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Religion and Post-Conflict Statebuilding

Roman Catholic and Sunni Islamic Perspectives

Denis Dragovic
University of Melbourne, Australia

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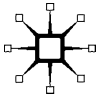

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To my wife, Dijana,
thank you for your eternal patience

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Series Editor's Preface

'Compromise' is a much used but little understood term. There is a sense in which it describes a set of feelings (the so-called 'spirit' of compromise) that involves reciprocity, representing the agreement to make mutual concessions toward each other from now on: no matter what we did to each other in the past, we will act toward each other in the future differently as set out in the agreement between us. The compromise settlement can be a spit and a handshake, much beloved in folklore, or a legally binding statute with hundreds of clauses.

As such, it is clear that compromise enters into conflict transformation at two distinct phases. The first is during the conflict resolution process itself, where compromise represents a willingness amongst parties to negotiate a peace agreement that represents a second-best preference in which they give up their first preference (victory) in order to cut a deal. A great deal of literature has been produced in Peace Studies and International Relations on the dynamics of the negotiation process and the institutional and governance structures necessary to consolidate the agreement afterwards. Just as important, however, is compromise in the second phase, when compromise is part of post-conflict reconstruction, in which protagonists come to learn to live together despite their former enmity and in face of the atrocities perpetrated during the conflict itself.

In the first phase, compromise describes reciprocal agreements between parties to the negotiations in order to make political concessions sufficient to end conflict; in the second phase, compromise involves victims and perpetrators developing ways of living together in which concessions are made as part of shared social life. The first is about compromises between political groups and the state in the process of statebuilding (or re-building) after the political upheavals of communal conflict, and the second is about compromises between individuals and communities in the process of social healing after the cultural trauma provoked by the conflict.

This book series primarily concerns itself with the second process, the often messy and difficult job of reconciliation, restoration and repair in social and cultural relations following communal conflict. Communal conflicts and civil wars tend to suffer from the narcissism of minor differences, to use Freud's phrase, leaving little to be split halfway and compromise on, and thus are usually especially bitter. The series

therefore addresses itself to the meaning, manufacture and management of compromise in one of its most difficult settings. The book series is cross-national and cross-disciplinary, with attention paid to interpersonal reconciliation at the level of everyday life, as well as culturally between social groups, and the many sorts of institutional, interpersonal, psychological, sociological, anthropological and cultural factors that assist and inhibit societal healing in all post-conflict societies, historically and in the present. It focuses on what compromise means when people have to come to terms with past enmity and the memories of the conflict itself, and relate to former protagonists in ways that consolidate the wider political agreement.

This sort of focus has special resonance and significance for peace agreements, which are usually very fragile. Societies emerging out of conflict are subject to ongoing violence from spoiler groups who are reluctant to give up on first preferences, constant threats from the outbreak of renewed violence, institutional instability, weakened economies, and a wealth of problems around transitional justice, memory, truth recovery and victimhood, amongst others. Not surprisingly therefore, reconciliation and healing in social and cultural relations is difficult to achieve, not least because interpersonal compromise between erstwhile enemies is difficult.

Lay discourse picks up on the ambivalent nature of compromise after conflict. It is talked about in a common sense in one of two ways, in which compromise is either a virtue or a vice, taking its place among the angels or in Hades. One form of lay discourse likens concessions to former protagonists with the idea of restoration of broken relationships and societal and cultural reconciliation, in which there is a sense of becoming (or returning) to wholeness and completeness. The other form of lay discourse invokes ideas of appeasement, of being *compromised* by the concessions, which constitute a form of surrender and reproduce (or disguise) continued brokenness and division. People feel they continue to be beaten by the sticks that the concessions have allowed others to keep; with restoration, however, weapons are truly turned into ploughshares. Lay discourse suggests, therefore, that there are issues that the *Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict* series must begin to problematize, so that the process of societal healing is better understood and can be assisted and facilitated by public policy and intervention.

