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The Impact of Faith: Does Religion Make a Difference in Political Conflict?

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1. Summary

The paper contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of religious traditions in politics. After briefly discussing several approaches to the study of the current world-wide revival of religions, a simple elite-based model of strategic choices in political conflicts is introduced. We argue that, although differences in religious creed are hardly ever a genuine source of political conflict, under certain conditions, they shape conflict behavior decisively in the direction of either escalation or de-escalation. The paper goes on to examine three different types of strategies which are expected to help control, if not reduce, the violence-promoting impact of religious creeds on the course of political confrontations: (1) strategies of socioeconomic development and democratization that are designed to manage the underlying modernization crisis; (2) strategies of intimidation and repression which aim at increasing the costs of violent resistance and uprisings; (3) the dialogue strategy which seeks to delegitimize the use of violence for the advancement of particular interests. The remainder of the paper focuses on this third strategy that is devised to initiate a dialogue - or to reinforce the on-going dialogues - among the world's religions in order to achieve and strengthen an inter-religious world ethos. Such an ethos is held to broaden the space for cooperative forms of conflict management during socioeconomic crises thus preventing political conflicts from escalating into violent clashes.

2. Introduction

As observed by numerous scholars, a revival of religious traditions is taking place nearly all over the world (Cox 1994: 266f; Juergensmeyer 1993; Kepel 1991; Marty/Appleby 1993). And what is frightening, in many cases this renaissance has been accompanied by violent conflicts resulting in grave bloodshed. Take, for example, the civil wars in Algeria, former Yugoslavia, Palestine, Sudan, India or Sri Lanka. For peace and conflict research(ers) it is therefore an urgent task to analyze the relationships between conflict, religion, and violence. In this regard, three positions can be distinguished among scholars.

Table 1: *Three Approaches to Analyze the Impact of Faith on Politics*

	Primordialists	Instrumentalists	Constructivists
Basic Conflict	Cultural	Socio-economic	Socio-economic

Religion	Independent Variable	Spurious Correlation	Intervening Variable
Expectations	Cultural Re-alignments and Wars of Religions	Socio-economic Cleavages and Civil Wars	Socio-economic Cleavages, Political Conflicts, and Contingent Militancy/Violence
Recommended Strategy	Balance of Power/Threat	Development and Modernization	Dialogue (+)
Goal	Stable Deterrence	Fair Distribution of Life Chances	Culture of Mutual Respect

The first position is represented by authors like Samuel Huntington (1993; 1996), Gilles Kepel (1991) or Bassam Tibi (1995). We will refer to them as "primordialists". Primordialists argue that cultural and religious convictions will determine world politics in the next century. Religion is seen as a stable and pivotal characteristic of any civilization, and the authors believe that it produces uncontrollable forces which not only set members of different religious communities against one another but often drive them into violent conflict. Religion establishes who is one's friend and who is one's foe. It intensifies cooperation among like-minded peoples and makes war more likely among nations of different creeds. Primordialists therefore expect international alliances to form along the lines of religious solidarities and foresee the beginning of a new era of religious wars.

According to this point of view, the violence in Bosnia and Palestine provides some foreboding of what will happen in the future. Faced with the prospect of a "clash of civilizations", primordialists recommend the classic strategies of power politics in order to prevent its escalation into large-scale violent conflict with disastrous outcomes for the West. As in Cold War times, only a stable balance of threat is supposed to forestall the horrors of World War III in the form of a deadly struggle for religious hegemony.

A second group of authors, whom we label "instrumentalist", oppose the view that differences of religious creed are genuine causes of political conflict, be it at the national or at the international level (see among others Fuller 1995; Meyer 1997; Senghaas 1998). According to instrumentalists, the revival of religion, although by far not irrelevant politically, should be seen as an epiphenomenon that rests on underlying economic and social tensions. A number of observations are adduced to support this view, and in the following we will briefly discuss two of them.

(1) In international politics, we do not observe the formation of alliances along religiously or culturally defined lines. The vast majority of wars in the recent past have been civil wars that were waged in culturally homogeneous areas (see Gantzel 1997; Rabehl/Trines 1997). Take, for example, the war between numerous clans in Somalia, the violent clashes in Algeria and Egypt, or the fights in Kurdish areas of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. In view of these findings, Nye (1995: 17) has argued that - currently - we are not witnessing the formation of a new, coherent world order, but a process of fragmentation and regionalization. This process does not follow the logic of Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" but is fueled by a "narcissism of small differences". Comparatively minor divergences in the understanding of the sacred as for example between Sunnites and Shiites or between Catholics and Protestants become highly significant in the escalation of conflict behavior while the more general common ground of the engaged parties is pushed into the background.

(2) Furthermore, in most cases religious radicalization and the politicalization of religious traditions follows economic decay and social desintegration (Faksh 1994: 187-194; Fuller 1995: 149-155; Kepel 1991: 61). Desperate people subject to poverty and marginalization turn to their religious traditions in search for an alternative political order that satisfies their need for welfare and recognition. Power-seeking political elites then try, often with success, to exploit this renewed interest in the sacred for their own aggrandizement (Gurr 1996:55; Wimmer 1995: 469). As they recast political adversaries into foes of faith, they acquire the support of those whose faith has become their last resort (Gurr 1996: 74; Senghaas 1995: 187). Therefore, the observed relationship between religion and violence amounts to a spurious correlation, and

there is not much point in exploring the political consequences of the revival of religion any further.

