

**In Need of a Spiritual Framework for Peacebuilding:  
Burma and Beyond**

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### Abstract

Traditionally in the West, the pursuit of a secular society has kept a spiritual dimension from the study and application of most peacebuilding processes. By excluding a spiritual dimension, however, a tremendous resource for building peace is often lost.

This thesis argues that spirituality can assist in encouraging connection and understanding between participants within a peacebuilding process. It also argues that religious/spiritual organizations and their leadership can play an important role in creating the conditions to support peace, through their organizational structure and position in society. Moreover, they can often find ways to prevent and transform conflict through the application of lessons, systems, insights and values from their own traditions, which may be more appropriate to their situation than importing outside solutions.

The case study methodology used in this thesis incorporates the experiences that the author had while interning with various NGO's in Burma. The case study itself offers a specific example of why a spiritual framework for peacebuilding is needed. Through this example, an illustration of why this type of framework is suitable, and how it might assist in that current conflict, is achieved. General lessons and insights that are applicable to other contexts are also discussed. //

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Figures .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1: A Theoretical Foundation .....	19
Chapter 2: Religion, Religious Leaders, and Religious Organizations: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace .....	34
Chapter 3: Burma: A Case Study .....	65
Chapter 4: Peacebuilding in Burma Today .....	98
Bibliography .....	117
Appendix A .....	126
Appendix B .....	127

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: “Three Worlds” diagram .....	20
Figure 2: “Approaches to Peacebuilding: The Pyramid Model” .....	50
Figure 3: Map of Burma .....	65
Figure 4: Modified Schirch “Justpeace Map” .....	75

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to establish why there is a need for a spiritual framework for peacebuilding. The case study of Burma provides a specific context where this need exists, illustrating how a spiritual framework might apply to an ongoing conflict. It is the hope of this author that the specific examples that come from the case study of Burma, grounded in the theory and literature review, will provide an understanding of why a spiritual framework for peacebuilding is needed in many of today's conflicts. Moreover, while a spiritual framework for peacebuilding will translate differently into each situation it is applied to, the lessons that arise may provide encouraging examples for those who wish to build peace from a spiritual foundation in other places.

The paper consists of an introduction and four chapters. This introduction includes an overview of the paper, the methodology used, a brief explanation of the choice of terms used, a statement of limitations, and three key definitions: spirituality, peacebuilding, and conflict transformation.

Chapter One, *A Theoretical Foundation*, begins with a look at specific theory, discussing the effect that the symbolic/spiritual has on how people react to conflict and peace. Connection and understanding are seen as integral in the building of relationships, and it is argued that spirituality can play a significant role in a peacebuilding process to facilitate this connection. Understanding how spirituality can act to encourage, or prevent, connection and how this relates to conflict and peace, is one of the objectives of Chapter One. Another of this chapter's objectives is to provide examples of how

spirituality can be incorporated into a peacebuilding process, using specific tools and techniques to accomplish this task.

Chapter Two, *Religion: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace*, considers how religion can be either a source of conflict, or a resource for peace. It is important to understand the role of religion in escalating conflict, if it is to be targeted in a framework to build peace. For this purpose, two specific religions, Christianity and Buddhism, are examined for elements that support either conflict or peace. Christianity and Buddhism are central to the case study that will be presented in Chapter Three. A broad look at the role religious leaders and religious organizations can play in a peacebuilding strategy will also be presented in this chapter. Their ability to support various peacebuilding activities, such as conflict prevention, conflict transformation, and diplomacy, should not be undervalued in any peacebuilding strategy. However, their role becomes even more important in a spiritual framework for peacebuilding, as they are able, in many ways, to build and encourage peace, from a spiritual foundation.

Chapter Three, *Burma: A Case Study*, introduces the context of Burma, and the political realities that have made that conflict so unique, and so difficult for peacebuilding. An in-depth look at the conflict and peace generating factors that exist in Burma follow; these are important to an analysis of the conflict in Burma. This analysis, grounded in the arguments made in Chapters One and Two, will illustrate why a spiritual framework for peacebuilding is needed in this country.

Chapter Four, *Peacebuilding in Burma Today*, provides an overview of the various levels of political dialogue currently going on in the country. Then, a discussion of how a spiritual framework could be applied to one of these levels of dialogue is

presented, providing examples of how such a framework can assist in the on-going conflict. This was done to show how a spiritual foundation can help not only in Burma's conflict, but also to provide examples for how a spiritual foundation can be applied in many other contexts as well. The chapter ends with some discoveries and observations on the current situation in Burma, which were made by the author while he was working in Burma. A general outline of situations where a spiritual framework can be applicable, make up the final remarks of this paper.

