

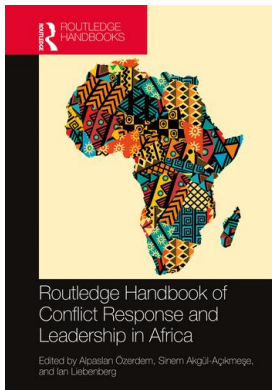
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LEADING AND MISLEADING THE FLOCK

Understanding the ambivalent record of faith leaders in peacebuilding and conflict prevention

Laura Payne

Introduction

Throughout history, deeply committed men and women of faith have led societies away from violence and towards more peaceful and socially just futures. A chosen few (invariably men) are chronicled and commemorated – Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu. Of course, history is also littered with faith leaders who have seeded violence, stoked division, and frustrated efforts for peace, those who have failed to act in the face of atrocities, and those whose actions have served both conflict and peacemaking to different degrees. This mixed record is often explained in terms of the “ambivalence of the sacred” (Appleby, 2000) – a concept that extolls us to recognize the importance of context for understanding religious leaders’ actions and reject overly simplistic narratives that frame them as one-dimensional forces for good or ill. This chapter explores the factors that help to explain the ambivalence of religious leadership in times of conflict. Why do some religious leaders doggedly pursue peacemaking, often at huge personal cost, whilst others are passive or actively opposed?

The chapter begins by characterizing faith-based leadership, examining the roles that faith leaders adopt in times of conflict and how these are shaped by cultural and religious norms, institutional structures, and power relations. It considers the extent to which different leadership models resonate with existing literature on faith-based peacebuilding, exploring charismatic, situational, transformational, and servant leadership as ideal types. It goes on to examine the ambivalent outcomes of faith leaders in responding to conflict and to reflect on some of the ways in which faith can be a resource to sustain peacebuilding leadership, helping faith leaders grapple with the moral dilemmas and personal challenges they encounter in what is often a relentless and thankless task. The chapter concludes with a brief recommendation to inform future faith-based peacebuilding through skills development.

The author approaches the subject as both an academic and a peacebuilding practitioner, drawing on experiences of working alongside faith-based organizations as a learning partner as they deliver humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions. These organizations have included many faith-inspired bodies in the humanitarian sphere, from leading international NGOs to local peace-focused charities in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. They have also included faith

institutions themselves, from local places of worship through to, in some cases, the offices of global representatives and figureheads. These experiences have provided a window into the complexity of faith-based organizations, with their individual goals, values, theological underpinnings, hierarchies and decision-making structures, and a boundless array of intersections with cultures, geographies, and politics. They have also underlined the difficulty of grand narratives and overarching theories, which at best are reductive and overly simplistic and at worst serve to misinform and perpetuate stereotypes. Throughout the chapter, the author engages as a “critical caretaker” (Omer, 2011), embracing the problem-oriented nature of the ‘critic’, for whom imagining the transformation of conflicts is key, and the historicizing and describing impulses of the ‘caretaker’ to record and comprehend.

Leadership in times of crisis

Wise, responsive, and committed leadership is pivotal when it comes to the tricky business of governance, and in times of crisis this is thrown into particularly sharp relief. The shortcomings of those in positions of power and authority become more pronounced; misjudgements and missteps carry even graver consequences. Whilst political leaders shoulder the greatest responsibilities, civil society leaders also find themselves under pressure to guide their communities through turbulence. Religious leaders, in particular, are looked to for moral and spiritual leadership and often have critical functions as conflict mediators or reconcilers.

At its simplest, leadership is “the accomplishment of a goal through the direction of human assistants” (Prentice, 1961) or “the art of mobilising others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (Kouzes and Posner, 1995, p. 30). While the former definition leaves open the question of whose interest leaders work in, the latter helpfully suggests they should serve ‘shared aspirations’, reminding us that leaders are in a mutually constitutive, and hopefully mutually affirming, relationship with those they lead. Leadership is, after all, a social and relational process. It involves articulating visions, embodying values, and creating an environment within which things can be accomplished (Richards and Engle, 1986, p. 206).