The empirical evidence, thus, does not support the primordialists' hypothesis of the autonomous, conflict-generating power of religious differences. Belief in divine truth seemingly attains greater political significance only in times of social and economic unrest. Additionally, the political mobilization of religious communities depends on the contingent interests of power-conscious elites. Therefore, from the instrumentalists' point of view, it is crucial to devise and implement adequate strategies of modernization and growth to defuse the world's grave socio-economic conflicts. Otherwise, the international community has to reckon with further civil wars as well as with the instrumentalization of religion by power-seeking war-mongers.

In this paper, we wish to present and defend a third position in the debate about the role of religious faith in political confrontations. Its representatives can be called "constructivists" (Hopf 1998; Snyder 1993; Tishkov 1997). Constructivists regard social conflicts as embedded in cognitive structures such as ideology, nationalism, ethnicity or religion. These structures, which consist of "shared understandings, expectations, and social knowledge" (Wendt 1994: 389), provide individual actors with value-laden conceptions of the self and other and consequently affect their strategic choices. For instance, cognitive structures help to identify friends and foes, and, following constructivists' reasoning, this distinction often makes a crucial difference for the management of otherwise similar social conflicts. In the second case, the recourse to violence is much more likely than in the first case. Conversely, in the first case, the probability that a mutually satisfying solution to the conflict will be found is *certeris paribus* much higher than in the second case.

Thus, for constructivists, cognitive structures are not mere epiphenomena of deeper material causes, but, unlike primordialists, constructivists view these structures as mutable (Tishkov 1997: 12; Kaufmann 1996: 152-155; Snyder 1993: 5f). They depend on social discourses, which, as Wendt (1987: 359) has put it, "are inseparable from the reasons and self-understandings that agents bring to their actions". Therefore, the rhetorical power of political entrepreneurs is not without limits. They have to convince their constituencies of their world view and they are always vulnerable to countervailing arguments which might undermine their authority.

Additionally, most constructivists share the instrumentalists' view that incompatible creeds are only in very rare cases genuine causes of conflicts (Johnston 1994b: 263; Juergensmeyer 1996: 19; Cox 1994: 266f). But this does not necessarily render religion meaningless for the course of political confrontations. Power-seeking elites do instrumentalize religious traditions and they regularly make the experience that this helps their own aggrandizement. The expectation that "religions matter" is further supported by the finding that confrontations often escalate comparatively fast when religious faith gets involved (Juergensmeyer 1993: 153). Therefore, constructivists propose to analyze the spiritual convictions of the conflicting parties as an intervening variable, i.e. as a causal factor intervening between conflict and the choice of conflict behavior.

In order to explore the impact of religious faith on political conflicts, we will introduce (section 3) a simple model taking the position of the "constructivists" as its point of departure. It distinguishes between *conflict* defined by the issues in contention and *conflict behavior* ranging from peaceful accommodation to aggressive self-help. We will argue that only in rare cases are incompatible religious creeds a genuine source of conflicts but that, under certain conditions, they shape the conflict behavior of religious believers (section 4). Put differently, religious faith can contribute to the onset and escalation of militant conflict behavior as well as to its deescalation and even its prevention in the first place. Following this, we will discuss strategies designed to control the impact of religious faith on conflict behavior (section 5). In this context, we will refer, inter alia, to the ideas of Hans Küng (1992, 1997) which are currently much discussed in Germany. Küng proposes that strategies be devised to initiate a dialogue - or to reinforce the on-going dialogues - among the world's religions in order to achieve and strengthen an inter-religious world ethos. As already suggested in the preamble of the UNESCO Charter, Küng's strategy emphasizes that "wars begin in the minds of men" and "it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". It is important, therefore, to strengthen people's principled disapproval of violence. This principled disapproval of violence is expected to enhance the space for cooperative forms of conflict management during social and economic crises. Under such conditions, even severe political conflicts would not necessarily result in violent clashes.

In Table 1 we put a "plus" next to the dialogue strategy, for constructivists are well aware that the propagation of peace-loving attitudes alone is no guarantee for a lasting peace (Hopf 1998: 177). Dialogues must be supplemented - as far as possible - with economic and political development strategies and sometimes - as a last resort - with means of force. Nevertheless, the success of these strategies depends, in the final analysis, on the willingness of vast fractions of the population to respect the rights of minorities and to reject violence as a means of conflict management. Additionally, this majority should be ready to support democratization and a system of broadly inclusive constitutional government. According to Hans Küng, it is exactly here that the positive power of religions to encourage peaceful conflict settlement is to be found.