### Methodology

The experiences that I have had in Burma, in combination with studies in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, have left a question that is at the heart of this paper: How can the potential that religious and spiritual movements possess in regards to building peace be utilized in peacebuilding processes? In order to address this question, the paper will use a case study as its research methodology, grounded in a theoretical framework, and then relate the case study to a review of current literature in peacebuilding, "...thus providing layers of analysis in the study and broader interpretations of the meaning of the case."<sup>1</sup>

This type of methodology is appropriate for a number of different reasons: 1) "In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over the events, and when the focus is on a

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998), 36.

contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.”<sup>2</sup> While certain ethnographic elements that relate to culture and people groups are important to this thesis, this is because of their relationship with the on-going, “real-life” phenomenon being studied in this paper: peacebuilding, and the role that spirituality can play in assisting this process.

2) A case study methodology allows for an incorporation of a variety of different resources. “Evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts.”<sup>3</sup> Research for this thesis will be through multiple sources including books, journals, on-line commentaries and articles, as well as descriptions of my own experiences and observations, both inside and outside of Burma.

“Observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied,” which can “...add new dimensions for understanding the context or phenomena being studied.”<sup>4</sup> Direct and participant observations that have come from living, working and traveling in Burma are important contributors to my broader understanding of the political, social and economic dynamics of that context.

Specifically in regards to peacebuilding in Burma, the time that I have spent working with organizations committed to that field (both local and international NGO’s) have given me a particular perspective on the peace processes that have developed there. It is important to note that I was not conducting specific research in Burma, but was for the most part observing and working within the boundaries that my experiences with the

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<sup>2</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994), 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

Shalom Foundation, World Concern, and Hope International provided. Therefore, while I am able to offer my opinion on various peacebuilding efforts that are happening in Burma, the scope of my research is limited to the context of the ethnic nationality groups, and other related work of these NGO's.

In my experience, there is a difference in the development of peacebuilding between Christians and Buddhists within Burma. The peacebuilding process is more developed in the Christian context, for various reasons. For one, the Shalom Foundation is made up primarily, though not exclusively, of ethnic nationalities. Many of these groups, and members of this organization, are largely Christian, although there are members on their board that are Buddhist Burmese, and Buddhists and Animists of other ethnicity. The experience I had, therefore, was for the most part with Christian peacebuilders. Furthermore, while the whole country is facing conflict, the ethnic nationality groups feel that their situations are worse than the majority Burmese Buddhists. Thus, both insurgency and peacebuilding are areas that may have received more attention within that ethnic context than in any other.

The peacebuilders/mediators that I observed have had little to no formal training, but all have had varying degrees of experience in low to high level work. The skill-building workshops they participated in were the first of their kind in Burma. What I learned about the role of religious leadership and peacebuilding in Burma came from primary sources who are religious/spiritual leaders, and thus their views and opinions have influenced mine.

Further, the experiences I have had in Burma are a result of a process that began with my grandparents, who were Baptist missionaries in Kachin State for over twenty

years. When I work in Burma, and particularly in Kachin State, it is with people who remember my grandparents or their legacy. The stories that were told while I was growing up involved Burma but this Burma was definitely portrayed through the eyes of people who had grown to love the Kachins, and perceived their situation to a depth that many did not. My uncle and his wife, and another aunt as well, currently work in Burma in the fields of peacebuilding and early childhood education. Thus, the opportunities that I have had in Burma are unique to my family's situation there. Consequently, I have been able to operate and understand certain things within that context that have given shape to my studies, and this paper. While these same experiences also limit my objectivity to a certain degree, they have been a tremendous resource, and, in combination with my studies, have resulted in both an outsider and insider perspective in regards to these peace processes, and the role that they play in the overall picture and context of Burma.

Working with the Shalom Foundation, an indigenous NGO, in particular, provided much of what I would refer to as an insider perspective: how peacebuilding might translate in its actual application, and the problems that it faces in doing so. In order to enrich my own perspective as an outsider interested in peacebuilding in Burma, I have included sources from the professional field of Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. I have also included and used a purposefully disproportionate amount of Buddhist literature, in comparison to sources used from a specifically Christian context, to add to my understanding of Buddhist peacebuilding. Because information about the situation in Burma is limited, for various reasons surrounding the political situation of that country, many of my sources in regards to the current situation there have come from on-line resources. Interviews and sources that exist outside of the public domain have not

been included in this research. I have submitted my proposed methodology and sources to the University of Victoria's Human Ethics Research Committee. They were deemed to be within the public domain, and a waiver from ethical review was approved.