This second book in the *Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict* series explores the contribution of religion to compromise and peacebuilding, and in particular its role in re-building the post-conflict state. Religious peace-building is largely an academic interest nurtured in the

post-Cold War period. This might appear paradoxical, for this period witnessed the tragic intensification of religiously motivated violence; and with it the significant growth of academic interest and research on the connection between religion and conflict. The balance was bound to shift, however, as academics, researchers and practitioners focused on the reverse side of the same Janus face: religion as a site of reconciliation and compromise rather than of conflict. Religious peace-building is now a burgeoning field.

The popularity of this new field is partly to be explained by the relevance of inter-faith dialogue between the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam to the growth of Islamic extremism and as the conflict in the Middle East rumbles on to negatively affect global security and international affairs. Another influence is the increasing direction of transitional justice studies towards religious studies, theology, morals and ethics in its concern with topics like truth recovery, social justice, atonement strategies, memory and reparation. The interest of theologians, for example, in the meaning of political forgiveness is matched by the significant involvement on the ground of religious actors and faith-based organizations in a variety of truth recovery mechanisms across the world.

A third reason for the growth of religious peace-building as an intellectual concern is cultural. The religious peace-building literature is overwhelmingly dominated by US-based scholars, and the USA as a cultural space promotes the practice of religious peace-building as a form of conflict resolution and an intellectual interest in mapping the field. Unlike Europe, the USA has never experienced religious violence and has no cultural or folk memory of holy war. It can therefore be more readily seen as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem. The USA also separates church and state, thus having no one religion dominating politics or the public square; and there is a high level of religious observance, as against the European trend. This encourages people in the USA to take religion seriously and facilitates them to see it as having a positive role in society and politics. Therefore, it is not only US political, international and strategic interests after the end of the Cold War that explains the growth of this new field; as a cultural space the USA is more inclined to see religion as capable of playing a positive role in conflict resolution and peace-building.

It is usual to consider religious peace builders as having interests and expertise in the second process of compromise that I have identified here, in relation to individuals, groups and communities who are rebuilding society and learning to live together after conflict. The difficult

task of re-building communal bonds and restoring relationships often lends itself to religious precepts, values and practices around forgiveness, atonement, justice, reconciliation and healing. Dealing with the legacy issues arising from past violence, especially for victims, can be thought of as particularly suited to the pastoral skills of faith-based actors. Nation re-building at the grass roots level after conflict also seems relevant to the largely local focus of religious actors and faith-based organizations. The bottom-up nature of the nation-building project is consistent with the communal ties and grass root spaces in which religious peace builders usually operate. For all these reasons, religion seems to have quite specific roles in the promotion and development of post-conflict compromise.

What is special about this particular book in the series is its attention to the role of religion in the first process of compromise, that between political groups and parties in a process of statebuilding. Statebuilding at the institutional level and nation building at the community level are two different aspects of peace-building. This book is unique because it explores the role of religious precepts, values and practices in creating legitimacy for the post-conflict state and in introducing effective institutional reform of the state. The focus on religious contributions to statebuilding at the top rather than to nation building at the bottom makes this a new and exciting contribution to the religious peace-building literature. What is especially noteworthy is its interface between theory and practice. The author combines close hermeneutical analysis of the religious precepts, values and practices in Roman Catholicism and Sunni Islam as they relate to statebuilding after conflict, with a thorough and detailed analysis of their use in the empirical case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one concrete example. He both illuminates an empirical instance of post-conflict statebuilding and contributes to our theorization of religious peace-building. As Editor I warmly welcome this new addition to the *Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict* series.

John D. Brewer

Preface and Acknowledgements

My interest in religion and its possible role in post-conflict statebuilding began while in Najaf, Iraq. As the head of a field office for an international NGO I was in the Shia holy city on 29 August 2003 when a car bomb exploded two miles away at the shrine of Imam Ali. It turned out to be one of the deadliest then and since, killing 125 people including Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, a leading cleric. As my security and that of our staff and projects were tied to our relations with the community and their religious leaders I began to visit those senior clerics who had chosen to remain.