As well as being a social process, leadership is also a social construct: a product of collective meaning-making produced through interactions between people and influenced by history, geography, culture and social norms. In the Global North and West, views on what constitutes effective leadership have evolved within a predominantly secular, white, male-oriented context and reflect the modernist, rationalist, individualistic thinking that predominates. Societies elsewhere in the world often have leadership cultures that differ considerably from this, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of their own contexts and histories. Some are collectivist and others authoritarian, some flat and others hierarchical, some challenging and others deferential. Acknowledging these socially constructed differences matters for any nuanced analysis of leadership, but it is particularly important in examining contemporary religious leadership. Firstly, it underlines the futility of setting forth totalizing theories as to the functions, motivations, and effectiveness of religious leaders in times of crisis. Secondly, it reminds us that religious leaders are generally not one-dimensional monoliths, shaped only by theology and the leadership culture within their own faith institution. Rather, they are influenced by these in tandem with the same social and cultural forces that influence other forms of leader.

Characterizing faith-based peacebuilding leadership

Faith leadership is often characterized as meso-, or mid-, level leadership, and indeed religious leaders can be effective in this space. Mid-level leaders derive influence from relationships with

others and their positions at multiple intersections, and they benefit from more “flexibility of thought and movement” than high-level actors (Lederach, 1997). In this respect, religious leaders are archetypal mid-level leaders, as they often have access to high-level political leaders, to mid-level leaders from civil society and respected professions, and to community leaders and their religious constituencies. They also tend to have strong connections with other faith leaders, certainly within their own sect or denomination, more than likely within their wider faith tradition, and sometimes also across faiths.

The focus on mid-level leadership should not eclipse the work religious leaders do in other areas. At a high level, global faith leaders like the pope, archbishops, chief rabbis, ayatollahs, and muftis bring to bear considerable influence and authority on issues of global import. At a grassroots level, religious leaders may be the only figure of moral (and sometimes legal and political) authority that those living in remote communities regularly encounter. The proximity that grassroots religious leaders have to communities means they can work on the more quotidian aspects of peacebuilding, such as providing psychosocial support, promoting reconciliation, and reducing prejudice. But it also means that they share the same difficult circumstances, which may limit their opportunities to work for peace (Hertog, 2010, p. 114).

The most familiar forms of religious leader are those working within places of worship, such as priests, imams, and rabbis, as well as their superiors. But not all faith leaders are ordained, and there is a wealth of leadership that exists within the laity. Indeed, given the restricted roles afforded to women in many faith traditions, this is where much female leadership occurs within institutionalized religion. Faith leadership also exists outside of religious institutions, with leaders working from an intentional faith perspective within other faith-based entities, including international development organizations and faith-affiliated hospitals, schools and universities. In many faith traditions, religious leaders also have specific roles as scholars and judges. This summary is not comprehensive or detailed, but it illustrates how many and varied the forms of religious leadership are.

The peacebuilding expectations of religious leaders vary according to faith tradition and are based on the principles of the faith. All major faith traditions have a rich tapestry of resources that can support peaceful resolution of conflict, as well as others that may undermine it. As Appleby (2000, p. 30) notes, “At any given moment any two religious actors, each possessed of the same unimpeachable devotion and integrity, might reach diametrically opposed conclusions about the will of God and the path to follow”. Many of the qualities of peace leadership are part of and nurtured in most faith traditions (Hertog, 2010, p. 103). Islam includes a set of “peacebuilding values that, if consistently and systematically applied, can govern all types and levels of conflict” (Abu Nimer, 2000–2001, p. 220). These include justice (*adl*), beneficence (*ihsan*), and wisdom (*hikmah*). Christian leadership emphasizes forgiveness and the stewardship of divinely provided resources. Peacebuilding is often considered to be an important form of ministry and a way to live out one’s faith. It is “the irrefutable vocation of the church as a living example of Jesus, Son of God” (Hunter–Bowman, 2009). In Judaism, the ‘profoundly positive’ concept of *shalom* sets a high bar for peaceful coexistence, calling to mind the wholeness, fulfilment, completeness, unity, and well-being of all humanity (Nicosia, 2017). These are simplifications, but the central point is that faith leaders will draw from such spiritual resources and will be expected to embody them by their followers.