3) A case study methodology is often used when “you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study.”<sup>5</sup> The context of Burma, and all that it entails politically, socially and economically, is a unique one. The isolationist policy upheld by various military governments over the past fifty years; an extremely ethnically diverse country representing a variety of different cultures, religions, and histories (both shared and separate) including colonialism; and “...a period of one of the longest running civil wars in this planet's modern history,”<sup>6</sup> all are factors that have shaped the situation there at present. In regards to this paper, the pervasive role that religion plays in this country, how it relates to identity, and in particular, its relationship with conflict as both an escalating and resolving/transforming factor, deserves special consideration. In fact it was through observations (both “direct and participant”) from working with religiously diverse yet equally motivated peoples and organizations, in combination with my studies in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, that the idea for this paper was born.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>6</sup> David Tegenfeldt, “Burma: Reconciliation in Myanmar and the Crises of Change.” *SAIS Conference Panel V: Minority Questions*. November 23, 2002 ([www.sais-jhu.edu/.../asia/asiaoverview/Publications/Southeast%20Asia/Burma%20Conference%20Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.sais-jhu.edu/.../asia/asiaoverview/Publications/Southeast%20Asia/Burma%20Conference%20Report_Final.pdf)).

## Boundaries

1) The political situation has made many aspects of life in Burma dangerous, and with it, so is the work of peacebuilders in that context. It needs to be mentioned that mediation, and any other peacebuilding efforts that include insurgent groups, is illegal.<sup>7</sup> Though the regime allows for this work to carry on in certain situations, there are issues of safety that relate to what, and how, I write about this topic. Therefore, only certain names of peoples and organizations that I have been given permission to use will be presented in this paper. General arguments and comments will for the most part be made, in order to respect this issue of safety.

2) This is a case study of an ongoing situation. As a result, the facts and the context are in flux, and constantly evolving. Since my last trip to Burma in 2003, the playing field has changed dramatically. For example, in early 2003, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was not under house arrest. The tripartite dialogue between the NLD, SPDC, and the UN was the most important political dialogue in the country, and the ethnic nationalities were not a part of that process. Currently, Daw Suu Kyi is back under house arrest, the tripartite dialogue has been stalled, and the ethnic nationalities are being courted to play a role in the upcoming National Convention. I imagine that there will be more significant changes to the situation in Burma before this work is finished. Therefore, some of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Journal Note*. Shalom Foundation, Meeting. Yangon, Burma: February, 2003.

findings and comments made on the situation in Burma may be out of date, but it is my hope that the general arguments made in this paper, will still hold true.

3) Only two religions are considered in this paper: Christianity and Buddhism. I have chosen to focus on these two, although there are sizeable numbers of Animists, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, among other religions, in Burma. (The Shalom Foundation does include some Animist members, but I had limited exposure to them during my time there.) My choice reflects the experiences I have had in regards to peacebuilding in Burma.

4) Language barrier was a limitation in a number of different areas. Meetings and workshops were in either Burmese or English. Burmese is not the first language of the participants, but was agreed upon by everyone as the best means for communication. Interpreters were provided for the English speakers. When English was used, the interpretation was in Burmese. Using a language that is not one's own, or trusting an interpreter to do it for one, is never completely satisfactory.

### Terms

#### ***Burma/Myanmar***

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Secretary-General of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, prefers the use of Burma over

Myanmar. When asked about the country's name change from Burma to Myanmar, she answered: "No one should be allowed to change the name of this country without referring to the will of the people. They say that Myanmar refers to all the Burmese ethnic groups, whereas Burma only refers to the Burmese ethnic group, but that is not true. Myanmar is a literary word for Burma and it refers only to the Burmese ethnic group. Of course, I prefer the word Burma."<sup>8</sup>

This paper will privilege the use of the name Burma over Myanmar, despite the change of name to Myanmar instituted by the military government in 1989. There is much debate over which name should be respected, but the majority of people that I have come to know and respect in Burma also prefer the use of Burma, which is why I also choose to use this name.

### ***Ethnic Nationality/Ethnic Minority***

The term ethnic minority has often been used to describe the various groups of people that live in Burma, in contrast to the majority ethnic group in that country, the Burmese. The people that I came to know at the Shalom Foundation corrected my usage of this term; they prefer to use *ethnic nationality*. They prefer it because it recognizes and reflects the fact that these groups are not new to Burma, but have an indigenous right to call Burma their home.<sup>9</sup> Therefore this paper will respect their right to refer to themselves as they choose, and will use the term ethnic nationality throughout this paper.

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<sup>8</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, quoted in Gustaff Houtman, "Buddhist Meditation and Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and Mental Culture in an Authoritarian State" *Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Monograph Series No. 33* (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999), 51.

<sup>9</sup> *Journal Note*. Yangon, Burma: March 8, 2003.

## Definitions

### *Spirituality*

The meaning of spirituality often differs significantly depending on who the user is, and in what context he/she may use it. For the purposes of this paper, a definition that is general, if not universal, was desired. This paper argues that a spiritual framework for peacebuilding can be beneficial to certain situations, specifically using the case study of Burma to show how such a framework might be implemented, who it would involve, how they might support such a strategy, and in what arena it might be most effective. It is suggested that the lessons learned through this specific case study can also apply to other and wider contexts of conflict and peacebuilding.

