridges and rehumanize the Other.

Another common difficulty is that it is very easy to dictate that religious tradition to its practitioners. This is immensely problematic, because it has a tendency to infuriate the practitioners in question when outsiders tell them how

⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

their tradition works, especially if they feel as though said outsiders represent some sort of threat to the tradition.

This is at best, insulting, especially to religious leaders who have dedicated their lives to studying their own religious tradition. It is often wiser to ask than to tell, though ideally, the question should not be terribly blatant. Asking a Christian about what “do not judge, so that you might not be judged,”⁹ means to them, for instance, is heavy-handed, whereas asking a rabbi what is meant by “you shall not wrong a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in Egypt”¹⁰ is more conducive to learning about said rabbi’s perceptions and beliefs.

In this, it is important to remember that each person’s interpretation of the texts is just that – *their* interpretation. Knowing that individual’s interpretation of the texts is incredibly important in the process of building peace.

Having established a certain level of knowledge about the problems a peacebuilder might be faced with when working in conflicts with religious elements, one must now ask how exactly religion plays a part in conflicts, whether that is as a driver or as a transformer of the conflict. In truth, not all conflicts with religious elements can be understood in the same way, and while the focus of this paper is on religious traditions, the economic, societal, and communal elements should not be ignored. Each conflict is its own unique problem, and all elements play unique, overlapping roles therein.

That being said, Fraser and Friedli have developed five different categories that one might be able to use to better understand the role played by a religious tradition (or several) in a conflict. These categories, as has been mentioned previously, are: as a community, as a set of teachings, as spirituality, as practice, and as discourse. They are not mutually exclusive, and in virtually all cases a religious tradition acts as more than one category in a given conflict. In order to best build

⁹ Michael David. Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), epub, 1756.

¹⁰ "Exodus 22:20 | Sefaria," Sefaria, accessed April 30, 2017, <http://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.22.20?lang=bi>.

peace, one must be able to understand what roles the tradition is playing in a given conflict.

The first of the five categories that Fraser and Friedli use is “as a community.” This category is perhaps the most familiar to most peacebuilders, because it is quite simple to understand. When they act in this way, religious traditions are identity markers, defining the boundaries between an in-group and all out-groups.

Most of the time this category is regarded as something that drives conflict, and not without reason. When Dr. David Steele discusses Religion as a Conflict Driver in his manual, five of the six examples given are examples where religious traditions are acting as communities (often in addition to other factors). These include Ethno-Religious, where religion and ethnicity are identified as identical, Religio-Racial, where purity of faith is equated with racial supremacy, Religious Nationalism, wherein a religious tradition is seen as central to a nation’s identity, Religious Globalism, where pan-national religious identity is seen as supreme, Religious Liberation, wherein religious identity is bound up with the plight of the working classes, and violence is justified as a means to freedom from oppression, and Intra-Faith, wherein a religious tradition is at conflict with itself.

It is worth noting that one particularly prominent example of Religious Liberation is the famous Liberation Theology of the South American Catholic Church. As mentioned above, this paper will not be examining in depth the uses of liberation theology to build peace, largely because it is so confrontational that it can easily lead to outbreaks of violence, even when its intentions are great.

These categories can be understood as sub-categories of religious traditions acting as communities, and all of them give credence to the common understanding that when acting as a community, they can only drive conflicts, rather than transform them.

Peacebuilders are likely already mostly aware of techniques and tactics in how to build bridges between communities, but it is also important to realize that religious traditions acting as communities can be used to help influence positive change as well as negative. Religious traditions often have influential members, whether they are Christian bishops, Jewish rabbis, Muslim imams, or simply highly

respected community members because of their activities or piety. Working with those figures can often lead to internal transformation of the community in a much less difficult way than otherwise might happen.

One example that Fraser and Friedli give of religion acting as a community in a positive way is the case of the Salafi prisoners in Morocco in 2009. Salafism, a form of Islam that is not dominant in Morocco, gained an increasingly ill reputation in the years after 2001. After a series of bomb attacks killed thirty-three civilians and twelve suicide bombers in Casablanca in 2003, anti-terrorism laws were quickly adopted and enforced, and more than 3000 individuals were arrested, most of whom contested their involvement in any such violence. However, because Salafi practice was associated with religious extremism and violence, these arguments were almost entirely ignored, and the people were held in the prisons to await trial.