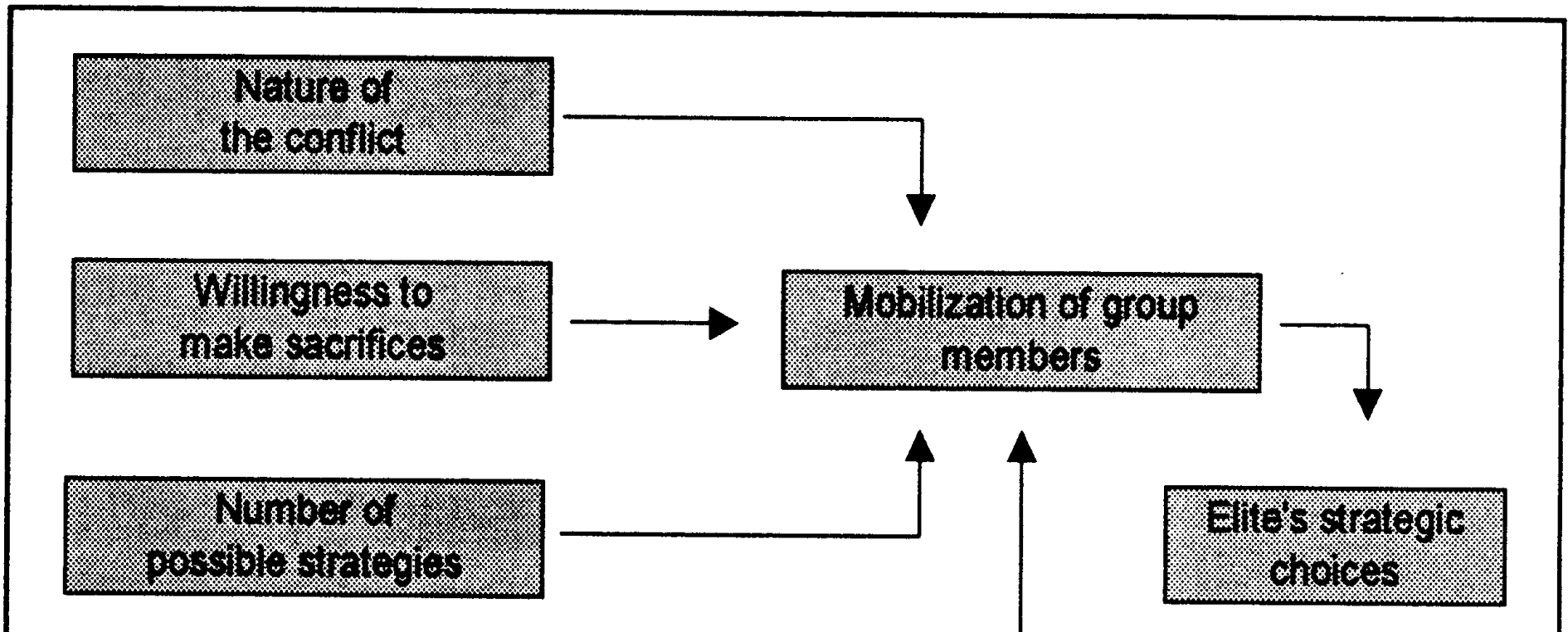
Before we start with presenting the conflict model, two further preliminary remarks are appropriate: (a) There is little systematic research on the positive and negative

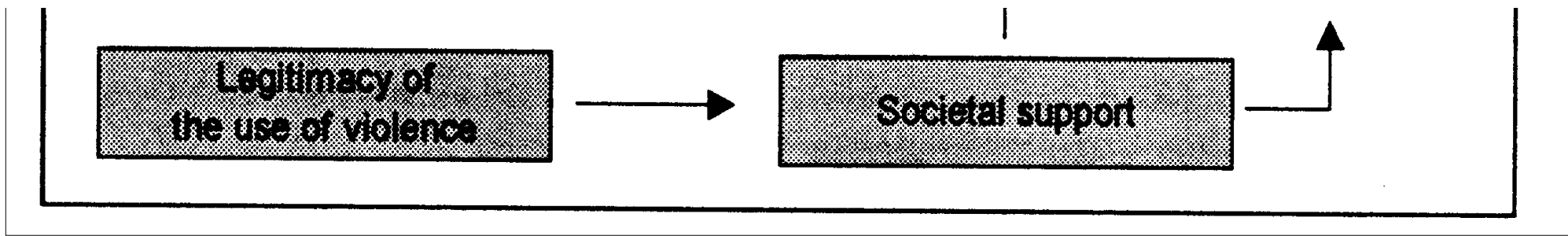
impact of religious faith on the course of conflicts. Neither is there much systematic research on adequate strategies for dealing with conflicts with a religious dimension peacefully. This paper should therefore be understood primarily as a theoretical contribution to the on-going discussion about the impact of religious faith on conflicts. It aims at preparing the basis for further research in this field of inquiry. (b) The background of our analysis is German peace and conflict research. We are particularly interested in the identification of conditions for peaceful conflict management and settlement. In other words, we are concerned with the prevention of violence, or, when it occurs, with its early termination in such a way that the goals and means of peace-making remain mutually commensurate.

3. The Conflict Model

Social conflicts are conflicts between groups, and the way in which these conflicts are managed depends on a multitude of factors (Coser 1965; Kriesberg 21982: 87-90; Weede 1986: 47). These factors include, *inter alia*, the nature of the conflict, the historical experiences of the involved parties, the degree of organization of the parties, the environment of the parties, that is, the national and transnational social context in which the conflict is embedded, etc. In order to keep this extraordinary causal complexity manageable, analytical simplifications are both necessary and permissible. Therefore, we start our analysis with the strategic choices of elites in social conflicts. [1] Elites are conceptualized as rational actors who calculate the cost and benefits of alternative strategies in order to maximize their utilities. They know that violence is an extremely risky policy instrument and that the success of violent strategies depends on at least two conditions: (1) the mobilization of their constituencies and (2) the support for the use of violent strategies in a given society.

Table 2: Determinants of Elite's Strategic Choices





Without the readiness of the elite's constituency to invest time and resources into achieving the group's goals, a social conflict can neither be waged nor successfully settled. Therefore, the following rule of thumb seems appropriate: The higher the mobilization of the group's members, the riskier will be the strategies which the elites are likely to choose. Additionally, adversaries in a conflict do not stand alone, and their success is crucially affected by the degree of societal support they can muster for their cause. The prospects of success for a party then decrease to the extent to which its goals, and the means by which it attempts to achieve them, are rejected in society. This decrease of societal support - in turn - has repercussions on the degree to which the group's members are likely to be mobilized: The risk that their involvement does not pay off increases, and their readiness to invest time and resources into a (possibly violent) conflict management decreases correspondingly.

