Chapter 190
Violence, Tolerance and Religious Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

John D. Brewer and Francis Teeney

190.1 Introduction

Northern Ireland, sometimes also known as six-county Ulster, is a small country, geographically attached to the Irish Republic but territorially partitioned from it and thus remaining part of the United Kingdom (on the special condition of the "border areas" see Creamer et al. 2011), with a population in the 2001 census of just over 1.6 million, just below one-third of the Island of Ireland's total population (Fig. 190.1). Irish independence from Britain in 1921 left Northern Ireland with a contested status (for a short historical introduction to Northern Ireland see Mulholland 2003), with the population roughly split in the 2001 census between Catholics (40 %) and Protestant (46 %), with "not stated" (9 %) and "neither" (5 %) comprising the rest. The Catholic population is disproportionately concentrated in the Western parts of Northern Ireland (Fig. 190.2).

Northern Ireland's ambiguous position as British or Irish, part of a united Ireland or in Union with Britain, spurred a conflict, known colloquially as "the Troubles," a phrase to our minds that has always undervalued the level of trauma the conflict caused. In its last phase it lasted for 30 years, between the civil rights marches of 1968 and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, although conflict existed for long periods before 1968 as part of the Irish war of independence and has broken out sporadically since the 1998 Agreement (for a history of Catholic-Protestant relations in Ireland see Brewer and Higgins 1998). Over 3,500 people were killed in the last phase, which per capita is more than the number of U.S. soldiers killed in the Vietnam War. Many tens of thousands were injured, roughly one in four of the population. Details of the violence are well known (see Edwards and McGrattan 2010 for what is styled a "beginner's guide to the conflict"). Our attention

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Fig. 190.1 Map of Britain and Ireland, showing Northern Ireland (Map by Daniel Dalet, /d-maps.com, http://d-maps.com/pays.php?num_pay=218&lang=en)

here is on the peace. Our chapter will address three issues: first, it will offer some reflections on the relationship between religion, peace, tolerance and co-existence; secondly, it will use these reflections to critique the new field of study called religious peacebuilding; and finally, it will address the dynamics of religious conflict and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland as a case study of religious peacebuilding.

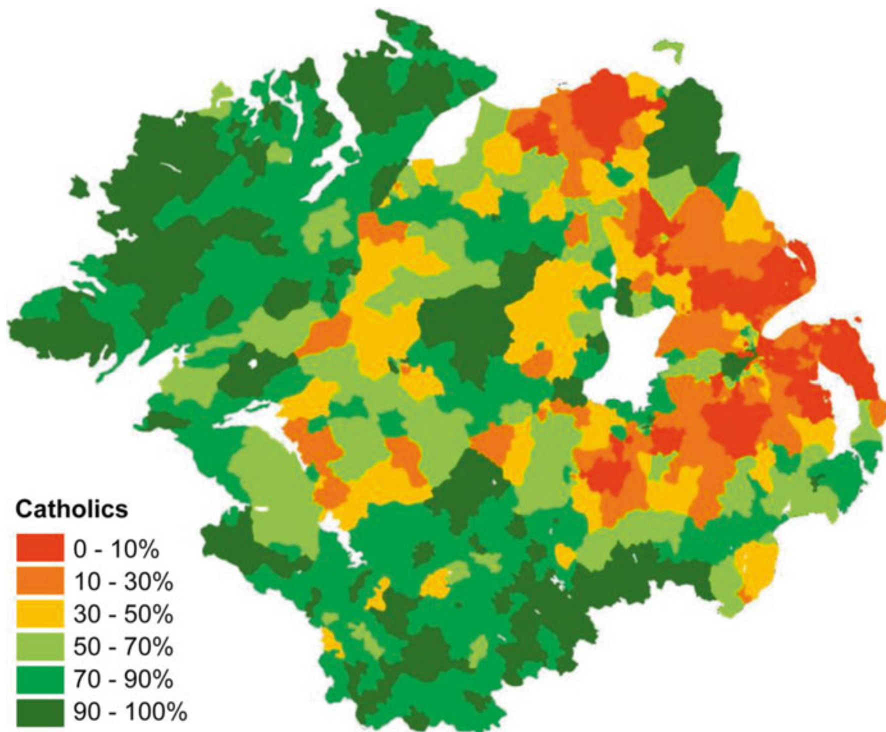

Fig. 190.2 Religious demography in Northern Ireland. Percentage of Catholics based on census figures from 2001 and 2006 (Map from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scaoileadh_Creidimhin_in_UlaidhReligious_Division_of_Ulster.jpg)

190.2 Religion, Tolerance and Co-existence

Religion is a site well suited to the process of cultural "othering," the process of perceiving humans in group terms and believing that some belong to less deserving categories than one's own. However, religious "othering" presupposes processes of religious "belonging" as two sides of the same Janus face, for religion differentiates between those who belong and those who do not, marking both the "insider" and the "outsider" or "other." If religion serves as a scared canopy gluing society together (Berger 1967), it does so only for those who belong and in practice it reinforces the exclusion of the marginalized religious "other." It is easy to see why religion is so suited to this process. Religion involves making and believing truth claims. The inherent tendency for each world faith to see itself as the font of all truth can among some believers turn religious righteousness into self-righteousness.