In 2009, however, a movement began within the Salafi prisoner community that endeavored to gain the rights and justice that had been denied to them. Called *Ansifûna*, or “be fair with us,” the movement attempted to work to clear up misunderstandings about their tradition. Drawing legitimacy from the reputation of its founder, Abu Hafs, the movement and the practices that it followed, the movement drafted a series of statements to which the majority of Salafi prisoners agreed, including the rejection of violence and of the practice of *takfir*, or declaring individuals infidels, and enabled the community to speak with a single voice for the most part.

While this case does not involve external intervention in the peacemaking process, it illustrates how working within a community can refine and redefine that community’s identity as a collective. Furthermore, it demonstrates how effective internal leaders of the community can be in beginning the process of transformation. It is highly unlikely that without Abu Hafs’ legitimacy and scholastic authority that the *Ansifûna* would have been so successful in changing and unifying the Salafi prisoners to speak in such a way.

Finally, the example of the Salafi prisoners brings up a distinction between the assumptions many Western scholars make about different religious traditions that are simply not true. The fact that Abu Hafs’ authority came not from his position

in a clerical system, but rather from the fact that he was known for “his preaching, [his] community engagement, and [his] Salafi pedigree”¹¹ demonstrates a difference between Islam and Catholic or Orthodox Christianity, which tend to inform Western scholars’ assumptions about religious traditions to this day. For much of Islam and Judaism, a given individual’s ability to speak authoritatively within the wider community is often based on the depth of their understanding of the sacred texts and the religious tradition itself.

This can be sometimes difficult to grasp for people more used to thinking of religious groups as organizations with hierarchies that are fixed, clear, and obvious. There are only very few organizations that resemble Protestant churches in Judaism and Islam, and even fewer that resemble Roman Catholicism or any branch of Eastern Christianity. More often, authority comes from one’s reputation as a scholar and one’s lineage whether scholastic or genetic, at least amongst more traditionalist groups within Islam or Judaism.

This provides both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to reaching out to authority figures in Judaism or Islam. On one hand, it means that if a given authority in either tradition is willing to work with a peacebuilder, they have greater autonomy to do so than a member of the Catholic or Orthodox clergy might. Further, it means that on the whole, one can deal with individuals rather than attempting to navigate an organization’s bureaucracy.

On the other hand, however, it also means that there can be much more vocal opposition from other religious authorities within the same tradition. If a bishop, for instance, agrees and attempts to spread word of a peacebuilder’s work, then the priests who answer to him are unlikely to openly challenge this choice. By contrast, if a rabbi or a scholar of Islam does the same, there will likely remain others who decry this work as heresy against the religious tradition.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind when dealing with Jewish or Muslim religious authorities that they are not as beholden to a hierarchy or party line as a Catholic or Orthodox cleric might be. Although certain countries have the

¹¹ Owen Frazer and Richard Friedli, *Approaching Religion in Conflict Transformation: Concepts, Cases and Practical Implications* (Zurich: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, 2015), PDF, 22.

office of “chief rabbi,” for instance, that is less an indicator of hierarchy and more of a way in which the state attempts to manage its internal religious affairs.

All of these elements tie to religious traditions as communities where a person’s self-identity is formed. Oftentimes, however, the community figures are not enough to provide positive change on their own, and more often, religious traditions are used in other ways than simply as borders between in-groups and out-groups. Sometimes, an individual might have a personal religious experience that informs their decision to either take part in a conflict or attempt to transform it. In these cases, Fraser and Friedli categorize the role of the religious tradition as “spirituality,” which they define as “the personally internalized experience of faith and the lifestyle that comes with it (faith, hope, resilience, ability to deal with disappointments).”¹²

This category is fairly easy to grasp. Spirituality is a term that grows in prominence regularly, and the people who categorize themselves as “spiritual, but not religious” are fairly common to find in the secularized western world. One can quite clearly imagine that there are quite a few people who go into peace or restorative justice work because of their own spiritual experiences. Equally, the stereotype of the religious zealot who believes that God wants him (or her) to kill the unbelievers is an outgrowth of those spiritual experiences.

