

DETERIORATION OF RELIGION ASPECTS AS PEACEFUL POWER

Annotation

There are many examples in 21st century of the deterioration of religious aspects as peaceful power. The world's major religions call for peace and ethics in society, but also religious differences rise destructive conflicts. Religious leaders have the power to prevent deadly conflicts, but there are also those who incite extremism, i.e. conflicts. Human history shows the contradiction as all religions emphasise the aspect of the power of peace; on the other hand, there are a huge number of conflicts and crimes committed in the name of religion. The question remains in the modern world, how can peace, as the most important values of all religions, be used to resolve conflicts and not to ignite them. It should always be considered that every religion is a large reflection of cultural differences, which supposes that in case of conflicts positive tendency would be to use religion as a part of peace diplomacy with an accent on common sense and ideas of fairness.

Keywords: conflicts, religion aspects, diplomacy, peacebuilding, difference reduction, the culture of dialogue.

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Different conflicts and wars are spreading in the 21st century. Almost always the base is economic and geo-strategic interests. However, different cultures, mentalities and religions are usually involved in conflicts. Religion is one of the important internal factors of any culture. Different cultures' diversity of visions about what kind of solution is fair must be seriously considered in peace negotiations. Awareness of these differences is important given that due to the ignorance of various cultures and religions, some norms of behaviour can be unknowingly violated. This can lead to intercultural and inter-religious mistakes in negotiations and can aggravate the conflict situation. The questions are — is religion as an integral part of any culture sufficiently included in peace diplomacy, and are the best teachings of different

religions that contain prayers for peace widely enough represented in diplomatic efforts for conflict resolution possibilities.

For the role of diplomacy in the de-escalation of conflicts, it is useful to research such subtle matters as what other cultures accept as a fair relationship. Ignorance of other cultures and religious concepts may lead negotiator to exhibit an incorrect kind of behaviour and performance, which open the wrong approach in de-escalation conflict negotiations. The spread of globalisation in the world has not reduced these conflicts. Likewise, globalization does not show enough respect for the cultural, interethnic and inter-religious subtleties, but relies on economic expansion and the pursuit of profit at all costs. An important factor in inter-religious and intercultural differences in negotiations is face-to-face dia-

logue as an attempt to initiate the possibility of resolving the conflict through diplomacy, despite huge differences between the parties. In personal meetings, the slightest chance that the process will start from a deadlock may exist. A subtle positive impact of religious leaders' involvement in the peace-building process could be helpful, as specifically among other conflicts, religiously motivated ones are widely present nowadays. Religion peace aspects need to be more researched, developed, used and noticeable. Accordingly, positive religious influence on peacemaking can contribute to some possible softer outcomes in conflict negotiations. However, in contemporary times of political divisions and conflicts, unpeaceful religious components that trigger conflicts are more in focus than peaceful religious aspects. Author Latinovic et al. are underlining such kind of question, indicating "if even members of the same religion can foster hatred and enmity towards one another, what hope, some may have asked, is there for greater understanding and commonality to be rekindled between adherents of very distinct religious pathways?" [5. — p. 6]. The answer could lie in more research on different religious peaceful components. The bloodiest example of a religiously motivated conflict is the extremization of Islam through the Islamic State (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization), which was proclaimed in 2014 as the Islamic caliphate. The goal was to conquer Christian territories and destroy the Christians. A wrong interpretation of Islam resulted in the beheading of Christians and the killing of thousands of people in Iraq and Syria until 2017. Research on negative aspects of religion that could lead to an absurd dose of violence in conflicts is necessary in order that science can provide some tools for the neutralization of such negative extremist religious paths. Analysis of negative examples is useful with the aim of distinguishing negative religious aspects from positive ones and to creating religious positive peaceful resources