Expectations of religious leaders also vary according to cultural context. They may be consulted for very localized, small-scale conflicts, between family members, or between different families within the community. They may also be involved in high-level initiatives to resolve civil unrest or armed violence or even to mediate international disputes. In some ‘failed states’, religious institutions may be among only a few governance structures functioning and at their

best can provide essential non-predatory and non-partisan leadership. In South Sudan, churches and faith-based organizations represent the principal form of local and national civil society. A recent study the United States Institute of Peace identifies religious actors and institutions as the most important peace actors in the country, even moderating discussions at the May 2018 peace talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Wilson, 2019). During ‘the tensions’ in the Solomon Islands, the government weakened to the point of collapse, and security forces became factionalized (Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2004). Churches were some of the only institutions still operating and stepped in to mediate between rival militia, provide security at the airport and other key sites, and distribute humanitarian aid. In the aftermath, faith leaders provided much of the impetus behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Vella, 2014), worked with the UN on disarmament, and officiated customary reconciliation ceremonies. Hayward and Marshall (2015) provide a helpful overview of the various roles of religious leaders in times of conflict, summarized in Table 18.1.

Faith leaders have significant agency to provide peacebuilding leadership, but they still exist within structures – sometimes tightly bound, sometimes loosely formed. Most large faith-based movements have well defined institutional structures, which may be strongly hierarchical and top-down (as in the Catholic Church), based on the principle of communion (as in the Anglican tradition), or networked with little or no central authority. Some balance synodal, democratic elements of governance alongside more traditional top-down authority. Many have a global figurehead (such as the Pope, Archbishop of Canterbury, or Dalai Lama), with responsibility devolved through various tiers to individual places of worship. This is the most recognizable chain of leadership, but it generally captures only the ordained, not the laity. It also does not capture faith networks with looser structures, such as self-governing churches that voluntarily affiliate with larger networks. Strong institutional structures can support religious leaders in their peacebuilding work, providing financial investment in other resources such as training, access to political decision makers, platforms for advocacy, and opportunities to leverage global networks. However, structures can also constrain peacebuilding leadership. In Northern Ireland, “some truly transformative religious peacemakers kept their church leaders in the dark for fear of retrenchment – or could flourish only by placing themselves in locations where church

Table 18.1 Roles of religious leaders in times of conflict

Witness	Embedded within communities, religious leaders can assess and report tensions. They may invite outside intervention or intervene themselves, for instance through accompaniment or by monitoring elections, peace processes, human rights abuses, and ceasefires.
Educator	Religious leaders may provide formal and informal teaching, emphasizing religious support for peace and teaching conflict resolution skills and values. They may also raise awareness about human rights, conflict grievances, and humanitarian concerns.
Advocate	Using their platform, religious leaders may denounce violence or speak out in defence of peace and social justice. They may support marginalized groups, particularly in asymmetric conflicts. Methods include demonstrations, marches, boycotts, statements, speeches, and letters.
Mediator	Religious leaders may act as trusted intermediaries to help settle disputes. Sometimes at the national or global level, more often locally.
Direct actor	Direction intervention encompasses initiatives to address the root causes of conflict (such as joblessness) or to take short-term actions to prevent or disrupt violence (such as sending intermediaries).

Source: Adapted from (Hayward and Marshall, 2015)

authority was weakest”, such as in ecumenical organizations and religious orders (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2011).