This raises the question of how a peacebuilder can possibly deal with the role religious traditions play as spirituality in conflicts. While spiritual experiences cannot be morally manufactured (such that a person might be inspired to take up the building of bridges between communities), those spiritual experiences that lead people to drive conflicts often provides difficulties for a peacebuilder, because it seems as though there is no way to reach individuals who believe with such zeal that what they do is right.

As mentioned above with regards to religious identity, it is important to understand what such individuals believe, such that one can better understand how to connect with them. Often, such individuals believe that they are taking part in a

¹² Ibid. p. 12

cosmic war of Good against Evil, where God will step in on the side of good, such that it does not matter whether they are slain or if they suffer setbacks – God is on the side of Good, as are they.¹³ The in-group is often entirely correlated with the Good, while everyone else is entirely associated with the Evil. Historical examples abound of this sort of apocalyptic belief system, from as early as the time of Second Temple Judaism and the Essenes into the present.

It may seem at first glance that there is no way to reach out to individuals whose spiritual experiences (as informed by their religious tradition) demand that they take up arms in a great cosmic battle. However, there are pathways to bridging the gap between the common practitioner of the religious tradition and those who believe most zealously in their divine mission. Though it may be difficult or even impossible for a peacebuilder to do so from the outside, one can work with other members of the religious community who do not hold to such extreme views to build a bridge to those groups. Dr. Steele gives the example of an imam in Iraq who claimed to have spoken with Al-Qaeda about hospitality. “Every Muslim, he said, has to have some understanding of hospitality. ‘I want to know what theirs is and hopefully they will want to know mine.’”¹⁴ This example, while self-motivated rather than coming from an external encounter with a peacebuilder, provides an excellent paradigm for how the greater faith group might work with religious extremists to help deescalate a conflict.

Of course, not everyone who participates in a violent conflict with religious elements is inspired by a personal experience that causes them to believe it is the will of the divine. In some cases, there are non-religious reasons for this, and these reasons are present in all manner of conflicts. However, in some cases, these reasons are in fact religious – for instance, there is a commonly held belief that many dictators and warlords use scriptural quotes and other religious phrases to legitimize their regimes, even if they do not believe the words that they are saying. While the matter of their belief is beyond the scope of this paper to determine,

¹³ Steele, p. 17

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 33-34

Fraser and Friedli would qualify this method of working in a conflict as a tradition being used as a set of teachings.

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures all hold a wide variety of messages. These texts can be used to guide believers and practitioners into acting in certain ways, whether as a driver of conflict or as a transformer of conflict. Texts can be used to justify violence – whether it is the infamous verse of the sword in the Quran 9:5, the intolerant zealotry of Elijah in the Book of I Kings, or the Jews demanding that they take the blame for killing Jesus in John¹⁵, which contributed greatly to the charges of deicide that hounded Jews in Christian countries for over two millennia.

By the same token, there are a great many times in which one can use religious texts to transform and delegitimize conflict – the Hebrew Bible repeatedly emphasizes that human life is incredibly precious, the Quran points out that there can be no coercion in religion, and Jesus redefines teachings using love.

To a peacebuilder, using the religious texts to transform conflict can be risky, but if used in a way that works for the conflict and the individuals involved, it can be very profoundly helpful. Of course, one must *know* the religious texts quite well in order to develop one's discussions about them. The risk comes from the fact that, as mentioned above, one might come across as dictating the faith of others to them. This is intensely patronizing, and is often offensive to those who likely are more knowledgeable of the text's contents than the peacebuilder. Make no mistake – the use of religious tradition's teachings to transform conflicts can be invaluable, but directly quoting from a text and clumsily criticizing practitioners for *not* following it is simply offensive, and therefore not useful to peacebuilders.

Instead, a peacebuilder might wish to frame their references as questions. Questions about justice, about forgiveness, about compassion, and the like are all highly legitimate ways of working with this category in order to build peace. As an example, in "Christianity as a Resource for Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding," Andrea Bartoli points out that "Christians are not just asked to love,

¹⁵ Coogan, p. 1913

they are commanded to do so... 'as' their master did."¹⁶ They are not commanded to simply love their neighbors, but explicitly to love even their enemies.¹⁷ Reminding those who have taken up arms in the name of Christianity of this fact can, if not outright change their minds, at least introduce a level of dissonance, which is often quite helpful – if this teaching is not relevant to them, what *does* being Christian mean to them?