which would be used in conflict resolution negotiations. The monitoring organization "Open Doors" ranks 50 countries according to religious freedom, and in the year 2022, the number of Christians suffering from a high level of repression was 360 million. According to their data, the highest level of repression is in Afghanistan, in the second place is North Korea, then Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, and India [10]. They state that the persecution source in Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan and Iran is Islamic extremism, in North Korea the persecution source is communist oppression and in Eritrea, the source is totalitarianism [10]. The listing indicates a surprising result showing India in 10th place, where Gandhi established the nonviolence cult and faith-based peacemaking, where there are only 67.4 million Christians, which is 4.9% of the total 1.4 billion inhabitants of the country [Ibid]. It is underlined that special persecutions of Christians are carried out by Hindu extremists, who physically attack them, sometimes kill them and if they do not convert to Hinduism they are isolated by the community [Ibid]. The monitoring organization draws a conclusion that Islamic extremism is the main driver of conflicts in 32 of the 50 countries and in other cases main drivers are religious nationalism, Islamic oppression, communist oppression, totalitarianism, corruption and organized crime [Ibid]. They indicate that Islamic extremism in the abovementioned countries includes killings of Christians, imprisonment without trial, and abduction by Islamist militant groups or organized criminal gangs, while Christian women can be raped or forcibly married and converted to Islam [Ibid]. In North Korea Christians are sentenced to death or to concentration camps [Ibid]. The report indicates that in Libya speaking publicly about the Christian faith is illegal, Christians there can be used as workers, practically slaves and Christian women can be sold into prostitution [Ibid]. In accordance with "Open Doors" in seventh place

is Nigeria with 46.3% of Christians, but they are mostly in the south of Nigeria while in the north and in the centre habitats are mostly Muslims, and persecution of Christians takes place there [Ibid]. According to monitoring organizations, more Christians have been killed in Nigeria than in any other country by violent attacks on men and boys, who are being killed with the exact intention of reducing the birth rate, by Islamist groups Boko Haram (The organization is banned in Russia by the decision of the Supreme Court), Fulani militants, ISIS (banned in Russia, a terrorist organization) and other Islamist extremist groups, and Christian women are often kidnapped and raped [Ibid]. The source underlines that since 2015 intensification of violent extremist Islamization in Nigeria has occurred [Ibid]. Per "Open Doors" in Pakistan Christians are officially marked as second-class citizens and get jobs that are considered low and dishonourable, while in Iran Christians can be given long prison sentences for 'crimes against national security because the government sees Christian church as a tool to undermine Islamic regime of Iran [Ibid]. Monitoring organization indicates that in the abovementioned countries ruled by Islamic extremism ideology the position of Christian women is very hard as they can be raped, killed, sold to slavery or forcibly married and forcibly converted to Islam [Ibid]. Even this contemporary, 2022 review can point out that other religions in those countries, where Christians are persecuted, do not use the power of religion as a power of peace. Author Madigan puts an accent on this issue saying that "the resolution of our conflicts lies not merely in political negotiation but in finding a common religious basis that can ground our mutual commitments and give them an authority beyond the calculations of temporary expediency" [6. — p. 178]. It can be noticed that between different religions as Christians, Muslims, Hindus etc. exist strong negative accents on differences, which are not helpful in peace

negotiations, while the mutual goodwill to put the main emphasis on the most important provisions of peace that exist in every religion is neglected. However, important peaceful factors of different religions could be able to bring positive impacts into negotiations on conflicts resolution diplomacy worldwide. It can be observed that peaceful religious resources are maybe not enough exploited and included in contemporary conflict negotiations. Religious aspects should not be underrated as an important feature in the national or international identity of different cultures and accordingly in conflicts. During hard conflicts and wars cruelty, aggression and loss of humanitarian features between conflict participants are intensifying. In political negotiations over different conflicts, the power of religious leaders could provide peace-oriented insight for the promotion of ending hostilities and peaceful solutions. Inclusion of religious leaders' efforts into tough conflict situations and wars could eventually reestablish an ethical and moral set of values, and could possibly open the path for a more human approach in negotiations between conflicting parties in the peace diplomacy process even in the worst conflict scenarios. Author Cox et al. underline that "religious identity is a critical factor in fragmentation, and thus religious leaders and communities play important roles in creating cohesion" [4. — p. 39]. Accordingly, the peaceful engagement of religious leaders could influence some positive political settlements in conflict negotiations. Author Cox et al. are pointing out that "in conflict-affected countries, religious actors often are deeply involved and invested in the debates and political processes that lead to the formation of new institutions at the level of the state" [Ibid]. The concept of multiculturalism, including multi-confessionalism was explained by Vladimir Putin in his 2020 traditional annual conference where he indicated that Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Muslims and Judaists live in peace in