Structures that reify power differentials between clergy and laity have particular consequences for women, who are often barred from ordination. Women’s invisibility within formal, clergy-led structures can hinder their efforts to access financial support, capacity building, and policymakers. As such, they are often consigned to ‘traditional’ gender roles within peacebuilding, such as healing, education, and relationship building, and are de facto barred from influencing political decision making and peace talks (Hayward and Marshall, 2015, p. 19). However, women’s marginalization can also free them to cross boundaries between opposing sides and allow them to take actions others would consider too risky (Hayward and Marshall, 2015, p. 16). Whilst this invisibility is often imposed, it is sometimes chosen and deployed strategically (Love, 2015). Women’s leadership is also often through larger coalitions, as they have to band together to have influence (Hayward and Marshall, 2015, p. 315).

Theorizing religious leadership in peacebuilding: charismatic, situational, transformational, and servant leadership

Trait theories, including charismatic leadership theory

Sometimes referred to, tellingly, as the ‘Great Man’ theory, trait-based leadership theory is one of the earliest theoretical approaches. Its central tenet is that traits, or characteristics, explain accomplishment in leaders. Such traits could include bravery, wisdom, diplomacy, empathy, humility, or other traits respected in leaders within their context. For Weber, one of the key traits evident in leaders and worthy of explanation was charismatic authority: the ability of one person to convince others that they possess extraordinary qualities, possibly of divine origin, which make them worthy to lead. For him, charisma is:

a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he [or she] is set apart from ordinary men [and women] and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.

(Anderson and Parsons, 1947, translating Weber, 1922)

Charismatic leaders are prone to emerge during crises, providing compelling narratives and potential solutions for the disaffected (Mazarr, 2004; Northouse, 2001). They emphasize values and set distant goals, imbuing them with meaning by referencing the collective past and future (Arthur, Shamir and House, 1994, p. 28).

The role of charismatic religious leaders in peace and conflict has been much interrogated. Some of the great charismatic peacemakers of history were people of faith – Martin Luther King, Mahatma Ghandi – as were many of those committing abominable acts of hatred. Much of the research on charismatic leaders within the sociology of religion has focused on new religious movements, in which it is considered a hallmark, but charismatic leadership can and does occur in institutional religious settings (Barnes, 1978; Corcoran, 2016). Much of the analysis is also concerned with explaining how religious leaders can so persuasively mobilize communities to commit violence, particularly terrorism. Ingram (2013) examines the charismatic leadership phenomenon in Sunni Islamist radicalism and militancy, building on earlier work from Dekmejian and Wyszomirski (1972) in Sudan. He identifies a “transformative charisma phenomenon”,

through which new charismatic leaders emerge by building upon the “charismatic capital” of preceding charismatic leaders (Ingram, 2013, p. 4).

Williams (2004) notes that charismatic authority is unstable, as it is “difficult to transfer and difficult to rely on consistently”. It is also fickle, as behaviour incongruent with the perceived extraordinary qualities of the leader may result in charismatic disenchantment (Joosse, 2012). To retain momentum, the religious charisma of leaders must be routinized – a Weberian concept through which charisma is depersonalized and attributed to the office or position, not to the person. Appleby (2000) observes this phenomenon in some religious peacebuilding which, sparked initially by charismatic leaders, later becomes deeply and permanently embedded within the structures of society – a process he refers to as saturation. However, he also notes that such saturation relies on a strong civil society and relevant institutional frameworks, the development of which may require external intervention. Generally, such intervention comes from international actors in the guise of liberal peacebuilding, and so is naturally contentious, as well as morally and practically complex.