The first cleric I met was Ayatollah Muhammad Said al-Hakim, who was very kind in his praise of our work and spoke highly of us to others. Another cleric, Ayatollah Sheikh Bashir, was animated during our meeting, as he believed me to be a CIA agent sent to plan his assassination. After two hours of discussions, including explaining how the international aid system works and why I thought myself a neutral actor despite receiving funds from the US government, we parted ways with him calling me a brother. The hostile welcome became a promise to lend his support to our efforts. True to his word, he spoke of the sanctity of our work during Friday prayers as did al-Hakim.

At one point I had a scheduling clash—a delayed meeting with a young, relatively junior cleric overlapped with the arrival of the newly appointed Coalition Provisional Authority representative to Najaf, Ambassador Robert Ford. Looking back I chose poorly, leaving Moqtadr al-Sadr's office after waiting for nearly an hour, at which point I headed out to meet with Ambassador Ford. The agenda, determined by the professional statebuilding set present at the meeting, focused on the progress in the physical and institutional rebuilding of the state apparatus in Najaf. I took the opportunity to ask whether the newly appointed representative to Najaf would be meeting with the Ayatollahs of the city. The reply was an emphatic 'No'. His instructions were clear. His role was to support the central state apparatus by strengthening its influence in the governorate. Living in and amongst the community, to me the view seemed to be naïve, disconnected from Iraqi society and its authority structures, an opportunity lost.

After nearly three years of living in the 'red zone' of Iraq, a year in Sudan, a return to Iraq and some work with the United Nations in

the West Bank, among other postings, it became apparent to me that not engaging with religious leaders in Iraq was not a contextual, calculated move but rather an inexplicable, systematic omission. Perceived as axiomatic this view was not unique to a particular mindset—the neocon preaching the virtues of secular democracy or the less travelled bureaucrat—but ranged across the board, including being embraced by diplomatic officers, international policy advisors, United Nations staff and even some NGO aid workers.

The responsibility for the persistence of this view cannot solely be placed at the feet of practitioners. Little thought had been put into how engagement with religious representatives should be undertaken, what benefits could be gained and, critically, whether religious leaders would even agree to contribute their substantial resources and legitimacy to the statebuilding effort. In other words, academics too had either overlooked or dismissed this relationship. A few implied a role and implicitly acknowledged religion's presence, but invariably stopped short of naming and engaging with it.

Once I decided to engage on a scholarly basis with this topic another challenge arose—finding an appropriate place to undertake the research. When it comes to religion most universities have transitioned from teaching theology or divinity to embracing the idea of religious studies. The former embraces and builds from fundamental foundations such as the gift of grace, the afterlife and the power of Jesus' sacrifice to redeem man in the eyes of God (and similar concepts in other religions). The latter treats such beliefs as myths whose practices need to be explained within cultural, historical or political constructs within this temporal world. In this view, whether God is real or not does not matter. But from my experiences in deeply religious (Islamic) societies such as Najaf and Khartoum I realized that to understand the politics of religion, reason must come second to revelation, no matter how irrational or illogical this may seem within our modern world. This is because the scriptures offer knowledge that no human ideas can displace, not only on how to live one's life but also in some cases on how states and societies should be structured. The only academic discipline that adequately engages with religion in such a way is theology.

Problematically, though, not only are theology departments in Western universities near extinct, but those that remain have chosen to isolate themselves within their own spiritual sphere as if the challenges faced by the world are only those of the world (a situation that has made it all the more difficult for Western scholarship to understand Islamic fundamentalism). Nevertheless a few remain. It was in Scotland

that I found an appropriate home for this research and am grateful for the resources available at the University of St Andrews that made this possible. In addition, many thanks are due to my advisor, a Chilean former Catholic priest, anthropologist of East African tribes and scholar of Christian–Buddhist dialogue, Professor Mario Aguilar.

I hope that this research contributes in some small way to the recent re-engagement with religion by policy makers, practitioners and academia.

Note on Transliteration

The transliteration system used in this book is that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* published by Cambridge University Press.

Regarding the use of the terms 'God' and 'Allah', I have chosen to refer to the Abrahamic god using the term 'God', whereas when speaking within the context of Islam I refer to the same God using the Arabic term 'Allah'.

For quotations in English of the Qur'an I use Yusuf Ali's work and for the Bible the New International Version.