This paper examines the role of spirituality in the specific context of conflict transformation and peacebuilding, by asking: In peacebuilding processes, how can the potential that religious/spiritual movements contain, be utilized most effectively? Religious and spiritual movements are a rich resource for promoting tolerance, managing relationships and effectively building peace. Spirituality encompasses the values expressed by world religious and spiritual movements, and is in fact the essence of these movements, yet "... no single religion can claim a monopoly on such teachings."<sup>10</sup> In fact, religious and spiritual movements can offer their own unique insights in regards to building peace in a particular context.

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<sup>10</sup> Kofi Annan quoted in *UN Press Release SG/SM/6541*, 3.

Lessons learned from these teachings can often be applied to other situations, and can inspire those from a different faith, or from a different context. An example of this can be found in Gandhi's study and application of the principle of *ahimsa*: or *nonviolence*. Inspired by the teachings of Christ in his *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5:38-41), Gandhi applied a strategy of non-violent direct action (*satyagraha*) in the context of Raj India as a means of resistance for the people of India, which eventually lead to the cessation of British rule. The lessons that inspired *satyagraha* made its way back into a Christian context, this time in the US, through the practice of civil disobedience during the civil rights movement. Inspired by examples from India, and applied by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his associates in the United States, this form of non-violent direct action worked to build peace through the transformation of unjust societal institutions and policies.<sup>11</sup>

As the research for this paper progressed, so did the scope and understanding of the role that the spiritual can play in regards to building peace. Again, different contexts render different interpretations of what spirituality might represent. While the initial focus for this paper was to look at the role religion plays in regards to peace and conflict, the scope of the research grew along with the recognition of the role that spirituality plays outside of traditional religious and spiritual movements. What the research process did clarify is that, though these different interpretations of spirituality do exist, they find a common ground in where they make their home, that is, in the human beings that interpret them. Many societies either outside or inclusive of traditional religious and spiritual movements have developed, over time, certain shared rituals and mechanisms

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (NY: Palgrave, 2000), 305-33.

for building peace, or traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution (TMDR). These too will be recognized in a spiritual framework for peacebuilding. Connecting people to each other through the spiritual, in regards to building peace, is the objective of a spiritual framework for peacebuilding. Therefore this paper will consider connection to be integral to the definition used for spirituality: “Spirituality...is the notion of being connected...to God, however understood, to others, to themselves, and often to the earth.”<sup>12</sup>

### ***Peacebuilding***

Another key term that requires “unpacking” is peacebuilding. Similar to spirituality in that it remains open to a number of interpretations, peacebuilding means different things to different peoples. For the purposes of this paper, an open definition was required that recognized the number of different activities that peacebuilding could encompass. Some of these activities include “...activism and advocacy, relief aid, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and transformation, education and economic development,”<sup>13</sup> conflict prevention, mediation and negotiation, non-violent direct action, and problem-solving workshops. This paper does not argue which specific activities should or should not be included as supportive of peacebuilding *per se*, preferring to keep the definition of peacebuilding open and inclusive of “...a wide range of activities, that

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<sup>12</sup> David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 14.

<sup>13</sup> Schirch, “7 Principles of Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding.” *JustPeacebuilding: Primer and Synthesis, CAUX Scholars Program Participants Handbook*, 17.

contribute toward the transformation of society into a just and harmonious order and the development of an infrastructure capable of maintaining this arrangement.”<sup>14</sup>

Speaking to this, two specifics need to be addressed when defining peacebuilding in the context of this paper. First, peacebuilding is an exercise in strategic planning. Recognition of the short to long-term dynamics of a conflict is integral to any comprehensive peacebuilding strategy. Understanding that conflict is dynamic, and recognizing that different strategies are needed to address the short, intermediate and long-term needs of a society dealing with conflict, is a necessary step when working to build peace.<sup>15</sup> The Catholic Relief Service (CRS) moves closer to this paper’s representation of the term when it defines peacebuilding as “a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and includes the processes, interventions strategies, and methods to promote a peace that is just. Peacebuilding occurs at every level of society, at any time (pre-, during, post-conflict) and encompasses a myriad of activities.”<sup>16</sup>

Second, this paper is informed by a Conflict Transformation (CT) paradigm. Therefore, the definition of peacebuilding in this paper must also speak to this. CT will be further explored in the following section, but briefly, it suggests that the key to transformation of a conflict “...lies in the relationship of the involved parties, with all this encompasses of the psychological, spiritual, social, cultural, economic, political and military levels.”<sup>17</sup> The focus on relationships as a medium from which to transform

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<sup>14</sup> David Smock, *Inter-faith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2002), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Schirch, “7 Principles,” 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> *CAUX Scholars Program Participants Handbook* (Conflict Transformation Workshop. Caux, Switzerland: 2000), 54.

conflict and effectively build peace is one that is shared with this author. Peacebuilding can often be seen as an exercise in relationship-building, and the “myriad of activities” listed above are ways to manage, build and transform the relationships needed in order to build peace.