In summary, the probability that elites choose violent strategies to pursue their goals varies with both the mobilization of the group's members and the support of the social environment. In the following, we will distinguish three determinants which are widely held to influence the mobilization of a group's members. Then, we will turn to the probability of societal support for elites that pursue violent strategies in social conflicts. These considerations will form the analytical framework for further reflections on the impact of religious faith on the course of conflicts.

(1) *The degree of mobilization depends on the nature of the conflict.*

With regard to the nature of conflicts the literature distinguishes conflicts about interests and conflicts about values (Aubert 1972: 180-184; Mitchell 1981: 35f). Conflicts about interests deal with the distribution of scarce goods or resources which are desired by all actors involved. In conflicts about values, by contrast, actors disagree about what is desirable and the moral principle(s) by which (alternative) actions are to be judged and decisions are to be made. Whereas the competition for governmental positions can be regarded as a conflict about interests, a conflict about the constitution of a state falls into the category of conflicts about values. Whereas the first case deals with the distribution of a scarce good or resource, in the second case the most general principles of the system of rule are at stake.

Conflicts about values are particularly prone to violence. (Kriesberg ²1982: 30-35; Rubin/Pruitt/Kim 1994: 15; Rittberger/Zürn 1990: 29-32). This is the case for three reasons: Firstly, individuals identify with the values of their group (Coser 1965: 143; Mitchell 1981: 87f). If the latter are at stake, this is perceived as an existential threat. As a result, the readiness of a group's members to mobilize more resources for the defense of these values and also to use violence, if necessary, increases *ceteris paribus*. Secondly, the use of violence in conflicts about values is regarded as justified. It is the defense of what a group assumes as right or wrong, as just or unjust, and of what makes up its identity. The adversary thus appears not just as somebody who attempts to pursue his or her interests, but as somebody who violates fundamental moral norms. In so doing he or she forfeits his or her right for a fair and nonviolent treatment. (Mitchell 1981: 94f; Rubin/Pruitt/Kim 1994: 85). Finally, the readiness to use violence in conflicts about values is reinforced by the belief that compromises are out of reach, and that a defeat would be tantamount to a total overthrow of one's beliefs. Therefore, the logic of such conflicts is one of "all or nothing". Either one party is able to prevail, or it has to give in completely. In this case the party would have to submit to the values of the adversary and his conception of what is a legitimate social order.

(2) *The degree of mobilization depends on the self-sacrificing attitudes of the group's members.*

The second determinant with regard to the degree of mobilization depends on the willingness of the group's members to make sacrifices. The higher this willingness is, the more practicable will be, *ceteris paribus*, the use of violent conflict strategies by the group's leaders. The use of violence is expensive and risky (Kriesberg ²1982: 134; Muller/Weede 1993: 52). The group's members and their sympathizers in the wider societal environment must reckon with repressions and counter-offensives on the part of their adversary. Therefore, elites when making the decision to use violence must be sure that their constituencies are prepared to pay a high price for achieving their aims. A lack of willingness to make sacrifices among the group's members leads, *vice versa*, to the recognition that the use of violent strategies promises hardly any success. Even if core values are at stake, the probability decreases that elites then choose these strategies to pursue its goals. [2]

(3) The degree of mobilization depends on the relationship between the conflict parties.

The willingness to use violence in a conflict is higher to the extent to which other strategies of attaining one's goals appear to be not available. Whether or not alternative strategies appear to be available depends on the relationship between the conflict parties. Peaceful strategies for conflict management presuppose a certain degree of trust. Each party must be convinced that it will not be harmed when cooperating with the other. If this minimum trust in each other is lacking, chances are high that each party chooses non-cooperative strategies for conflict management. Non-cooperative strategies aim at achieving one's goals without taking the other's preferences into consideration. Therefore, they tend to lead quickly to an escalation of conflict behavior in the direction of violent self-help (Kriesberg ²1982: 186-189).

(4) The degree of societal support depends on the public justification for the use of violence.

The probability that elites choose violent strategies in social conflicts does not only vary with the degree of mobilization of their constituencies but also with the real or anticipated reaction of the wider societal environment which they have to take into account (Gurr 1996: 69; Kriesberg ²1982: 147f). [3] The likelihood of success thus depends on those who are not directly involved in a given conflict. If a conflict party loses societal support, its prospects for achieving its goals decrease. This will be even more the case, the more previously uncommitted individuals or groups join the adversary because they disapprove of how he is treated. The use of violence in social and political conflicts is thus in need of particular justifications (Kriesberg ²1982: 185). Therefore, elites are prone to choose violent strategies to the extent to which they are recognized as legitimate in society. When the use of violence cannot be justified, the danger is high that the militant conflict party loses support whereas the victimized adversary wins support. Thus the violent party's chances to achieve its goals decrease. This, however, has negative repercussions on the mobilization of the party's members and sympathizers and thus again diminishes its prospects for prevailing in a given conflict situation.

4. Religious Faith and Conflict Behavior

As already indicated above, religious differences are rarely genuine sources of contemporary conflicts. Rather, the politicization of religious faith and its conflict-escalating consequences are more often than not an outgrowth of social and economic turbulences. People feel a particularly intense economic and cultural pressure as processes of modernization destroy their traditional way of life. They lose both their material security and their intellectual orientation. This makes them join religious communities which operate, in the first place, as a refuge of solidarity and cultural re-affirmation. Militant elites then take advantage of the renaissance of religious communities transforming them into political movements. They convince the "new believers" that their enclaves of solidarity are threatened by, again religiously defined, political adversaries who want to destroy them and that they have to fight for their religious convictions if they do not want to lose them. This mixture of the elite's political targets with the religious convictions of the group's members forms a highly explosive compound. The enrichment of social conflicts with religious symbols makes them particularly prone to violence (Juergensmeyer 1993: 153). This is due to three reasons:

(1) Upgrading one's own claims and downgrading the claims of the adversary.