The point about self-righteousness is the conviction of the untruth of others. This makes *in*tolerance rather than tolerance a virtue. For example, in the early modern

period in Britain and its colonies, roughly the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, when religious conflicts were vivid, toleration was perceived pejoratively as a threat both to God and politics, since it reflected doubt in one's own religious truths and uncertainty in government. Religious *in*tolerance was valued; some historians have referred to this as a kind of "charitable hatred" (Walsham 2006). This is quite the reverse to the way in which today we like to see religion as carrying the ethic of liberalism, pluralism and tolerance In the past, religious toleration posed the same dilemmas and problems as religious *in*tolerance does today.

But the respect for religious *in*tolerance is not a just a historical quirk restricted to the distant past. Religion is still often a site of conflict, which belies its perception as a carrier of tolerance and pluralism. Conflict between religious groups is common, even in recent history. Indeed, sociologists of religion who otherwise denude religion of significance in their obsession with secularization, argue that religion retains its saliency in modernity only when it stands in as a surrogate for ethno-national and political conflict (for example Bruce 2011). In Bruce's view, the sociology of religion is really the sociology of secularisation and the substantive focus is on its decline, denuding it as marginal and irrelevant, save in one exception, the ancient association of religion, politics and conflict (on which see Norris and Inglehart 2004). There are several dimensions to the historic link between religion and conflict.

Religion is clearly wrapped up in the 'problem of large numbers,' where cultural majorities have the ability to impose exclusion on minorities in the form of persecution, competition or indifference. This is what we understand commonly by intolerance. Intolerance naturally leads to "external othering" for religious majorities assert their differences in order to exclude minorities who do not 'belong.' External "othering" of religious minorities can show itself in religious persecution, but most often neglect and indifference. Violent persecution is more likely to occur when the majority feels threatened and beleaguered, perhaps because of the size of the religious minorities or their political and cultural assertiveness, with indifference the likely result when the majority is not an unsettled community and there is no sense of threat.

It is in the context of this neglect and indifference that religion also gets wrapped up in what is popularly called today the "problem of small numbers." This concept describes the demand from small religious and cultural minorities for social, political and economic recognition. We might call this "self othering," for cultural differences are asserted by groups themselves to facilitate their recognition as a minority. This is not necessarily a demand that they become absorbed into the majority religion and made to feel they "belong;" it is a demand for their religious difference to be accepted as a legitimate minority status. In this regard, cultural and religious minorities are asserting difference in order to better separate themselves. Sometimes this demand for religious and cultural separatism is pursued by violent means, deepening the association between religion and violence; on other occasions by political mobilization. Note that in the first instance, "othering" is imposed on minorities from the outside, in the latter appropriated internally, hence, our terminology of "external" and "self othering." In both cases, however, religious differences can be the measure by which cultural distinctiveness is reproduced.

However, religious difference can be asserted for the purposes of social inclusion as much as exclusion. While "external othering" can manifest itself in terms of religious persecution at worst and neglect at best, "self othering" does not have to involve separatism but can encourage religious toleration. Recognition of their cultural and religious difference is merely the precursor to demands for a minority's social inclusion. It is fuller participation they demand, not separatism. This breaks the link between religion, conflict, and intolerance for religion can be a site for reconciliation, an arena for articulating the demand for toleration and mobilizing on its behalf. This uncouples "othering" from "unbelonging," for some religious minorities can assert a demand for acceptance in order to "belong."

Religious "othering," in short, does not have to provoke intolerance. In this instance, religious toleration is *not* premised on the demand to eliminate all religious differences, but to denude these differences of contestation. It is the wish to pacify, that is, make peaceful, obvious and clearly recognizable, but enduring religious differences. This effort requires that we understand what peace means. Peace is never about eliminating differences, the merging of the world religions in rainbow ecumenicalism, it is about the way *dis*agreements are handled better in the future. It is also about the reproduction of continued religious difference but in non-violent ways, encouraging all the religious groups to feel they belong despite their remaining religious differences.

Over the last two decades an interest has developed, particularly in the U.S., in religion as a site of reconciliation (Coward and Smith 2004; Hadley 2001; Johnston 2003; Little 2007; Schlack 2009; Shore 2009; Smock 2001, 2002, 2006, 2008). The U.S. is particularly suited as a cultural space for this kind of work. There is a plurality of religions in the U.S. as part of its racial and ethnic mix, but the country has never witnessed a religious or holy war and thus has no historical memory of religious hatred and violence of the kind that affects most of Europe. Its separation of church and state ensures no one religion has become the established faith and accorded privileged political status as a result. It is also a society where religious practice remains high, against the trend toward secularisation in the West, which encourages people to take religion seriously. It is also a society, for example, in which religion is recognized as a rich resource in politics, part of political diplomacy (for example, Johnston 2003) and incorporated into peace and civic education.