A leading school in the field of peacebuilding, the Institute for Justice and Peacebuilding (IJP) at Eastern Mennonite University (Virginia, USA), clearly sums up the points important to this paper’s usage of the term when it defines peacebuilding as involving “... the proactive construction of the conditions of a mutually desired, shared future. Rather than limiting peacebuilding to the post-conflict phase, it is seen as a continuous process of creatively engaging and channeling conflict into the building of constructive, equitable relationships, social justice, and sustainable socio-economic development. IJP understands *conflict transformation and peacebuilding* to be closely allied processes. Conflict Transformation is often necessary so that peacebuilding can take place.”<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, peacebuilding in this paper will refer to a number of possible activities that encourage the growth of relationships in a way that is capable of sustaining peace. Peacebuilding strategies recognize these relationships as key to the successful implementation of any plan, and employ conflict transformation theory and practice as a means to manage, build and transform said relationships in regards to building peace. It is dangerous to assume that there are prescriptive responses to cure certain conflicts. Context and culture, along with many other factors, make each attempt at peacebuilding unique. Understanding that conflict is dynamic; strategic analysis and planning can work

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

to address the short, intermediate and long-term requirements necessary to build peace in a specific context.

### ***Conflict Transformation***

Conflict Transformation (CT) is a method that focuses on relationships, and sees these relationships as both the cause and the possible solution to disputes. Leading CT theorists Robert Bush and Joseph Folger state that a transformative orientation views disputes not as problems, but as opportunities for moral growth and transformation. They further state that a transformative approach is one that defines the objective of the process as improving the parties themselves.

Conflict transformation is a practice that is grounded in two core concepts. *Empowerment*, according to Bush and Folger, means enabling the parties to define their own issues and to seek solutions on their own. *Recognition* means enabling the parties to see and understand the other person's point of view--to understand how they define the problem and why they seek the solution that they do.<sup>19</sup> In order to move towards these two goals, a facilitator guides the process in order to empower the participants and achieve inner-party recognition. Empowerment is related to the idea of awareness and strengthening the self, and "...it is achieved when disputing parties experience a strengthened awareness of their own self-worth and their own ability to deal with whatever difficulties they face. Recognition is achieved when, given some degree of

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<sup>19</sup> Baruch, Bush and Joe Folger, *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict through Empowerment and Recognition* (NY: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 2.

empowerment, disputing parties experience an expanded willingness to acknowledge and be responsive to the other parties' situation and common human qualities."<sup>20</sup>

Peacebuilding, as defined in this paper, includes conflict transformation because it focuses on relationships as the means for transforming the conflict. When applied to the field of peacebuilding, CT has the ability to perform in two arenas. "Descriptively, 'transformation' suggests that conflict affects and changes things in potentially destructive or constructive directions. Conflict transforms relationships, communication, perceptions, issues, and social organizations. Prescriptively, 'transformation' is concerned with broader social structures, change and moving toward a social space open for co-operation, for more just relationships and for non-violent mechanisms for handling conflict, or what might be understood as dynamic and increasingly peaceful relationships."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Roger Bush and Joe Folger, *Changing People, Not Just Situations: A Transformative View of Conflict and Mediation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 84-85.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul Lederach, "Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework," ed. Kumar Rupesinghe, *Conflict Transformation* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 201.

## Chapter 1

### A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A spiritual framework for peacebuilding seeks to enhance connection between participants by including that which is spiritual to the participants within that process. Instead of excluding religious or spiritual values, systems, and lessons, a spiritual framework recognizes them as valuable to the process of building relationships. “Most conflict theorists and many people who train practitioners have, however, largely ignored the symbolic world. The existence of material facts can be confirmed by the senses. Most people also acknowledge the reality of social facts. They experience them as defined, constrained, and empowered by the multiple social relationships and roles they occupy, and they work and live within systems of routinized roles and relationships known as institutions. However, many people only vaguely recognize the existence of symbolic facts.”<sup>22</sup> This, despite the fact that, as conflict resolution practitioner/theorist Michelle LeBaron writes, the symbolic world “...is where we make meaning and where we hold our picture of ourselves or our identities.”<sup>23</sup> The symbolic world subsumes spirituality in that through a connection to a higher power, the earth, self, and others, meaning is made out of the world around us. Informed by this meaning, we situate ourselves, and thus our identities, in relation to others.

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<sup>22</sup> Jayne Docherty, *Learning Lessons From Waco: When the Parties Bring their Gods to the Negotiation Table* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 30-1.

<sup>23</sup> Michelle LeBaron, *Bridging Troubled Waters: Conflict Resolution from the Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002), 85.