The interpretation of social conflicts as religious conflicts leads to their radicalization. One's own claims tend to become exorbitant and the other's claims blasphemous having no moral justification at all (Appleby 1996a: 5; Juergensmeyer 1993: 22-23; Little 1996: 82-83). At the extreme, satanic streaks are ascribed to the members of the other conflict party (Juergensmeyer 1996: 13-15). For example, during the civil war in former Yugoslavia the fate of the Serbs' President and of his followers was identified with that of Jesus whereas the Bosnian Muslims were compared to Judas, the traitor, being not in a position to be forgiven ever (Little 1996: 83). All means seem to be legitimate in such conflicts; the adversary has no right to mercy. This is because he is seen as having excluded himself from the God-wanted Order that he now threatens and whose peace he disturbs. One's own claims, however, are regarded as holy and their fulfillment serves true peace. This will be achieved when the adversary is defeated and the believers are again able to live in agreement with their faith.

(2) Increase of willingness to make sacrifices.

Since Cicero's "De natura Deorum" at the latest, selflessness in serving the Divine is considered a trait of the true believer (Schaeffler 1985: 59). As social psychologist Günter Bierbrauer (1995: 56) observes, by virtue of promising a meaningful existence on earth as well as immortality in heaven (or reincarnation), faith sets free enormous forces within believers. Those, who are seized by the Divine give everything and do not fear anything even if their creed might lead them to grief or death. Religiously motivated suicide commandos such as Hamas militants in Palestine show how strong such convictions can be: Committing such a deed, they believe, will

make them enter paradise as martyrs. By idealizing grief in this world, on the one hand, and by giving hope for rewards in another world (or in heaven), on the other hand, faith enhances the margin of action for political elites. They know they can demand and expect high sacrifices from the group's members even over a long period of time (Little 1996: 87; Smith 1993: 57).

(3) *Loss of Trust.*

From the perspective of a Holy War it is to be assumed that there is deep mistrust between the parties. One cannot expect sincerity from the representatives of the Evil. Rather, it is to be expected that they use any concession for their own self-aggrandizement. For the adversary is seen as a fanatic. As long he has the option to do so, he will attempt to achieve his goals by any means. In other words, there is a zero-sum-situation between the parties. Both are convinced that the other side will seize every advantage for their own struggle for supremacy. Each party therefore tries to make use of every option to improve its standing in the conflict. In so doing, the conception of the other as an enemy is reinforced and the course of the conflict worsening. Expectations and actual behavior are reproduced in a way to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A vicious circle of antagonism and, eventually, violence arises from which it is difficult to escape (Nevers 1993: 33).

5. Strategies of Conflict De-Escalation

In the first part of this paper, we developed a simple model of strategic choices in social conflicts. We argued that elites are more likely to choose violent means when the mobilization of their group's members and sympathizers is high and when they can reckon with broad support in society. In a second step, we outlined that and how the politicization of religious traditions enhances the mobilization of a group's members and consequently increases the probability of conflict escalation. In the remainder of the paper, we will discuss three different types of strategies which are expected to help control, or even to reduce, the violence promoting impact of religious faith on social and political conflicts: (1) strategies of socioeconomic development and democratization that are designed to manage the modernization crisis; (2) strategies of intimidation and suppression which increase the costs of violent uprisings; and (3) the dialogue strategy aiming at delegitimizing the use of violence in conflicts. In a final section (4) we will briefly outline two conditions for a successful implementation of the dialogue strategy.

Table 3: *Three Strategies to Cope with the Impact of Faith on Social Conflicts*

	Development and Democratization	Deterrence	Dialogue
Focal Point	Socio-economic Conflict	Conflict Behavior	Conflict Behavior
Counter-measure	Material Welfare	Military Warfare	Moral Enlightenment
Goal	Making violence unnecessary	Making violence irrational	Making violence illegitimate

Causal Mechanism	Welfare lowers identification with religious communities Welfare decreases mobilization and public support for violent strategies	Military suppression denies political success Military suppression counterbalances increased willingness to make sacrifices	Exposing the political instrumentalization of religious traditions Emphasizing the intrinsic value of all human beings Enabling cooperation by enhancing mutual trust and monitoring agreements
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All three strategies focus on the societal context of the adversaries since they aim at preventing various segments of society from supporting or even joining militant conflict parties. If successful, these strategies marginalize, or even isolate, those actors who use violence in the pursuit of their goals. Militant activists then have to downscale their expectations of success, and, correspondingly, their own readiness, and the readiness of their constituents to invest time and resources in violent conflict behavior decreases. In other words, the underlying assumption of this part of our paper is that, if societal support for violent conflict behavior vanishes, a militant group will, sooner or later, cease to pursue its goals with violent conflict behavior.

(1) Strategies of socioeconomic development and democratization.

It is widely accepted among scholars that the current political renaissance of religion is a consequence of a worldwide economic and developmental crisis (Gurr 1996: 55; Juergensmeyer 1993: 194; Karawan 1997: 14-16). Therefore, if this crisis can be managed, the attraction of religious communities will decrease and the likelihood of religious convictions being used for the mobilization of a group's members for the purpose of violent conflict behavior will diminish. The number of content people will increase while militant groups lose their support base in society. The majority of people will reject violence as a legitimate means in political conflicts and will turn to moderate religious and political leaders. In short, as the distributional conflicts in a society lose their severity, the attractiveness of violent forms of protest decreases.