Situational leadership theory

Situational leadership approaches stress the importance of context in shaping leaders’ responses. Also known as contingency leadership theory, the key principle is that for leaders to be effective, there must be an appropriate fit between their behaviour and environmental conditions. Leaders may need to be relationship or task motivated, authoritative or participative, based on the prevailing circumstances and the responsiveness of those being led. Indeed, religious leaders often adapt their leadership styles to their contexts and the needs of those they serve, and at their best this makes them trusted and authentic representatives. However, the approach is not without peril. Religious leaders are not impervious to the pressure of staying in step with their constituencies, even when peacebuilding calls for constructive confrontation, cultural change, and difficult decisions. Fitzduff (2011, p. 161) recalls an interreligious dialogue attended by global faith leaders in 1999 where “it became obvious that for many of the church leaders, adopting leadership that went against the grain for the emotions and directions of their people, their flocks, was extremely difficult”. This pressure to please is exacerbated when religious leaders rely on congregations for financial support, for instance through tithing, zakat, or other gifts and donations.

Religious leaders employ different strategies to manage tensions between situational fit and peacebuilding’s implicit need for change. Some exercise a form of ‘elastic-band’ leadership, stretching constituents as far as possible in the interests of peace but not so far that the band snaps (Gormley-Heenan, 2001). Others may employ ‘leash leadership’, maintaining tight control over views that diverge from the status quo and reigning in inflammatory perspectives. Neither is particularly ambitious, as while they might preserve an element of fit with the context, they take – at best – an incremental approach to much needed change.

Transformational leadership theories

Transformational theories of leadership appeal to self-transcendent values to pursue shared goals for the common good, provoking change within individuals and social systems. As such, the concept taps into people’s intrinsic motivations, aiming to enhance motivation and morale. According to Burns (1978, p. 20), transformational leadership occurs “when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and reality”. This contrasts sharply with transactional forms of leadership,

which focus on negotiated cost/benefit exchange (Gardner, 1990). Transformational forms of leadership also prioritize connected relationships between leaders and followers. Leaders mobilize followers partly through charisma, but while charisma is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own (Yammarino, 1993).

Studies have examined the role that transformational leadership can play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, some of which demonstrate that it can have a positive impact (Samatar and Kising, 2018; Sentongo and Warfield, 2011). Certainly, transformational leadership resonates well with one of the core principles of peacebuilding, which is that interventions should seek to ‘transform’ conflict by addressing its root causes of conflict. There has also been some examination of how religious leaders do and do not employ transformational leadership within peacebuilding. Langley and Kahnweiler (2003) found that African American churches with transformational leaders were more likely to be involved in socio-political concerns. Meanwhile, former Methodist President Harold Good reflected on the lost opportunity for transformational leadership in Northern Ireland, where religious leaders failed to “paint a vision of what the world could be” (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2011, p. 100).

Servant leadership

Do those served grow as persons? “Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 9). These are questions posed by Robert Greenleaf in the 1960s and early 1970s in setting out the model of servant leadership. The concept of servant leadership is predicated on the care and development of followers (Peachey and Burton, 2017) and so anchors the concept of leadership to the needs of followers, rather than the traits or talents of leaders. In doing so, it has an interesting parallel with the concept of human security – a paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities in which the interests of individuals, not states, are the central concern. In both, the least powerful and most vulnerable are considered to be the proper referent for peacebuilding, and leadership should be altruistic. Servant leadership is particularly crucial in crisis situations, when humanitarian, development, and peace organizations “need servant leaders concerned with saving lives or resolving wicked problems more than addressing turf battles between institutional and organization service delivery” (Campbell, 2018, p. 7).

The concept of servant leadership has been explored within peacebuilding, humanitarianism, and development. Peachey and Burton (2017) found that it empowers followers, leads to more sustainable and effective organizations, supports psychological needs, and diffuses issues of power and control. Servant leadership resonates strongly with Christian scripture and tradition, though the Christian interpretation does differ in some ways from that presented by modern leadership scholars (Shirin, 2014). In Christianity, Jesus came to the world not to rule over people but to serve and told his disciples that whoever wants to lead should also be like a servant. Calvocoressi (2015) charts how the implementation of servant leadership principles within the Christian International Peace Service has enabled the organization to be “incredibly effective” in contributing to peace.