***“Three Worlds” Theory***

Jayne Docherty’s “three worlds” theory argues the importance of the symbolic world in understanding how we interpret and respond to conflict in the social and material worlds. “Human beings simultaneously occupy three different ‘worlds’: the material, the social, and the symbolic. All conflicts—like human interactions—involve the mobilization of three types of resources: material, social and symbolic.”<sup>24</sup> Her theory supports a spiritual framework for peacebuilding inasmuch as it incorporates the symbolic world, and thus the spiritual, into the framework, acknowledging that it can play a role in escalating conflict, and building peace. The diagram that illustrates this theory is nested, showing the relationship between the material, social and symbolic worlds, with the greater symbolic world acting as a foundation for the whole (see Figure 1<sup>25</sup>).

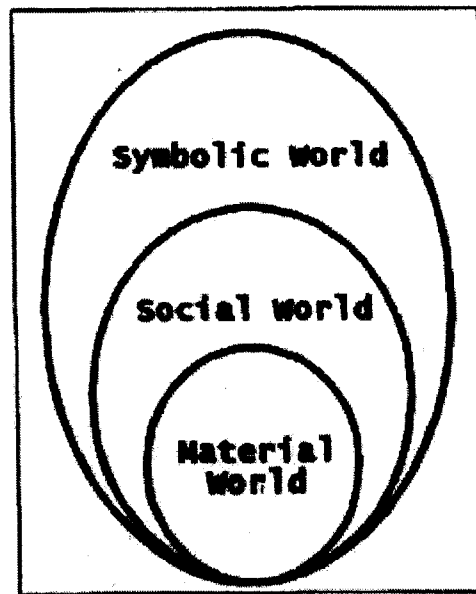


Figure 1. Conflict takes place in three worlds.

<sup>24</sup> Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 31.

In other words, the symbolic world informs both the social and material worlds. Therefore, acknowledging the relationship between the symbolic, social, and material worlds can help to better understand why others act as they do: what motivates them, what is important to them, and why in certain situations people may choose to promote conflict or support peace.

Jayne Docherty, in her book *“Learning Lessons From Waco: When the Parties Bring Their Gods to the Negotiation Table,”* uses the Waco standoff as an illustration of the tragic results that can occur when a negotiation refuses to recognize the spiritual dynamics involved. Docherty applies her “three worlds” theory, in combination with “worldview” theory, to the Waco standoff which took place between February 28 and April 19, 1993, involving an “unconventional millennial religious community,” namely the Branch Davidians, and federal law enforcement including the ATF and FBI.

She believes the tragedy took place as a result of conflicting worldviews.

“...(W)orldviews take the form of *common sense*. They are the unquestioned, invisible, given reality that shapes human perceptions and actions. Worldviewing is a universal activity, even though worldviews differ significantly from one community to another.”<sup>26</sup>

Docherty argues that the Branch Davidians and law enforcement, while mutually operating in the same material and social worlds, differed significantly in their worldviews primarily because of how they were informed by their symbolic worlds. Supplementing the analysis of the actual negotiation process between the two sides, she uses interviews, and the investigation and reports that transpired after the tragedy, to illustrate her theory. “Her main finding is that the Branch Davidians and federal law

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<sup>26</sup> Docherty, 50.

enforcement, even while continuing 'to negotiate,' were looking at the world in utterly different ways, underwriting too often a 'negotiation' that was virtually a dialogue of the deaf, resulting in deep mutual miscomprehension that carried lethal consequences."<sup>27</sup>

Docherty begins with the argument that both sides brought "their Gods to the negotiating table" as a means to analyze the conflict, and how the participants acted within the conflict, on equal terms. This speaks to her interest "...in understanding the impact of ultimate concerns on negotiation processes."<sup>28</sup> Looking at the standoff in this light, the deterioration of the negotiation process can be characterized as a worldview conflict; arising from the difference over the symbolic worlds from which both sides operated. "Waco was a confrontation between the Branch Davidians, for whom God acts in history, and FBI agents, for whom religion is an individual, private concern. For the Branch Davidians, the Waco standoff was a confrontation between God and the evil powers of a secular state that refused to be governed by God's law. For the FBI, the Waco standoff was a confrontation between the legitimate powers of a state and a group deluded by religious fervor or duped by a con man using religion as a cover for immoral and criminal activities."<sup>29</sup>

Docherty argues that conflict experienced in the symbolic world is very important to how it is expressed in the material and social worlds. The exclusion of the symbolic world from the negotiation process by the FBI furthered the escalation of the conflict, whereas including it could have helped bring about understanding. The FBI "...considered themselves perfectly justified in refusing to listen to biblical language,

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<sup>27</sup> Kevin Avruch, "Foreword," in *Learning Lessons From Waco: When the Parties Bring their Gods to the Negotiation Table*, Jayne Docherty (NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), xii.