From this perspective, it is obvious that policy-makers should foster economic "growth with distribution" in order to improve the economic and social situation in the societies concerned. Senghaas (1994: 109-113, 148-152; 1998: 185-186, 216) maintains, for example, that the current crisis in many developing countries can be defused by imitating the success story of OECD states. For this purpose, development aid should be used to stimulate good governance, the establishment of well-functioning markets and the education of the people. In the medium and long term, prosperity will be the result. Even more importantly, economic growth will cause gradual democratization and pluralization of developing societies. This is supposed to further reduce the political salience of faith (Bartley 1993: 17; Senghaas 1995: 187-90). As in Europe of the 19th and 20th centuries, secularization processes should then gain momentum referring questions of faith to the private sphere of individuals. Thus, religious differences will not, or will only at the margins, translate into political differences.

The central problem of implementing economic development and democratization strategies is that they presuppose a viable state (Campos/Root 1996; Snider 1996). Senghaas (1998: 186), for instance, argues that the positive experiences in Europe and East Asia would have been unthinkable without the state as a modernizing force. In many developing countries as well as in numerous regions of the former Soviet Union, however, the state cannot operate as 'crisis manager' because it is itself a part of the current crisis (Jackson 1990; Snyder 1993: 7; Welsh 1993: 64). Additionally, in these parts of the world religious institutions are often the only functioning social organizations that can muster the loyalty of people and that can serve as reliable networks of political communication (Rubin 1994: 24). The expectation that economic and social conflicts can be defused by virtue of economic development and democratization is therefore in many cases deceptive. It remains to be seen, then, how the instrumentalization of religious faith by power-seeking elites can be kept in check.

In this context, scholars discuss two other strategies: One consists of questioning the rationality of violence as a political instrument, the other one tries to diminish its legitimacy. The first strategy is designed to decrease the mobilization of activists as well as the societal support for violence by denying militant elites and their followers the achievement of even their most immediate goals. The second strategy aims at turning a conflict party's members away from violence and at minimizing the societal support for violent conflict strategies through information and moral persuasion.

(2) Strategies of intimidation and suppression.

A look at the behavior of states' elites in developing countries as for example in Algeria or Egypt reveals that they often fall back upon strategies of intimidation and suppression for the purpose of holding down militant opposition and pacifying the wider society (Gurr 1993: 177; Juergensmeyer 1993: 24). Due to the protracted development crisis in many developing countries, the distributive margins turned so narrow that the legitimacy of a state's elites has been eroded. Only well-paid troops seem to be able to suppress rebellions. They eliminate militant activists and threaten parts of the population with mass arrests and the destruction of their livelihood if they do not refrain from supporting the militant opposition. These massive threats raise the costs of supporting rebellious groups. They serve to counter-balance the potential mobilization effects of the sacred and the religiously motivated willingness to make sacrifices. Strategies of intimidation and suppression aim therefore at building up military superiority which guarantees the psycho-physical control of society. Open resistance is turned into an act of desperation and entails very high risks.

Strategies designed to intimidate and suppress militant opposition groups are highly dubious as a means of restoring a peaceful social order. Admittedly, there may be situations in which the use of force against organized militant activists by legitimate state actors might be justifiable on moral and legal grounds. This presupposes, however, that these militant activists have already challenged the state's monopoly of force and are violating the rules of civilized conflict behavior. Additionally, any state action must continue to respect human rights. As far as we can see, in many parts of the world these conditions are not honored by state actors.

Furthermore, the success of intimidation and suppression strategies remains - if a violent suppression can be said to be a success at all - uncertain. Kaufmann (1996: 151) and Gurr/Harff (1994: 105), for instance, point to the continuing fights of the Kurds in Iraq (and elsewhere) for more autonomy or the establishment of their own state. Even the extremely brutal action of Iraqi troops in the course of the Al-Anfal campaign - the population of entire villages was killed by the use of poison gas - could not break the Kurdish will for autonomy or independence permanently. Similarly, the unyielding policy of the Algerian government towards the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) has remained without success (Ruf 1997: 59f; Viorst 1997). The Algerian government's action sparked off a spiral of violence and counter-violence. As in many other civil wars, scholars fear that the civil war in Algeria will be fought until the conflict parties are completely exhausted (Faksh 1994: 217; Tzschaschel 1996: 32).

(3) Dialogue strategy.

The dialogue strategy seeks to delegitimize the use of force in political conflicts. Its aim is to enhance the inner resistance of people to support, or to engage in, violent behavior. For this purpose the proponents of dialogue do not in the first place seek to convince militant activists of the value of forgoing the use of force but rather to strengthen the violence averse moderates in a given society. Take the case of Palestine: A dialogue strategy would not spend too many resources on trying to convert radical Hamas' activists to peaceful conflict behavior. Rather, its proponents will try to keep the number of Hamas' militant followers and sympathizers as small as possible and to reinforce the moderates among the Hamas' rank-and-file as well as within Palestinian society at large.

To win over moderates, the dialogue strategy by necessity relies on convincing arguments that motivate people from within. In contrast to the two other strategies discussed so far which operate primarily on external incentives for action, it is the proverbial "struggle for people's minds" which is practiced here, and this is where Hans Küng (1992: 86) sees an opportunity for the world's great religious communities to promote ideas and ways of peaceful conflict management among themselves and the societies in which their members live. For Küng, it would be a great step forward toward a less violent world if, for instance, important religious leaders refused to legitimate wars. More importantly, the recourse to violent strategies by political elites would be even further impeded if religious leaders preached to their faithful followers that all human beings, independent of their religious creed, are endowed with the same human rights.