For a great deal of time, the common perception in the West is that Islam is an innately violent tradition, and such terms as “‘Holy war’, ‘a faith spread by the sword’, ‘Islamofacism’, ‘infidel’ and many of the other catchphrases... only serve to muddle the issue.”¹⁸ The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Jordan set out to correct these perceptions in its work *Jihad and the Islamic Law of War*, where it makes a strong case for the precedence of internal *jihad* over external *jihad*. Quoting verse 25:52 of the Quran, as well as several *hadith*, the document points out that the internal struggle against one’s own evils is greater than the external battles against those who are designated evil.

The Quran has many other passages that can be understood in a manner that supports peacebuilding, as opposed to one that simply values war *less* than internal reflection. For instance, in the sura of al-hujurat (the Chambers), the 49th sura of the Quran, it is revealed “O humankind! We [Allah] have created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another.” Many Muslim scholars¹⁹ take this to be a reminder of the shared heritage of all humanity, especially when combined with the verse from the Quran 5:48: “Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.” Islam exalts God’s virtues of mercy

¹⁶ Andrea Bartoli, "Christianity as a Resource for Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding," *Die Friedens-Warte* 82, no. 2 (2007): 55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23773927>.

¹⁷ Coogan, p. 1754

¹⁸ *Jihad and the Islamic Law of War* (The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought), xv.

¹⁹ *A HIGH-LEVEL SUMMIT OF BUDDHIST AND MUSLIM LEADERS: Overcoming Extremism and Advancing Peace with Justice*, March 3-4, 2015, Yogyakarta and Borobudur Temple Indonesia.

and compassion the most often, using names that translate approximately to “the Merciful” and “the Compassionate” the most frequently of all 99 names of God that Muslim tradition holds that humans know.²⁰

The Torah demands that Jews “not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt”²¹ and insists that all of humanity is created in the image of God.²² Numerous laws show that human life is of utmost importance, and the rabbis acknowledge that almost any law can be broken in order to save a life.

While this is a brief survey of possible quotations that are relevant to a peacebuilding mission, it is simply impractical to attempt to outline the entirety of each of the three traditions. As such, below are some ways in which Jews, Muslims, and Christians understand the sacred texts and the ways in which they can be interpreted.

Jews speak of the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, which includes the Five Books of Moses (the Torah), the Prophets (Navi'im), and the Writings (Ketuvim). Beyond these books, there are a number of traditions that are held to have originally been oral traditions – interpretations and explications of the biblical writings. These include the Mishnah, which is composed of commentaries on the Tanakh itself, the Gemara, which is composed of commentaries upon the Mishnah, the Talmud, which is the previous two put together, and many, many others.

Christians also speak of the Tanakh, but when they do, they often use the term “Old Testament,” with the sacred texts that focus on Jesus and the early Christian movements being referred to as the “New Testament.” The New Testament varies in its composition (as does the Old Testament) depending on which branch of the tradition is being referenced, but virtually all branches have the Gospels – tales of Jesus’ life and teachings – and other philosophical or theological texts determining what the Christian followers ought to believe, such as Paul’s Letters.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Exodus 22:20 | Sefaria," Sefaria: a Living Library of Jewish Texts Online, accessed May 07, 2017, <http://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.22.20?lang=bi>.

²² Ibid. Genesis 1:26

Historically, Christianity has used allegorical methods of interpreting the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and emphasizes theological ideas more than observance of laws.

The primary sacred text of Islam is the Quran, which Muslim tradition understands to be the words of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the archangel Gabriel. For believing Muslims, the Quran can only ever be in Arabic – any translation of the Quran is not the Quran – it might *convey* the message, but it is not, itself the message. To Muslims, the Quran is the primary miracle of Muhammad’s revelation, for no mortal could possibly write such beautiful verse. In a way, the Quran is analogous not to the Gospels of Christian tradition, but rather to Jesus himself²³ – it is a divine manifestation in the world, not simply a record thereof. Of course, the Quran is not the only source of religious tradition or wisdom for Muslims – the *hadith*, sayings and wisdom passed down orally through generations, are where the Prophet clarifies certain parts of the divine message, though differing branches of the tradition have differing beliefs about which *hadith* are legitimate.