<sup>28</sup> Docherty, 63.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 69.

even though their own instrumental language frame effectively silenced the Branch Davidians, who could explain their actions only in biblical terms.”<sup>30</sup>

Docherty further argues that an analysis of the Branch Davidians’ worldview could have provided critical information which, in hindsight, might have changed how the FBI formulated its negotiating strategy. “They (the Branch Davidians) had been expecting an apocalyptic confrontation with evil worldly forces since at least 1985. Therefore many in the community were afraid they would be killed upon exiting the building.”<sup>31</sup> But getting the Branch Davidians to exit the compound of Mt Carmel was integral to the FBI’s strategy. The Branch Davidians resisted because of their belief in the outcome of that action. Because their (FBI) worldview supported their own position in the standoff as “legitimate powers of a state,” they did not fully understand that by laying siege to the compound of Mt. Carmel itself, the federal law enforcement’s efforts were seen as fulfillment of the prophecy that the “end days” had begun.<sup>32</sup>

### *Secular/Non-Secular Divide*

Though Docherty’s example involves an “unconventional millennial religious community,” the lessons she offers are applicable to a broader context -- where there is an “impact of ultimate concerns on negotiation processes.” Some of the attributes of the Waco standoff are characteristic of conflicts that exist across the secular and non-secular divide. For example, the increasing polarization between the West and the Islamic world is often portrayed as resulting from a clash of religious values, or worldviews. “Islam speaks the language of integration (of politics and religion), while the West speaks the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 242.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 36.

language of separation. Even the same words can have different meanings. When Westerners use the term ‘secular,’ for example, Muslims hear ‘Godless,’ while what was intended is ‘freedom to worship as one pleases.’<sup>33</sup> In the West, a division between church and state and the pursuit of a secular society has kept a spiritual dimension from playing a role in most peacebuilding processes.

However, for many people an approach to conflict and peacebuilding that doesn’t incorporate a spiritual dimension is either inappropriate or inadequate. As the Waco standoff illustrated, excluding what Docherty refers to as the “symbolic world” acted to not only further estrange the parties involved, but resulted in missed information and opportunities. Often, problems have arisen across the secular/non-secular divide because of the “...the unfamiliarity of Western policymakers with the relevance of theological concepts to the motives of others....”<sup>34</sup>

No longer should a secular approach to peacebuilding equate with not doing the homework necessary to understand the role that religious and spiritual dynamics can play in a certain situation. “To account fully for a conflict, we must study the material, social, and symbolic sources of that conflict. To identify potential solutions to the conflict, we need to understand the parties’ respective symbolic worlds because the actions they will or will not employ to escalate or resolve the conflict will be determined ... by their symbolically constructed patterns of compulsions and permissions.”<sup>35</sup>

Though the West espouses a secular society through its institutions, a more sophisticated understanding of religious and spiritual dynamics in relation to conflict

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<sup>33</sup> Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Docherty, 30.

could greatly increase the effectiveness of how those institutions build peace. A spiritual framework for peacebuilding recognizes the spiritual dynamics of a conflict and instead of excluding them, searches for ways to incorporate them into process, to strengthen the possibilities for peace. In the case of the West and Islamic world, this is a necessary step in working across the secular and non-secular divide. A more sophisticated understanding of Islam in this light offers a new “logic,” informing strategies to build peace that may have not been previously considered.

### ***Faith-Based Diplomacy***

Author and former senior in US government, military, business, academia, and founder/president of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, Douglas Johnston, writes about and puts into practice an example of this “sophisticated understanding” in what he calls “faith-based diplomacy.” “Because Islamic law emphasizes faith-based interactions rather than those among states, logic suggests that one of the most effective ways to engage Islam would be through a new form of diplomacy that effectively brings to bear the transcendent aspects of religious faith in addressing the secular obstacles to peace.”<sup>36</sup>

While traditionally the West has viewed religion as an obstacle to diplomacy, the reality is that a large part of the world does not. Responding to conflict in the future, those that implement peacebuilding processes must recognize religion as an important factor in their overall success or failure. In framing this recognition as “logical,” Johnston has successfully created a framework for a new form of diplomacy that acknowledges

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<sup>36</sup> Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy*, 9.

religion as a resource for peace, and makes responding to the spiritual needs of those involved, a goal of the process itself.

A spiritual framework for peacebuilding also acknowledges the important role that religion can play in regards to building peace, and like “faith-based diplomacy,” it moves to address the spiritual needs of participants within its framework. However, it goes further in that it recognizes that spirituality exists for many outside of traditional religious and spiritual movements. Thus a spiritual framework looks at a broader picture of lessons, systems, and values that offer insights into ways to build peace, and encourage connection between participants, from a spiritual foundation.