It is indisputable in theology, and in religious studies more generally, that the world's great religions encompass a multitude of sources and traditions. The fundamentalist interpretation of scriptures is just one possibility amongst others. Moreover, it is most often a rather marginal one (Appleby 1996a: 5). Aside from those texts which legitimate violence, demand sacrifices in the case of war, and condemn persons of a different religious creed, one also finds a wealth of sources which hold faith and violence incompatible, demand sacrifices for peace and respect for persons of different faiths. According to Küng and Appleby, this civil side of the great religions needs to be strengthened by religious leaders, in order to make it harder for political leader to frame political conflicts as eschatological clashes in which every action is justifiable and none illegitimate. It would then become obvious that religious faith are being exploited for the selfish interests of power-seeking elites. It is exactly this kind of instrumentalization by power-hungry elites which can be prevented by religious leaders committing themselves to the religious enlightenment of their faithful.

There are two indicators which speak in favor of the peace-promoting power of religions:

(A) Social movements which do not only strive for radical political reforms but also commit their followers to strict non-violence arose time and again from the midst of religious creeds. Take, for example, the Indian Congress movement for independence (Cox 1994: 270f; Kriesberg 1982: 119), the Pashtun reform movement in northwestern Pakistan (Johansen 1997), the American civil-rights movement (McAdam 1994: 402-404), and the Tibetan liberation movement (Kolas 1996; Little 1996).

The central figures of these movements, Mahatma Gandhi, Abdul Ghaffar Kahn, Martin Luther King and the present Dalai Lama, never doubted that their political demands as well as their strict adherence to peaceful strategies of protest resulted necessarily from their religious beliefs. The moderating influence of Christian churches was also helpful, if not decisive for the rather peaceful end of Apartheid in South Africa (Johnston 1994a). Their leaders managed to delegitimize the use of violence stressing, at the same time, the Christian obligation for reconciliation.

(B) As Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (1994) demonstrated in their comparative study, religious leaders often take on important roles in the mediation in political conflicts. They are in a position to support the formation of mutual trust between the adversaries in that they oblige all sides to honor principal religious values. They can also provide a forum and a rather relaxed atmosphere for negotiations. Thanks to their presence in society they are able to observe whether agreements are kept. In so doing, they enable a cooperative dealing with conflicts even in extremely tense situations. Thus they are decisive in avoiding that the spectrum of possible conflict behavior narrows down to that of using aggressive self-help.

So far our analysis of the religious communities' moderating influence on the course of conflicts has referred to political conflicts in religiously homogenous spaces. There are no general objections, however, against extending this analysis to conflicts in religiously heterogeneous areas. Two points are decisive for this: Firstly, the religious communities concerned must agree on "zones of overlapping consensus" (John Rawls). That is, they must develop a set of shared values and norms that govern their behavior in political conflicts. Secondly, it is necessary that such agreements entail practical consequences. In other words, different religious communities must not only agree on common rules but also on respecting them.

The World Conference of Religions for Peace which convened in Kyoto/Japan in 1970 and the Parliament of the World's Religions which met in Chicago from August 28 until September 4 in 1993 were important steps towards agreeing on a set of common moral norms (Küng/Kuschel 1993; Vendley/Little 1994: 313f). Küng refers to the consensus worked out at these meetings as the core of a global ethos (Küng 1997: 154). This is a basic consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards and inner virtues which can be agreed upon by all religions despite their dogmatic differences. Four commandments form the core of this global ethos: (1) the obligation to a culture of non-violence and deep respect for life, (2) the obligation to a culture of solidarity and a fair economic order, (3) the obligation to a culture of tolerance and a life in truthfulness, and (4) the obligation to a culture of equality and partnership between man and woman. Together these obligations form the basis for the world's great religions to mutually perceive and recognize each other as peacemakers. In so doing, they would oppose political elites who attempt to instrumentalize religious faith for justifying violent conflict behavior, and they would keep open the spectrum of possible strategies for peaceful forms of conflict management.

(4) *Two conditions for a successful implementation of the dialogue strategy.*

Despite theoretical progress towards a normative unity within dogmatic plurality, the way to a common global ethos which really affects people and their behavior is still a long one. In our view, there are mainly two problems which impede the achievement of such an ethos:

(A) There is an often discussed dilemma situation between the different religious communities: Before they can strengthen the resistance against violence in their own communities, they have to be sure that the other communities do the same. If this is not the case the peaceful would turn the stupid as often feared by conservative scholars (Kaufmann 1996: 147f; Posen 1993: 27-34). Therefore, confidence-building measures between the religious communities are needed to avoid the occurrence of dilemma situations. Effective monitoring of each other's behavior minimize the risk of cheating. That is, any exploitation of the other's cooperation is discovered early and thus loses its attraction. In this context, it might be helpful that there are only very few states without a religious minority (Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden 1995: 440). The majority's treatment of their minorities might then be taken as an indicator of the great religions' readiness to cooperate with each other.