Religious peacebuilding is a rapidly growing field in the U.S. where it is distinguished by three defining characteristics: (a) an emphasis on inter-faith dialogue as the primary form of religious peacebuilding; (b) the commensurate privileging of ecumenism as the chief peace strategy; and (c) eschewing comparative research in favor of the case study method. Methodologically, the single case study approach dominates. Single case studies get set alongside each other in endless edited collections within this new literature, but there is no conceptual apparatus with which to compare the cases systematically.

There is another weakness in this literature. It concentrates on positive cases, situations where religious bodies, para-church organizations and faith-based NGOs bring warring factions together and where religion is above the fray and considered

Fig. 190.3 A typical anti-Catholic wall mural in a Protestant area of Belfast (Photo by John D. Brewer and Francis Teeney)

neutral so that religious actors have legitimacy as peacemakers (for example, Johnston 2003; Smock 2006). Celebrate as we might the odd case or two where this outcome has occurred, such as the short-lived peace deal in Sudan in 1972 or the stable settlement in Mozambique in 1992, we need a conceptual apparatus that focuses on the more numerous cases where religion is part of the problem.

This background introduces the problem of Northern Ireland. Religion was perceived to be wrapped up in the conflict to such an extent that it was difficult for religious peacebuilders to be seen as neutral. Religion was thought to be part of the problem in Ireland and incapable of turning itself into part of the solution (Fig. 190.3). Ireland has a legacy of conflict between Catholics and Protestants that goes back four centuries and historical memories that involve instances of extreme atrocity and depravity on both sides (see Brewer and Higgins 1998). Processes of religious othering and belonging ensured marked cultural and political differences between Catholics and Protestants. The national narrative of both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland invokes religious symbolism to portray the struggle for nationhood as a religious one. Therefore, religious peacemakers challenge these stereotypes by going against history, culture and politics. Many commentators deny the churches a role in Northern Ireland's peace process or belittle it, focusing on the few well-known events of church involvement and the small number of high profile religious peacebuilders.

190.3 Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland's Conflict

In this section we address the nature of the conflict, assessing the contribution religion made to it. In the final sections we discuss the activities of religious peacebuilders in effecting peace and tolerance. By so doing, we seek to correct various misapprehensions about the ineffectiveness of the role of the churches by pointing to their major achievements in both the social and political dimensions of the peace process. We also develop a conceptual framework to understand religious peacebuilding, allowing the Northern Irish case study to speak to other conflicts where religion is thought to be problematic.

Jonathan Swift, the well-known eighteenth century satirist and Irishman, once said that Ireland had enough religion to make its citizens hate one another, but not enough to make them love. WB Yeats, another well-known literary Irishman, wrote of the Irish that there is more substance in their enmities than in their love. It appears strange that a society noted in the distant past for the conversion of Europe, a land of saints and scholars, and known today for maintaining very high levels of religiosity against the modern secular trend, should be associated with enmity, hatred and conflict. This picture is no paradox.

Religion, while not the cause of conflict, is the social boundary marker that demarcates the groups between whom there is conflict. While some observers seek to denude the conflict of any religious hue, preferring to present it as ethno-nationalist conflict for which religion is just an inconvenient surrogate (for example, McGarry and O'Leary 1995), others highlight the residual religious dimension at least at the symbolic level (for example, Barnes 2005; Mitchell 2006a, b). The truth is it is both political *and* religious, for religion maps onto and represents both real material and political differences. The conflict is over the legitimacy of the state and access to its political, economic and cultural resources, but religious affiliation defines the boundaries of the groups who are in competition. Religion provides some of the cultural resources for drawing moral boundaries between the ethnic groups in political competition, religious symbols become associated with political contestation and the churches also took sides in the war. The religious affiliations of protagonists once had strong theological meaning for most people involved in the conflict (see Brewer 2003a).

For most people today however, their religious affiliation has no substance in the conflict, such that "Protestant" and "Catholic" are merely labels representing contrasting positions on the legitimacy of the state (Fig. 190.4). Protestantism is understood by protagonists mostly in terms of its political and constitutional stance rather than theology; the same would be so for Catholicism, which is why people's sense of belonging to one or the other can be matched with low Christian observance and religious practice (see Brewer 2003b). People are *cultural* rather than *religious* Catholics and Protestants. Those sensitive to the political nature of the conflict prefer to use alternative nomenclature to describe these positions, distinguishing, on a continuum from the moderate to the more radical position, between Nationalists and Republicans within the Catholic community, and between Unionists and Loyalists within Protestantism.