All of this leads to another category of how religious traditions might play a role in conflicts – that of practice. Fraser and Friedli define this category as various elements of how religious traditions inform the daily life of its practitioners. Most obviously, this covers religious rituals, such as prayer three or five (or more) times a day, for Judaism and Islam respectively, or partaking in practices such as baptism, for certain branches of Christianity, but there are also more subtle ways in which religious tradition as practice can influence one’s life. For example, Jewish or Muslim traditions of Kashrut or Halal, respectively, put limits on what sorts of things can and cannot be eaten. To this day, Orthodox Jews do not wear garments of linen and wool together, while the famous example of the Amish Anabaptists restrict their own style of garb to certain fabrics and styles.

The question arises as to how these practices are connected to conflict, whether in a way that drives it or transforms it. The most obvious answer is that

²³ Fraser and Friedli, p. 12

differing practices, especially those that are performed in the public sphere, mark people as part of that particular religious group. When someone sees a person participating in a specific ritual that is unfamiliar, it automatically places that person in the out-group, which can, of course, lead to the usual problems that might arise from in-groups and out-groups.

Moreover, specific practices can be seen as totally abhorrent to others. Fraser and Friedli give the example of the regular visits by Japanese politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japanese leaders during the Second World War, leaders who have since been convicted as war criminals by an Allied tribunal. This shrine continues to provide negative relations between China and Japan.²⁴

Another example of how certain practices might be used either to provoke or to transform conflict is the commemoration of Karbala in Shia Islam. Recalling the tragedy where the Prophet's grandson was betrayed and slaughtered by the regime of the time and those who had thought to revolt against it, this practice brings up a sense of victimization, as many Shia men march through the streets of their city, flagellating themselves until they bleed, reenacting parts of key Shia narratives as others join in with weeping and grieving. Yet at the end, the voice of Hussein, who was so horrifically betrayed and killed, promises that the suffering shall come to an end. Whether this brings about conflict or not rests on how the leaders of this ritual present the tale, and whether a demand for taking up arms against the oppressors is a part of the narrative.

Of course, some practices are much easier to use than others. For instance, in Jewish tradition it is held that three things can redeem one in God's eyes – t'fillah, t'shuvah, and tzedakah, the first of which is understood as prayer, which is not necessarily useful for the purposes of peacebuilding. T'shuvah is often translated as repentance, but it means much more than simply apologizing. T'shuvah refers to a process of turning oneself about, which can mean an attempt at self-reflection, wherein someone tries to understand what he or she has done and reform him- or herself. Tzedakah is usually understood as giving money to charity, yet it is all too

²⁴ Fraser and Friedli, pp. 13-14

often focused on the problems of fellow Jews. These rituals can be turned and reinterpreted into various useful methods of building bridges, rather than building conflicts.

In certain branches of Christianity, there is a practice known as confession, wherein a sinner confesses their sins to a priest, who is empowered to forgive them though the specifics may vary, including corporate confessions or selecting one's own spiritual guides. This schema, regardless of one's opinions on the veracity of the practice of confession, can be reinterpreted and reimagined in such a way to make a safe space within which someone may feel comfortable sharing stories about their suffering, something that is absolutely essential to the building of empathy between those who formerly had dehumanized one another.

Virtually all religious traditions can offer practices that can be used for the purposes of transforming conflicts. It is a matter of seeking out the ones that will be most useful to a given conflict, a task that is greatly aided by local experts of their traditions, and of presenting it in a positive way. Of course, the practices described above are not exactly the same as they have been practiced in the past. This brings up the fifth and final role religious traditions play in conflicts, as understood by Fraser and Friedli – that of discourse. This is perhaps the most complex and difficult role to comprehend of the five, but it is also amongst the most important to understand.