Thus, it is to be expected that the trust between the world's great religions grows to the extent to which they act as advocates for persons of different religious creeds in their own areas of influence. In so doing, they would show that they are serious about the universal validity of the above mentioned minimum moral standards. A culture of mutual respect would then arise in the societies concerned. This would help to prevent the danger of demonizing one's adversary in social conflicts from arising. In order to speed up the process of minority protection, religious communities could agree on the establishment of common non-state courts of appeal for discriminated minorities. These would be free to bring forward their complaints to the court. The latter would be endowed with the competence to decide about "religious discrimination" and to make its decision public. [4]

(B) A second obstacle on the way to an inter-religious recognition as peacemaker is the problem of guilt. All great religious communities were, or are, more or less entangled in violent political conflicts. They took sides in conflicts or did not prevent their faith from being exploited for the legitimation of violence and for the mobilization for war. A fundamental re-orientation in the way indicated above would therefore be equivalent to an admission of guilt. The established religious leaders,

in particular, would find that hard to accept for their most valued asset would be at stake: their credibility. They must fear that they will lose followers and that they cause damage to their mission - whatever they understand as such. The question as to what could lead them to recognize, and to comply with, a common world ethos therefore deserves further scrutiny.

It is to be expected that religious leaders - as every other social elite - only re-evaluate their programmes and change their behavior when the damage caused by proceeding the same way as before is greater than that caused by a programmatic re-orientation. If, in such a situation, they remain inflexibly tied to their status-quo position they run the risk of being replaced by more reform-minded members of the leadership group. Thus it might be an important impetus for laying greater emphasis on inter-religious common grounds if intra-religious reform movements gained strength. As Scott Appleby (1996b: 4), Mark Juergensmeyer (1993: 195) and David Little (1996: 83-86) observe, there are moderate critics of religious demagoguery and intolerance in every world religion today. These critics argue that peace is only possible with, and not against, persons of different religious creeds and that it contradicts the very essence of religion to push through one's own convictions with violent means. The reform movements within the different religions will gain the support of their respective faithful to the extent to which the programmes of militant fundamentalists prove to be unworkable. For it shall not be forgotten that the political renaissance of religious faith arose from the weaknesses of modernity. It was the disappointment at the unkept promises of modernizing elites with regard to an increase of welfare that instilled new plausibility into old teachings and which lifted their representatives to new heights of reputation and power. This is why the latter will lose support to the extent to which they are being regarded as part of the problem themselves - as being partly to blame for violence and grief. In other words, if religious faith is not able to bring about the promised future, it will face the same fate as the promises of secular modernity. [5]

6. Concluding Remarks

The influence of religious communities on politics and policies - real as it is - must not be overestimated, as Douglas Johnston (1994b: 263) and Harvey Cox (1994: 266f) have emphasized. The sources of conflicts and the course of conflict processes are usually highly complex. Religious factors often play only a subordinated role as a source of conflicts but an important one in conflict processes. Therefore, religious visions of peace can take on a practical significance in the dealing with confrontations short of violence, as the role of Christian churches in South Africa or Mahatma Gandhi's Indian Independence Movement have shown. Thus the question is not so much whether religious faith can influence the course of conflicts - this is without doubt -, but rather when religious faith has an escalating and when a de-escalating effect. The pertinent research undertaken in peace and conflict studies is just at its beginnings. Nevertheless, we hope that the prospects and the limits of the dialogue strategy will be thoroughly explored in future. It is not yet foreseeable that today's social and political crises can be defused with the help of economic growth and democratization alone. Neither is it desirable that social tensions are controlled by a state's ruling elite using force against parts of its population. This is why we have to search for ways that keep open the space for strategies of peaceful accommodation if not reconciliation. Perhaps the dialogue strategy which counts on the delegitimation of violence and the popular resistance against it turns out to be a useful starting-point in doing so.

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Footnotes

[1]

In the literature, the significance of elites in social conflicts is undisputable (Kriesberg ²1982: 87-90; Rubin/Pruitt/Kim ²1994: 20,24; Weede 1992: 277f). Usually, in a conflict elites do not only define the goals of their groups but also decide which means to apply in order to achieve them.

[2]

The willingness to make sacrifices depends, however, on a whole range of factors. Kriesberg (²1982: 134) observes, for example, that young people are comparatively easy to be mobilized for the use of risky strategies. He puts this down to the feeling of invulnerability young people share. Moreover, they are relatively independent and often have not the personal commitments older people have.

[3]

For complexity reduction, in this paper we will only consider the national societal environment of the parties. Nevertheless, there is research demonstrating that elites attach great significance to the support of international as well as transnational actors when choosing strategies for conflict management (Gurr 1993: 175-176, 1996: 70-73; Davis/Moore 1997; Weede 1992: 266). Thus it makes a difference when parties have areas of retreat in "friendly" states at their disposal, when they are

financially supported by other countries, and when they have information on similar conflicts in other countries.

[4]

Furthermore, it would make sense to institutionalize some form of communication between the world's great religious communities. One might think of the establishment of inter-religious organizations, for example. They could offer a forum for discussing the interpretation and application of the global ethos. Besides, they could begin to reappraising the history of mutual discrimination and persecution. In so doing, they try to deal constructively with traditional prejudices and anxieties (Posen 1993: 44). In the run-up to the foundation of such inter-religious organizations, the difficult question about its membership should be solved, however. That is, the different religious communities have to agree on which religious groups should possess the right to send representatives to these organizations.

[5]

The context of societal support on the one hand and of economic and political success or failure, on the other hand, has been confirmed by studies looking at recent developments in the Arab countries (Fakash 1996: 215f; Karawan 1997: 31). The fundamentalist motto "Islam is the solution" has lost much of its power by virtue of the disappointing performances of the Iranian and Sudanese governments, respectively. The radical-islamist movements have lost much of its popular support. This development should not imply that Islam has lost its social-revolutionary power entirely. We observe, however, a shift of constituencies to groups who pursue their radical aims with peaceful means, as for example the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.