Fig. 190.4 Wall mural in Protestant East Belfast showing the Protestant reformers, Calvin, Luther and Wesley (Photo by Keith Ruffles, http://www.geolocation.ws/v/P/16215658/protestant-reformation-mural-east/en)

This nomenclature is a fine distinction and it is easy to see how outsiders to Ireland can mistakenly perceive the conflict as a religious one, caused by religion, fought to defend religious principles, and contested by people for whom religious affiliation is the master status. Some protagonists in Ireland assist in the perpetuation of this error. For a small minority of Protestants see the conflict in religious terms and reinforce this belief by killing Catholics, burning churches or portraying Irish Republicanism as Catholic, in pursuit of a strategy directed by the antichrist in the Vatican (on the antichrist belief see Barkley 1967 and on its use in Northern Ireland see Higgins 2000, and for a discussion of anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland see Brewer and Higgins 1998; Rafferty 1994). These beliefs are so marginal to mainstream Protestantism as to appear even to the majority of Northern Irish Protestants as extreme, although at moments of most threat, these ideas temporarily often gained much wider popularity among ordinary Protestants. And Republicans, while thoroughly political and criticized by the Catholic Church, were not averse to utilizing Catholic symbolism (Fig. 190.5).

But if the situation is not a religious war, it is nonetheless puzzling that religion still represents the boundaries of the groups between whom there is conflict. Religion survives as an important social cleavage primarily in the Two-Thirds

Fig. 190.5 A wall mural in Catholic West Belfast uses religious symbolism – the rosary and the Virgin Mary – to characterize the political protest of the Hunger Strikes in 1980–1981 (Photo by John D. Brewer and Francis Teeney)

World, but it is unusual in the modern industrial world for conflict to be socially marked by religion, or at least, for religion to remain important after the country has modernized and industrialized, since historically religion was once a powerful source of social cleavage and conflict throughout Europe and North America. The conundrum, then, is why religion in Northern Ireland retains its saliency as the critical social cleavage around which social division coheres. Marx, in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* gave us a glimpse of the explanation when he wrote that the tradition of the dead generation weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. Put another way, Northern Ireland has not transcended the social divisions of its colonial past, ensuring the perpetuation of the process of religious othering and belonging.

What religious peacemakers in Northern Ireland confront, therefore, is a situation in which ancient religious differences have ensured the survival of separate religious communities through such methods of same-religion marriages, residential segregation, distinct cultural organizations and segregated schools. The social structure of the two communities ensures the effortless perpetuation of distinct and separate groups marked by religious differences. Catholics and Protestants live in separate areas, they hold to separate symbols, they contest rather than share territory. Belfast is a divided city whose geography and physical space give vivid portrayal to the conflict. Those working for peace and for reconciliation in the churches thus had three obstacles to overcome: (i) the legacy of the past that created social

division; (ii) the impact of a social structure that reproduces separateness; and (iii) the perception that religion was part of the problem and could not possibly become part of the solution.

190.4 Conceptualizing Religious Peacebuilding

The real contribution of sociology in explicating the subfield of religious peacebuilding is threefold: (1) to focus on those problematic instances where religion is wrapped up in the conflict so that we can more sharply see the potential for religion to assist in reconciliation, tolerance and co-existence; (2) to devise a theoretical framework that moves us beyond the case study method; and (3) to deploy this conceptual apparatus in cross-national comparative research. What follows is one such model.

While this model has been garnered and honed during a 4-year study of the role of the churches in Northern Ireland's peace process, it is proffered as a conceptualisation of religious peacebuilding that facilitates comparative research (what follows is a summary of Brewer et al. 2010, 2011). Figure 190.6 represents the model in diagrammatic form. We see these distinctions as sedimentary layers. At the base of the conceptualisation are three critical distinctions. The first is between active and passive peacemaking. The former lives out commitments to peace as a social practice, so that peacemaking is enacted rather than just talked about; the latter is full of an idealistic commitment, but lacking in application. Some faith-based NGOs, churches and para-church bodies talk peace, but are passive when it comes to its

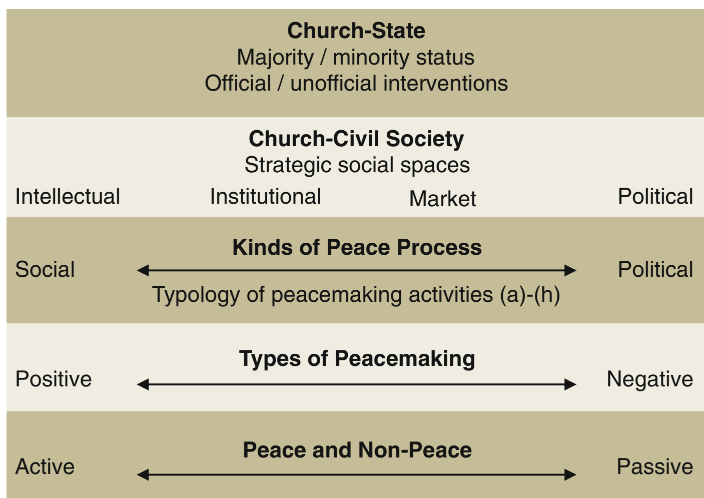

Fig. 190.6 The sedimentary layers of religious peacebuilding (Source: John D. Brewer and Francis Teeney)