Fraser and Friedli define discourse as “a manifestation of a whole way of thinking about, and acting in, the world,”²⁵ or a dynamic world-view. When it comes to religious discourse, it is important to understand how different traditions (and indeed, different parts of the same tradition) use language, whether the same or different, to mean differing things. This can lead to greater misunderstandings during periods of tension which explode into conflicts and it can lead to existing conflicts growing more vitriolic, but building a common discourse about certain topics allows for the bridging of gaps between disparate world-views, and even a small awareness of what a given group's discourse on subjects of religion is allows

²⁵ Ibid. p. 14

for a new sense of awareness when it comes to communications between conflicting groups.

As an example, one may look to the issue of the term Satan in the three religious traditions. At first glance, it seems quite simple – Satan is a demonic force, an evil part of the cosmology, and is the reason for worldly suffering. However, such things are not nearly so clear cut, as the case of American-Iranian relations in the late 1970s demonstrates. Armstrong notes that by emphasizing strong ties to the newly reinstated shah, President Carter (and by extension, the United States) became known to the Iranian public as “the Great Satan.”²⁶ This title outraged the people of the United States, for it implied that the Iranian people thought of the US as out and out demonic, the root of all evils, and indeed, to the Christian discourse, that is what Satan represents.

However, as Armstrong quickly adds, the Christian view of Satan is highly different from the Muslim view of the same figure. “In popular Shiism, the Shaitan, the Tempter, is a rather ludicrous creature, chronically incapable of appreciating the spiritual values of the unseen world... [h]e was, in fact, incurably trivial, trapped in the world of the exterior”²⁷ This was not an accusation of utmost demonic evil, but rather an assertion that the United States, in the grips of its capitalist, materialist, secularist societal mindset, simply did not *get* what was most important in the world, at least by Shia Muslim understanding.

Now, this is not to claim that there was no malice behind the title – it is hardly a flattering term in the first place, after all. Moreover, the fact that the United States was seen as the source of many of Iran’s woes, such as the returned shah, likely provoked an enormous amount of antipathy towards the United States in Iran.

What Armstrong does not explicitly say with regards to this issue is that although the US and its citizens did not comprehend what the Iranian label of the Great Satan meant, neither did the Iranian populace grasp what reactions might be to this term. The two discourses simply did not connect to one another in any meaningful way, and even in the cases where they might have done so, there was no

²⁶ Armstrong, p. 301

²⁷ Ibid. p. 302

interest on either side to clarify the term, as both parties were already hostile to one another.

This is further complicated by the fact that in Judaism, HaSatan (a term often translated as “the opponent”) is seen as something of a divine prosecutor, an angel that argues against the existence of humanity, and is tied in some way to the Yetzer Harah (the evil inclination, an internal voice that tells humans to do evil). Thus, to each of the three traditions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, the word that is Satan in English has three differing meanings that are nevertheless close enough to result in great miscommunications, and that does not even begin to touch on the difficulties that might arise from translation between different languages.

As discussed previously, however, there is greater meaning to the term “discourse” which the example of the term “Satan” simply fails to do justice. To Fraser and Friedli, “[t]he acceptability of ideas and actions is assessed in light of their consistency within a particular discourse.”²⁸ In other words, the differing discourses determine the range of acceptable actions within a given group’s context, which can easily be tied to religious tradition as practice and as a set of teachings – the teachings and practices of a given religious tradition often greatly inform its discourse, and thus, its range of acceptable actions.

Thus, an action that has great significance in one discourse might seem utterly abhorrent to another, or something that seems inconsequential to a person familiar with one discourse will be deeply meaningful to another. These differences might be understood as differences of values systems, which are deeply ingrained in most religious traditions. Such differences might be incredibly miniscule, but “any [apparent] challenge to these systems is likely to be perceived as a threat to what one holds to be most important.”²⁹ The intensely personal nature of this perceived threat means that it is of the utmost importance for a peacebuilder to be willing and able to learn about the local discourse on matters of values.

This is not to say that discourses are static – indeed, most discourses are constantly evolving in reaction to changes in the world and the environment within

²⁸ Fraser and Friedli, p. 14

²⁹ Steele, p. 11

which they dwell. As an example of this, one might look to the Jewish responses to the Enlightenment of the late 18th century. While some Jews, such as Moses Mendelssohn, wholeheartedly embraced the idea of a secularized society, others, such as Rabbi Moses Sofer of Pressburg, rejected any change to accommodate modernity.³⁰ In this extreme example, Rabbi Moses Sofer rejected the Enlightenment and modernity because it seemed that any acceptance was to accept a total loss of Jewish identity. It is from this idea that the origins of Jewish Orthodoxy sprang, as many traditional Jews looked askance at Mendelssohn, only to grow horrified to see that within two generations, his family had converted to Christianity. Thus, it was deemed necessary to freeze the tradition, to keep as closely to the way things were believed to have been as was possible.