Russia, while in the West due to faith diversity a great division exists [9]. In Russia, common ground and shared values are existing, although there are many different faiths and differences between those faiths. Putin underlined that Muslims in the West were imported from their home countries to Europe now or a couple of generations ago, while in Russia there are local Muslims who have been there for centuries and are in their own country [Ibid]. He pointed out that centuries of coexistence have built mutual respect and peace, while the Western model has failed because democracy is mistakenly identified with the freedom to insult other confessions [Ibid]. An illustrative example for this thesis is tragedy which happened in the French satirical journal "Charlie Hebdo" in 2015 due to misconception of respect between the religions involved, Muslim and Christian. The lack of respect for each other's religion was demonstrated in the public sphere, which led to tragic consequences because neither of the two religions served as a model for implementing peace to society. This example may also emphasize the need for conflict-related diplomacy to be interested in peaceful aspects of religion. Such interest could improve mutual understanding and contribute to negotiating efforts. Each culture has its differences, including religious ones, and accordingly, religious values in peacebuilding diplomacy should be known and taken into account in negotiations. In the preparatory phase of conflict resolution negotiations, analysis of various religious approaches could be helpful as it could increase understanding of the different roles of religions in specific conflicts. Determination of the greatest discord meanings in terms of religion may be performed. Overcoming discord could be used as a tool for achieving peace by finding the closest peaceful meanings of different religions. It would be a positive trend for negotiators to integrate peaceful aspects of religions into practice in

negotiations. This is not an easy task and it would be useful to consult with theological experts who are familiar with the differences in religions, as well as with the dynamics of changes in religions, precisely to extract the best peace grains which would successfully help the negotiation practitioners. Such advisers could also correctly inform negotiators about the complicated dynamics of the development of religious extremism which is certainly a strong trigger for conflicts. When it comes to different religions, the importance of the 'Document on Human Fraternity' which the Pope of the Catholic Church signed with the great imam al-Tayyeb in 2020, is invaluable. The main philosophical point of Pope Francesco is that the Lord must not become a periphery, and people of honour and honesty recognize the ethical axioms that have been pointed out in various religions. "The Document develops some of the most important of different levels — namely, the dignity of human life (men and women, children and elders), family, justice based on mercy, freedom of the person, freedom of religion, the protection of sacred spaces and spaces of worship, condemnation of pseudo-religious fundamentalism, the culture of dialogue and tolerance, dignified citizenship, the protection and recognition of minorities, the relations and understanding between East and West" [3. — p. 8]. For negotiators in different conflicts, the indicated values of this document are of utmost importance. Peaceful aspects which may be found in every religion could be used in diplomacy as resolving tools in conflict negotiations. Buddhism is based on nonviolent living and compassion for any kind of life. One of the Five Pillars of Islam is the care for the poor implemented through annual charitable donations. Author Nafisi underlines the meaning of the term tolerance in Islam indicating that "Islam does not believe in absolute tolerance in every circumstance. As Islam emphasizes tolerance in some conditions, in others it ac-