practice. To flesh-out the forms that active peacemaking can take, we utilize Galtung's famous contrast between negative and positive peace (Galtung 1969). Negative peace is desirous of an end to the killings, in which peacemaking involves working to end violence. Positive peace involves working toward establishing (or reintroducing) wider principles of justice, equality, fairness and social redistribution as well. The former we can call conflict transformation, the latter social transformation. Some religious peacebuilders can be active when it comes to resolving particular incidents of violence, for example, in demanding military groups desist from killing and dialoguing with them to this end; a smaller number advocate and mobilize to achieve positive peace via the social gospel.

The final distinction is between the social and political peace processes. This antinomy needs more elaborate explanation (see Brewer 2010 for fuller details). All too often peace processes are understood to describe the negotiation process that results in a settlement and the monitoring of conformity to the accord afterwards. Negotiated compromise peace deals, in which parties opt for (or are forced by third parties to accept), are second-best preferences in order to resolve conflict. These are the foundation of peace processes. We refer to this as the *political peace process*. However, the negotiated settlement is never the end of peacemaking, for accords mostly leave unresolved the processes for realizing social healing. By this we mean reconciliation between erstwhile protagonists, social relationship-building and repair across a communal divide, and the replacement of brokenness by the development (or restoration) of people's feelings of wholeness. These concerns are either ignored by negotiators in the political peace process or assumed to follow naturally from the signing of the agreement itself. The *social peace process*, however, fills this void and deals directly with societal healing. It constitutes an important dimension to peacemaking, going on well after the new political institutions resulting from the accord are bedded in.

With this process in mind, we now have a conceptual field that shows what active (as distinct from passive) peacebuilding looks like. As informative as this is for fleshing out the content of *active peacemaking*, the broad sweeps by which the cells are painted need finer detail in order to complete the picture. A typology of examples of active peacemaking fills-in the cells. We suggest active religious peacemaking involves the following kinds of activity:

Social activity (+indicates positive, – indicates negative):

+ Ecumenical activity (breaking down barriers, stereotypes and developing contact in a religious context)
– Mediation (conflict resolution and prevention)
+ Cross-community activities (entry into secular spaces to try to break down barriers)
+ Peace initiatives (espousing peace and monitoring the conflict)
+ Anti-sectarianism/anti-racism etc. (challenging the conflict and redefining it)
+ Dealing with the problems of post-violence (assisting with post-conflict adjustment)

Table 190.1 Active peacemaking in practice

	Positive	Negative
Social	Involves civil society and grassroots groups working in areas of expertise to focus on social transformation and societal healing, whether in pre or post-agreement phases	Involves civil society and grassroots groups working in areas of expertise to focus on conflict transformation by intervening as mediators in specific instances of violence and/or campaigning to end the violence generally
Political	Involves political parties, negotiators and politicians incorporating social transformation and societal healing into the terms of the accord and/or using the new political structures to address social transformation and societal healing	Involves political parties, negotiators and politicians negotiating ceasefires and campaigning for all factions to desist from killing

Source: John D. Brewer and Francis Teeney

Political activity (+indicates positive, – indicates negative):

– The churches as back channels of communication (provision of ‘safe’ private political spaces)
+ Churches’ participation in negotiations over political settlements and their iterations and contributions to selling the deals (the churches’ public political role).

It is useful to plot this typology in order to synchronize the elements of our conceptualization (Table 190.1). This conceptual apparatus enables us to see the variety of activities religious peacebuilding compromises and the diversity of activities religious peacebuilders can engage in.

As sociologists we do not see institutions as independent actors autonomous from the rest of civil society or the state; the key to this model is placing churches within the civil society-state matrix. Civil society is an idea much in vogue in peace studies (see Brewer 2010: 44–67; van Leeuwen 2009). We emphasize four socially strategic social spaces as important to a peace process that go well beyond the now familiar distinctions in the civil society literature between “good” and “bad,” or progressive and regressive, civil society (Chambers and Kopstein 2001). These strategic spaces help us understand further the differences between kinds of religious peacebuilding. These strategic spaces are: *intellectual spaces* (as places for discussion of peace, development of visions for peace, ideas for conflict resolution, new ideas for reconciliation work, envisioning the new society, etc.); *institutional spaces* (religious organizations putting peace into practice in their own activities and behaviors); *market spaces* (their employment of social, symbolic, cultural and material resources to actively support peace and peace work); and *political spaces* (their engagement with the political peace process, engagement with political groups and their armed wings, with governments, etc.).