Despite what it seems on the surface level, then, even the most rigid interpretation of a religious tradition reacts to changes in the environment – the famous church council known as the Second Vatican Council, in the 1960s, reflected a massive update to the Catholic Church’s self-conception and discourse within itself, for instance.

Knowing this, the question becomes how can a peacebuilder use the changing of discourse, or discourse in general, to build peace. There are many ways, but foremost among them is educating both sides on the other’s values system and discourse. Whether it is clarifying between two groups about the other’s usage of the term “Satan” or explaining in greater detail why exactly it is so important for a group to pray at a specific time, education to the discourse of another group allows the transformation of what had once seemed alien into a familiar, human language and understanding. Furthermore, it is an absolute necessity that a secular peacebuilder gain some level of awareness of the discourses of the conflict within which he or she will be working, for the same reasons that it is important to build a common understanding of the differing discourses of two religious traditions – because without such an understanding, she or he risks making statements or taking actions that will be understood as threatening by the actors.

³⁰ Armstrong, pp. 107-109

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be clear that it is necessary for peacebuilders working in conflicts with religious elements to understand the religious traditions involved and the nature of their involvement. Whether or not one uses the religious tradition itself to transform the conflict, understanding the religious tradition's framework and world-view is absolutely essential for working with members of that tradition.

Even if a secular peacebuilder does not feel confident enough in his or her knowledge of a religious tradition to use it as a practice or as a set of teachings, it is absolutely vital that she or he be able to understand the mindset of religious actors in the conflict. For this reason, it is important to recall that to many fundamentalist minds, a secular person represents their existence being attacked, which causes further extremism. Even those religious individuals who lack the intense zeal of fundamentalist extremists often find the blasé secular attitude towards religious practices and beliefs troubling, if not outright offensive.

This is only exacerbated in parts of the world that associate secularism with Western influence and hegemony, because this brings in new dynamics of power between secular peacebuilders and religious actors with whom they attempt to work. From this, a secular peacebuilding effort might seem like just another imperializing, interfering assault on the individuals in question, as the secular peacebuilder brings foreign and irreverent practices to places from which they do not originate. This might be understood as just another demand from the Western sphere to "westernize" and abandon the native practices and beliefs.

Even those individuals who might agree that native practices and beliefs need some level of adaptation to the changing world might find such elements in a peacebuilding effort that does not find roots in the local religious traditions. For all of these reasons, then, it is absolutely essential for even secular peacebuilders to be able to grasp the ways in which the local religious traditions can be used to transform the conflict.

Likewise, when a peacebuilder goes into a conflict that has religious elements and does not know of a way in which to process these elements, their unknown

nature makes them seem all the more intimidating. This in turn leads to the assumption that religious traditions can only cause or drive conflicts, rather than being useful to transform them. Aside from walking right into the difficulties described above, this lack of knowledge makes even the non-religious elements of the conflict more obscure, because they are often tied together with religious motivations.

Thus, when a peacebuilder uses Fraser and Friedli's matrix of religious traditions' roles in conflict, he or she is better able to assemble an understanding of how the religious traditions are working to drive the conflict, and how they might align with non-religious motivations. Though this paper has focused exclusively on the religious elements in a conflict, it is imperative to recall that they are not the only reasons for a conflict to exist, nor are they always the best tools to transform a conflict. That being said, without being able to determine the roles religious traditions play, one cannot hope to fully transform a conflict into a positive peace.

It should be noted that the techniques described in this paper are intended as a beginning, not a limit. There are many secular techniques that can be applied whilst using religious traditions, but in order to do so, one must be familiar with the religious traditions in question. Finally, with all that in mind, it is important to remember that whatever the conflict paradigm is and however religious traditions are involved, a peacebuilder is always working with *people*. The social location and psychology of the peacemaker as well as their audience is a worthy dimension to explore, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do so in more detail than it already has.

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