

Preface

ONE OF THE MOST discussed themes in both domestic and international political arenas since the end of the Cold War has been the role of religion in politics: if religious actors or political actors with a religiously based agenda to an increasing degree have political ambitions, how does this affect conflicts as well as peace initiatives?

On the global level, and with some variations over time, there is on the whole a strong presence of religion, in history as well as in current life and culture. This makes religion—manifested as it is in thousands of forms—exposed and vulnerable, on the one hand, and powerful and attractive, on the other. Through their own institutions, religious actors can on the one hand play both a promoting and restraining role in relation to the use of violence and its justification. As a widespread social phenomenon, religion can—on the other hand—be used by anyone who wants moral support for his or her ideas, irrespective of the opinion of the allegedly supporting religion's majority or institutions.

Most observers would agree that religion plays a mixed role vis-a-vis politics. It can create conflict based on dogmatic and theoretical differences as well as identity and institutional connections. It can also restrain forces that prefer using violence to further an agenda, for instance through arguments based on what is a justifiable reason for war, and a justifiable conduct of war, if not proposing pacifism as a radical alternative to all too many compromises with violence. All these opinions are harbored within globally encompassing but locally worshipped religions.

This collection of studies on the connection between religion and armed conflict in a wide sense of the concept, brings perspective both on the promoting and restraining role of religion vis-a-vis violence, conflict, and conflict resolution. Its purpose is to illustrate the variety of approaches taken in the use of religion for a particular political cause, whether peaceful or not.

Not only the most recently discussed events and trends, with respect to religion and armed conflict, are represented in this collection. Some

contributions have a clear anchorage in a historic process with ramifications until this day, and in which religion has played very different but fascinating roles.

This volume has its origin in cooperation on the theme of religion and conflict between three research institutions based in Uppsala, Sweden—the Church of Sweden Research Unit, the Life and Peace Institute, and the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. Following institutional and staff changes, the volume was finalized with the inclusion also of Stockholm School of Theology, Stockholm, in the network.

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