Table 190.2 Civil society's strategic social spaces

Intellectual: Ecumenism, anti-sectarianism	Institutional: Cross community activities, peace initiatives
Market: Transitional justice work with prisoners and families, social gospel	Political: Mediation, back channel political communication, formal political representation

Source: John D. Brewer and Francis Teeney

If we combine this typology with those above, we have four strategic social spaces for the reproduction of active religious peacebuilding, represented in Table 190.2. We suggest that in *intellectual spaces* we find the churches doing many forms of ecumenical activity and anti-sectarianism/anti-racism. In *institutional spaces* we see the churches engaging in cross-community activities and involving themselves in national and local peace initiatives. In *market spaces* the churches were involved in those post-violence adjustment problems that involved expending material and cultural resources, notably transitional justice work with prisoners and their families, and other forms of faith-based social action. In *political spaces* we see the churches involved in mediation, especially in dialogue with paramilitaries, acting as back channels of communication, facilitating engagement between the various factions, including paramilitaries and governments.

When analysed in these terms, it is important to note the opportunities and constraints that operate on churches and para-church organizations in entering socially strategic spaces. The minority/majority status of the churches significantly affects the level of engagement and its forms, since majority religions tend to be established churches linked to the state or the religion of the dominant group culture. This majority status can limit their role in peace processes; a majority church can also be constrained in the critical positions it can take, and, broadly speaking, may be fearful of offending sectors of their congregations. Minority churches can be more critical, but also very vulnerable. One way in which the majority churches managed the problems of engagement, should events go wrong, was to restrict the involvement to 'unofficial' activity, although church decision-making processes and governance structures also made it very difficult to arrive quickly at an "official" position. The distinction between "official" and "unofficial" peace work thus becomes another important element to the conceptualisation, for it helps churches manage the risks of public exposure both to themselves as institutions and to their members.

We contend that in order to understand the opportunities and constraints on religious peacework, the activities of the churches and religious bodies need to be located in a three-way relationship between themselves, civil society and the state, making the *church-civil society-state matrix* the chief conceptual tool for understanding religious peacemaking. Church-state relations shape the kinds of peacemaking done by majority and minority churches, restricting the majority churches in the extent to which they challenged majority community dominance and power relations, and making certain forms of minority church activity particularly

vulnerable, whether these threats were real or imagined. The constraints imposed on majority and minority churches by church-state relations can be managed by different forms of official and unofficial intervention, allowing majority church peacemakers some autonomy when acting secretly and facilitating minority religious peacemakers, some of whom were in a double minority position and whose capacity for engagement required creativity in sidestepping official constraints. Churches mostly move officially quite late to develop policies for engagement, which is why unofficial forms of religious peacemaking can dominate as path-breaking activities during the worst of the violence.

190.5 Religious Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

Not only does this matrix proffer methodological and conceptual leaps by facilitating cross-national comparisons, but it also provides the intellectual apparatus to understand the nature and forms of religious peacemaking in Northern Ireland. It moves us beyond the emphasis in the case study literature on personality, individual motivations and religious leadership in Northern Ireland, important as these are, by locating the churches' activities within the context of their wider relationship to global civil society and the British and Irish states.

Applying this model to Northern Ireland, it seems possible to delineate specifically religious factors when explaining the course of religious peacemaking there, as with the impact of church governance structures and forms of church leadership, theological relations and disputes that opened or closed opportunities for collaboration and networking, and the effect of different institutional forms, such as the organisational and bureaucratic differences between established and non-established churches, religious orders, para-church organisations, religious lobby groups, and others that mediated the capacity for religious peacemaking.

We contend, however, that these narrowly religious factors need to be located in a broader relationship between church, civil society and the state. After all, governance structures, organizational forms and styles of religious leadership, for example, can be managed and manipulated if the commitment to peace engagement is present, especially persuading some minorities to engage in imaginative types of mediation to circumvent the constraints. Religious peacemakers in the North of Ireland found ways around the restrictions imposed by insecure or frightened leaders or the restraints in established churches in moving synods or presbyteries toward a critical position against the state.

It remains the case, however, that as institutions, the churches contributed less than the individual members they compromise. This is why some of the most effective religious peace work was done in non-denominational organizations, such as the ecumenical communities, or in organizational settings outside the control of conservative church hierarchies, such as in monasteries, or it was done in secret. We can explain this kind of religious peacemaking best by locating it in the church-civil society-state relationship.

This conceptual apparatus is, we contend, a particularly enlightening way of explaining the paradoxical dynamics of religious peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. Our intellectual apparatus helps explain, for example, the individualization of religious peacemaking in Northern Ireland as the institutional church withdrew from prophetic leadership. Individualization is both the cause and effect of the churches' weaknesses and describes the *process* by which religious peacebuilding was conducted (done mostly by independents and mavericks rather than the institutional church) and its *outcome* (a focus on improving individual relations between Catholics and Protestants within a framework of "politics as usual" rather than dismantling collectivized religion). Individualization is the necessary consequence of a weak institutional church containing within it several highly committed mavericks and independents who sought to circumvent conservative and cautious church hierarchies.