Faith-based leadership in times of crisis: the good, the bad, and the indifferent

As we have seen, religious leaders can and do engage in peacebuilding. Leadership exists within the clergy and the laity, among men and women, and at all levels of seniority. It can take different forms, from the charismatic to the situational, transformational and servant based. Sometimes

the actions of faith leaders are pivotal, creating seismic shifts that swing the pendulum towards peace. More often, their contributions create small, incremental changes, influencing the attitudes, behaviour, and everyday experiences of individual people, therein laying foundations for progress. Initiatives that bring together religious leaders to support peace have proliferated at the local, national, regional, and international levels. These initiatives may be intrafaith (within one faith tradition) or interfaith (between faith traditions) or collaborations between the faithful and the avidly secular. They may be externally sponsored, through international donors and global NGOs, or they may draw on the communities' own resources.

Clearly, the critical role of religious leaders – living and dead, human and deified – cannot be overestimated (Gopin, 2002). Faith leaders influence their communities, providing moral guidance, and can also be persuasive to policymakers (Hayward and Marshall, 2015, p. 11). A recent community perception survey in Mandera County, Kenya, demonstrated that religious leaders were among the most trusted conflict resolution actors, with 83.4% considering them “very effective” within a 500-respondent survey conducted across all seven sub-counties in the region (Payne, 2019). Similarly, the author's work in Afghanistan underlined the extent to which religion is the primary lens through which moral, social, and political issues are approached, with perspectives rooted in Islam being considered well reasoned and evidence based (Payne, 2018). Yet while religious leaders play valuable leadership roles, it is important not to instrumentalize them. Approaches that value religious leaders narrowly, as useful tools or instruments, risk forming relationships that are extractive or overly transactional. Faith leaders are rightly scrutinized, but they should also be afforded the freedom to engage autonomously and to be the architects of their own approaches, even when these are out of step with more liberal and technocratic peacebuilding methods.

Religious leadership may be demonstrably important in peacebuilding, but it is not always forthcoming. Faith leaders can also use their influence negatively or not at all. Religious elites may provide a “warrant for violence” and the “ideological justification, moral reasoning, and call to action that create conditions for collective confrontation in deeply divided societies” (Sisk, 2011). They can inflame tensions through hate preaching, perpetuating stereotypes, and dehumanizing others (for instance, by labelling people of other faiths or no faith as ‘infidels’). Perhaps even more perniciously, they may sustain or fail to challenge unjust systems, such as South Africa's former apartheid, or maintain institutional discrimination, such as in India's caste system. Some Christian churches were ‘deeply implicated’ in the Rwandan genocide, with churches a major site for massacres and church leaders participating in the slaughter (Longman, 2001). Faith leaders may also stigmatize women survivors of sexual violence and oppose women's involvement in peacebuilding processes (Hayward and Marshall, 2015). Weak leadership can also be problematic. Appleby (2015) describes how the demolition of Cambodian Buddhist organizations during the civil war weakened connections between the lay community and the sangha (the Buddhist community of monks, nuns, and novices). This left younger Cambodians “untutored in Buddhist values and precepts” that support peacebuilding (Appleby, 2015, p. 201). More generally, weak leadership on one or both sides of a conflict can hinder peacemaking, as weaker leaders are less able to extract and make concessions (Rothstein, 1999, p. 10).