cepts war as a necessity. Meanwhile, Islam maintains the necessity for freedom of belief, that is, freedom of expression and dialogue as necessary" [8. — p. 1]. According to Jesus's teachings, Christianity is a peace-making religion devoted to forgiveness and peace. Judaism traditionally promotes peace, as "Jewish people live in expectation of the coming of a Messianic Age in which universal peace will be established on Earth according to the vision of the prophets of Israel" [1]. Author Engineer states that Hinduism calls for acceptance of all other religions and Saints in Hinduism have provided teachings that the essence of religion is in love [2. — p. 39]. The author underlines the Hindu virtue of 'unity in diversity and he emphasizes the preamble of Indian Constitution which is dedicated to plural India "where everybody enjoys the freedom of thought, expression and to profess practice and propagate the religion of her choice" [2. — p. 42]. In short, the author underlines the tradition of tolerance in Hinduism which can lead to reconciliation. The philosophical Hindu doctrine is that "Absolute Truth can be perceived differently [...] but that truth has to be distinguished from falsehoods driven by selfishness, injustice and violence" [2. — p. 39]. Author Engineer indicates that due to the spirit of tolerance in Hinduism, other religions, including Christianity and Islam were welcome [ibid]. Accordingly, it could be of help in diplomacy if all religions would fulfil their most important function of sowing peace among the people, especially in conflicts and wars. It can be observed that the idea of religion as a helping component in negotiations for achieving peace in world conflicts is much less represented than perceiving of religion as a factor that often causes conflicts. This could be noticed in the previously mentioned list of conflicts on an inter-religious basis. For inclusion of important peace teachings in different religions the author Moix is supplying a conclusion useful for negotiation purposes that "while religious teach-

ings on issues of war and peace vary widely across traditions, a number of common values have been recognized across the world's major faiths: compassion, love, tolerance, respect for human dignity, the sacredness of human life" [7. — p. 7]. This can be the cornerstone for implementing positive aspects of religious teachings in peacebuilding diplomacy. The connection between religion and conflict exists and it is even more necessary to emphasize connections between religion and peace. They should be thoroughly explored as important parts of the conflict resolution process. No exaggeration in the exploration process should appear as soon as religious components are the very sensitive areas in any nation and community. It is important not to narrow religion inclusion into the peacebuilding process just in cases related to religious-based conflicts. Quite opposite, the peaceful impacts of different religions should not be neglected in political negotiations for non-religious-based conflict resolution. Such kind of a goodwill approach could be a valuable addition to negotiations in conflicts. The engagement of religious leaders in such a context may provide the possibility for certain kinds of soft inclusion into the negotiation process for conflicts resolving. In scientific diplomacy the powerful influence of religion in different societies around the globe should be taken into consideration, keeping in mind that they can be more widely implemented for peacebuilding. Scientific diplomacy can use cultural context which most often includes some religious base for wider possibilities of resolving conflicts, although religion cannot play the major role in such kind of negotiations as soon as the main role is on the side of political diplomacy. The religious components of peacebuilding negotiations may start their positive impact by providing humanitarian aid to conflict areas. Such kind of step could eventually open the door for some exchange of opinions and dialogue, which could be helpful for the preparation pro-

cess of future diplomatic negotiations where religion serves without taking sides but being a general peace voice.

Consultations with theologians for correct interpretation of various faiths' values could be used to support peace negotiations in conflicts or wars. It is very important to detect the extremist interpretations of various religions that can initiate conflicts. Accordingly, researchers may be interested in a greater study of the religions' teachings that preach peace which would be helpful in conflict resolution diplomacy. Negotiators can learn from theologians these kinds of peaceful postulates of different religions. The negative aspects of religions which can cause conflicts and the positive religious aspects of peacebuilding in the 21st century could be researched with help of documented positive examples which negotiators can use in consultations with theologians in order to get a better and deeper understanding of the cultural and mental differences of each side of the conflict. Thus a better understanding of

how to approach negotiations. Regardless of the fact that there are great differences in religions and their interpretations, a scientific diplomacy approach would be helpful in determining the best positive links between religion and conflict resolution. It would be useful to recognize the possibilities of religion for contributing to sowing peace in the negotiation process. Accordingly, religious leaders could engage themselves to point out the need for tolerance and find cooperative possibilities in mutual meetings and dialogues, such as the mentioned example of 'The Document on Human Fraternity'. This type of action could contribute to better interfaith cooperation as well as to the possibility of better understanding in dialogues with conflict-involved parts of different cultures. It can be concluded that scientific efforts of diplomacy to include the best religious peacebuilding aspects in conflict resolution negotiations could implement a positive effect on resolving conflicts in the world.

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