Individualization, however, constitutes a problem. "The Troubles" were not located by these otherwise well-meaning and highly committed mavericks in the continued capacity of the churches to reproduce themselves as collective religions and in the social structural conditions that sustained two mutually exclusive ethno-religious blocs. Symptom and cause were confused. The problem was perceived to be violence itself rather than a sectarian social structure of which the churches were themselves an integral part, so negative peace became the solution rather than positive peace, conflict transformation the emphasis rather than social transformation. This stance predicated even the efforts of mavericks and independents; it was about normalizing relations between people rather than attacking the system that distorted them in the first place. This sort of work was recognized by them (and others) as inherently political, pushing the institutional churches and the mavericks into political spaces where they felt uncomfortable (in varying degrees), but the aim was to demilitarize politics rather than change the society that created the conditions for abnormal politics.

This change occurred at the same time when religious peacemakers, of course, displayed very high levels of personal motivation to peacemaking (and often great bravery). The value of our conceptual approach, however, is precisely that it moves debate beyond personal motivation and moral commitments to peace work (which is the problem with the case studies of individual religious peacemakers) (see Little 2007) in order to focus on wider opportunities and constraints. It is unquestionable that some people in the churches lacked motivation while others had it aplenty, but personal motivation interacts with opportunity and constraint in such a way so as to disclose that despite the high levels of motivation in some religious peacemakers from the very beginning, the churches' peacemaking activities did not prove effective until the conditions were ready for it in the mid-1990s. And they *were* effective – when the time came.

For a quarter-of-a-century, faith-based peace activism in Northern Ireland was dominated by secret engagement between church figures and political and paramilitary leaders on the one hand and also by the question of improving relations between Catholics and Protestants on the other. The intellectual reflection exemplified by (a) the Irish School of Ecumenics' Moving Beyond Sectarianism project, (b) the

encouragement of Protestants to rethink their identity, (c) the development of meaningful positive political relationships through individuals like Rev Ken Newell, Fr Gerry Reynolds, Rev John Dunlop and Rev Harold Good, (d) the activities of groups like Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland, and (e) the continued witness of inter-church communities, in the form of Corrymeela and others, stand as icons of what Christians have tried to do to challenge the terms and ameliorate the consequences, of the vicious conflict. To those atheists like Richard Dawkins who claim that religion inevitably kills, we agree that without religion there would have been no conflict in Ireland, but it is also certainly the case that without religion there would have been no ceasefires and thus no negative peace. The motivations of the religious peacebuilders never diminished over this period. What varied were the conditions that shaped their opportunities and constraints.

We can distinguish between internal and external opportunities and constraints. Among the external conditions, premier must be the spaces that were opened up for the churches as a result of developments in the political peace process that provided political opportunities, such as transitions towards a political strategy within the paramilitary organizations, the formation of a single military command in Loyalism with which to negotiate, the active interest of the Irish government in working with the British government in delivering their respective client groups, the good personal relations between John Major (British prime minister) and Albert Reynolds (Irish prime minister), as well as the involvement of other international third parties, especially President Bill Clinton. The deterioration in the level of violence that occurred in the lead up to the Hume-Adams talks and the Downing Street Declaration seemed so bad as to counteract the delaying effects of the 'latest atrocity syndrome' and to reflect the truism that violence in the North had to get worse before it got better. The back channel dialogue that various religious peacemakers had established over the years with Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries, which were so suited to sacred spaces as places of secrecy, confidentiality and anonymity, were able to be mobilized later to deliver support for the political peace process and ceasefires. The key religious figures included Fr Alec Reid, Rev Roy Magee and Archbishop Eames who orchestrated the maneuvers in combination with the respective governments.

The churches' long-standing contributions to the social peace process were not irrelevant to this. The extensive development of ecumenist contacts between clergy, congregations and denominations, the involvement of neighbourhood clergy in instances of local conflict mediation and dialogue, and the churches' participation in public peace initiatives and secular cross-community activities, which comprised the main activities by which societal healing and relationship building was attempted in the social peace process. This cooperation continued throughout "the Troubles," but there is no real evidence that they were effective in their own terms. However, the relationship between the social and political peace processes is recursive and spaces were opened up for the social peace process only by advances in the political peace process. Progress in political negotiations was facilitated by the social peace process, such as when church dialogue with

protagonists, as a form of conflict mediation, developed later into back channel political communications that assisted the political peace process. Religious peacemakers, however, could not proactively initiate these back channel communications, perhaps with the exception of the Hume-Adams talks instigated by Fr Alec Reid. They had to wait until the external conditions made the paramilitaries and the governments *want* to utilize sacred spaces for the purpose. This requirement was outside the churches' control.