Faith as a resource to sustain a peacebuilding leadership

One of the often overlooked realities of peacebuilding work is that it is fraught with danger. “Many peace actors work under extreme conditions and with major difficulties. They sacrifice not only their time and funds but also risk their own lives as well as the lives of their family members” (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana, 2008). In some contexts, a faith identity may

reduce these risks. The author recalls that in Jos, Nigeria, the joint sponsorship of the Catholic Archbishop of Jos and the Emir of Wase allowed a local peacebuilding organization to travel to insecure and highly volatile areas (interview with JDPC-Jos representative in Jos, 2013). Similarly, in the Solomon Islands, an Anglican faith leader explained how the Melanesian Brotherhood was able to travel to provide humanitarian support during the tensions of 1999–2003: “The brothers could travel even when normal people would be questioned or hurt. It would be taboo to hurt a brother” (senior leader in The Melanesian Brotherhood in Honiara, 2014).¹ When risk cannot be mitigated, religious leaders may draw strength from their faith, for instance by finding courage in stories told in religious texts or in the ideals embodied in a deity or deities. Hunter-Bowman and Lederach (2013) observe that ‘imitation motif’ courses through many Christian traditions, calling Christians to be Christ-like in their behaviours by healing others, crossing identity boundaries, and challenging oppression in order to build a socially just peace.

Peacebuilding can also exact a punishing personal toll on those who engage in it. The relentlessness of the enterprise requires considerable stamina, and those involved must find ways to contend with hopelessness at times. Yet “the many challenges and set-backs with which long-term peacebuilders are confronted can be significantly addressed by commitment, passion, and emotional energy, which are generated by motivation for peacebuilding which is deeply rooted in religious belief or inspiration” (Hertog, 2010). Faith leaders can contextualize their experiences of hardship, persecution, and struggle within the stories of their faith. Hunter-Bowman and Lederach (2013) describe how, in the Catholic tradition, leaders are challenged to seek out God’s grace even in seeming impossible circumstances and also are sustained through the affirmation that, through God’s presence, transformation is possible. The presence of a faith community can also provide much needed emotional and practical support, encouraging leaders to persist in their efforts even when the outlook is bleak.

Of course, faith leaders have access to many other resources that can sustain them in their peacebuilding leadership. Some of these have already been discussed, such as their institutional structures, access to networks, platforms for advocacy, and social standing. Many leaders have also built personal trust and legitimacy over time, demonstrating qualities such as personal integrity, piety, honesty, and compassion. However, the challenges of navigating risk and maintaining stamina and hope have been highlighted because they are two particularly important issues that all peacebuilding leaders face, and yet they remain largely unexplored – perhaps relegated to the personal realm or considered tangentially as matters of ‘well-being’. It may be that some of the measures used by faith-based peacebuilders, of drawing from core beliefs or ideals and nurturing a supportive community, could be helpful to others who are not already adopting and benefiting from them.

Conclusion: towards better leadership

As this chapter has shown, religious leaders engaged in peacebuilding work have many things in their favour. In particular, their roles as faith leaders enable them to develop many of the qualities that are essential for resolving conflict and building sustainable peace. Their institutional structures also allow them to leverage existing platforms and resources, so they do not have to develop organizational bodies and funding streams from scratch in the way many secular changemakers have to. However, qualities and resources are not all that are required for successful peacebuilding. Increasingly, peace work is a technical and professionalized endeavour requiring a distinct set of skills and a grounding in peace theory. This professionalization should not be overplayed, lest it exclude those without formal training and tip the balance of power further in the favour of global organizations and away from local, volunteer-led initiatives. However,

it is important to acknowledge the need for broader and more advanced skills development for local peacebuilders, including religious leaders. This should include but not be limited to development of leadership skills. As Dubois (2008) notes, “Like others in the peacebuilding and NGO sectors, religious actors would do well to advance professionally, increase accountability to people on the ground, and continue to limit the potential to do harm”. The provision of such training may also be an opportunity to strengthen links between religious peacebuilding leaders of different faiths and between them and others within the peacebuilding sector. It also has the potential to open up opportunities for collaboration, funding, and thought leadership, as faith leaders become more capable partners able to take on more significant levels of programmatic responsibility.

Note

- 1 Tragically, the ‘taboo’ of hurting members of The Melanesian Brotherhood was not universally held, and in late April 2003 seven members of the order were tortured and murdered by the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army after visiting the militants to negotiate peace.

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