190.6 Systems of Clerical Political Engagement

There is a need for further research that places Northern Irish churches in these wider national and international political developments that explore how churches were manipulated by political actors for their own ends. Our interest, however, has been with the opportunities and constraints internal to the churches. These include the following: the institutional and leadership barriers to engagement with peace; the church systems of authority that constrained mavericks and squeezed the institutional spaces for prophetic leadership; the resort to unofficial interventions that made practitioners vulnerable, insecure and open to marginalisation by their own church leaders; the tendency toward both denominationalism within the churches and separatism from other civil society groups that prevented an umbrella alliance; their ambivalent attitude toward anti-sectarianism as a result of the realization that "politics as usual" formed part of their ethno-religious boundaries that sustained them as churches; and the dominance of "clergy manager" role expectations that limited the ambitions as well as the time of individual clergy.

It was easier for some religious peacemakers to evade these internal constraints and to exploit opportunities, notably non-parish clergy, those in religious orders, the independent para-church organisations, ecumenical communities, and the mavericks impervious to any censorship and control from church leaders. Clergy outside these categories desirous of involvement in the peace process chose highly ambivalent institutional locations outside the purview of church leaders. Only those with the tacit knowledge of the hierarchy, such as Methodists, could claim any authority for their peace work, further individualizing the process of religious peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. For the rest, it put them on the margins of developments, limited their availability for meetings, and encouraged them to voyeuristic involvement in the peace process, keen and enthusiastic, to be sure, but from a distance, urging on the mavericks well from behind. These sorts of church people were not against peace, but their institutional position made them vulnerable and afraid. The ambivalence of these institutional spaces, therefore, either pushed them towards a "fellow traveller" role or, as a way of supplying a source of social and moral support, garnered an attitude amongst them of "ourselves alone," fostering religious denominationalism and separatism from the rest of civil society.

190.7 Conclusion

It is clear that our model of religious peacebuilding has transgressed the theoretical/policy dichotomy, being both oriented to practice and theory. We suggest this model opens an interesting direction in the future for advocates of religious peacebuilding, for we need to better understand its nature so it can be better practiced. We also have tried to show that its practice in Northern Ireland helped pacify a violent conflict and turned a situation of religious intolerance into now one at best of religious indifference. This process is not the same as societal healing and reconciliation. Much work still needs to be accomplished in Northern Ireland for religious intolerance to transform into social reconciliation. We would like to close by drawing attention to the failure of religious peacebuilders to tackle the problems of post-violence in Northern Ireland.

The institutional church failed Northern Ireland during "the Troubles." Religious peacebuilding was individualized to lone peacemakers, independents and mavericks. And in the post-conflict stage, the peace process, as far as the institutional church is concerned, has come to an end. Taking no responsibility for the past, or their contribution to sectarianism, the institutional church does not accept it has any responsibility to the future, save ministering to the pastoral needs of their congregations on a piecemeal basis. Hesitant and uncomfortable in displaying prophetic leadership in the public sphere during the violence, the institutional church is at a loss to know what to do publicly after it. It is thus left again to individual religious peacebuilders to address the legacy of violence, equally piecemeal.

Victim groups feel neglected by the church as victimhood is reduced to a pastoral issue to be handled on a case by case basis inside private church space not in the public square. There is no public religious discourse on forgiveness, hope and compassion; still less on resentment and anger. Forgiveness as a process is often feared by liberal human rights activists and victims alike because it is assumed to mean amnesty, although it need not. But debates about what forgiveness means politically, and whether or not it first requires repentance, on which churches *ought* to take the lead after conflict, are not entering the public arena. And hope is not a word in the lexicon of the churches – at least not this-worldly hope. As part of the same neglect, the churches are silent on transitional justice issues. There is no religious discourse in Northern Ireland on human rights issues, on truth-recovery, or on other transitional justice themes like reparation, memory, restorative reintegration of ex-combatant prisoners and the like. Religious peacebuilders placed a very high priority on working with prisoners and their families, but not when released nor once they gave their imprimatur to the deal. Of course, one can cite a few examples where this is not so, of, for example, brave churchmen and women active in social witness, managing the risk of renewed outbreaks of violence, or dealing with the management of memory. But these are independent of the institutional church, done freelance by individual religious peacemakers (in some cases done after they retired from active ministry) and undertaken in conjunction with other civil society

representatives in a way that they carry no strong religious stamp. There is no authoritative religious voice in public debate on post-violence issues. This is partly a skills issue, but also primarily a motivational one. Polarization has been left intact by the peace agreement and in this quiescent phase without overt violence to stir them, there thus is no motivation for the churches to get involved. The churches are uninterested in post-violence reconstruction.

By way of conclusion, therefore, we need to ask the key question. Are the churches capable of doing anything anymore, even if they wanted to? Their condition post-agreement is worse than before. Secularization and anti-clericalism diminishes their influence and respect. They lack moral legitimacy for having missed opportunities for prophetic leadership during "the Troubles." Individual peacemakers are aging, retiring from active ministry, or burning out, ill and moving out of Northern Ireland. Religious peacebuilding is in crisis as the individuals who bore its brunt depart and as the institutional church evades its responsibilities in the public square.

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