### ***A Spiritual Framework for Peacebuilding***

#### *(i) Connection/Understanding and Conflict Transformation*

The role that the symbolic plays in regards to conflict and peace is precisely what a spiritual framework for peacebuilding moves to recognize, in process. This is done in two ways. First, as suggested by Docherty, understanding how spirituality influences one’s responses to conflict and peace, can be very important to how one plans to build peace in a certain situation. Second, incorporating spirituality into a peacebuilding framework enhances connection between participants in the process. A spiritual framework moves to incorporate what exists in the participants’ “symbolic world” into the process, in order to deepen connection through the understanding of each other’s own spiritual worth, values, goals, and needs. Connecting participants on a

spiritual/symbolic level has "...the potential for deeper and more meaningful engagement because of the possibility for spiritual encounter."<sup>37</sup>

In so doing, a spiritual framework operates from a conflict transformation paradigm, that suggests the goal of the process is to empower participants through a deeper understanding of their role in relation to the conflict, and the other. Through this empowerment, recognition of 'the same' in the other can take place. "Empowerment is an objective that can be achieved in all cases; recognition, on the other hand, can only be attained when parties willingly give it."<sup>38</sup> Empowerment and recognition are intrinsically connected; however, empowerment doesn't necessarily lead to recognition. A connection between participants needs to happen in order for this recognition to be "given willingly." Connection is a concept intrinsic to this paper's argument for a spiritual framework for peacebuilding. To revisit, "(s)pirituality...is the notion of being connected...to God, however understood, to others, to themselves, and often to the earth."<sup>39</sup> Incorporating spirituality into peacebuilding processes, when applicable, can help create a connection between the participants, which encourages that recognition to happen. Conflict transformation seeks ways to support empowerment and recognition in order to achieve this connection, and specifically, a spiritual framework for peacebuilding enhances the possibilities for connection.

*(ii) Metaphors/Rituals/Storytelling*

Conflict theorist and practitioner Michelle LeBaron speaks about symbolic tools that can assist in this process of establishing a connection between participants:

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<sup>37</sup> David Smock, *Inter-faith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, 127-28.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Bush and Joe Folger, *Changing People, Not Just Situations*, 94.

<sup>39</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 14.

metaphors, rituals, and storytelling. “Grounding what we learn in sensory experience, metaphors, rituals, and stories gather listeners and tellers into the same circle of human connection.”<sup>40</sup> Metaphors provide a window into how people see themselves in a situation, in relation to how they perceive the world, from what is often referred to as a worldview. When worldviews are in conflict in a peacebuilding process, metaphors can provide a useful tool in helping one party understand why the other feels a certain way. “Through a discussion of metaphors, parties are empowered. They become aware of their own and others’ metaphors and thus have the language to question subsequent situations in which one party may seek to impose a process or an idea grounded in one worldview that excludes others.”<sup>41</sup>

For example, when participants in a process represent different religions, spiritual movements, or even if the party/parties exist outside of traditional faith movements, ways for explaining and expressing what is spiritual can act as a bridge between participants. This allows people to understand more clearly the beliefs and values which are truly important to them, and how these affect the situation they are in. Metaphors offer a way for interpretations of spirituality to be expressed and understood within a peacebuilding framework, thus contributing to the possibilities for connection within that process.

Storytelling and ritual are other ways through which connection can be established between participants; in fact, storytelling and ritual share a number of characteristics. Storytelling is a “...universal act. The telling reveals meaning and makes meaning at once.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, “Ritual is pervasive. All societies and individuals have

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<sup>40</sup> LeBaron, *Bridging Troubled Waters*, 181-82.

<sup>41</sup> LeBaron, 201.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

rituals that give meaning, structure, and richness to their lives.”<sup>43</sup> Both storytelling and ritual make excellent tools for identifying a connection between participants that is already present, based on an understanding and connection to the roles that they play in “all societies.” Religious stories and rituals are, therefore, an obvious place to start when looking for examples of how spirituality can help participants better understand, and connect, with each other. Within many religious and spiritual movements, examples of stories and rituals that aim to build peace can be found, and these are often targeted in inter-faith dialogue as a starting point for those wishing to explore peace in a religious context. This will be explored further in Chapter Two. This section will continue to look at theory and facts that relate to connection, but exist outside of traditional religious and spiritual movements.

*(iii) Traditional Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution (TMDR)*

Another characteristic common to storytelling and ritual is that they are often used *in themselves* as a traditional means to settle disputes and effectively work towards building peace. “Conflict occurs in all societies and people groups. In response, societies everywhere have developed mechanisms and methods of conflict resolution that reflect and support their social structures, values and norms.”<sup>44</sup> These responses are what will be referred to as traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution (TMDR). CT theorist and practitioner John Paul Lederach argues that the employment of TMDR is fundamental in a “comprehensive transformative approach” to peacebuilding as a “principle in building a peace constituency.” A focus on local knowledge and systems, he argues, offsets the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>44</sup> Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and Stories About Them.” *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn 1980): 137-48.

tendency for those in conflict to look to the “outside” for solutions, and makes space for the transformation of the conflict to take place through the resources found *within* the setting. This type of approach encourages the growth of infrastructure and capacity needed in a “peace constituency” to support a long-term approach to peacebuilding.<sup>45</sup>

A spiritual framework goes even further in recognizing the role of TMDR in peacebuilding processes. In agreement with Lederach’s “comprehensive approach” and support of long-term capacity and infrastructure to build peace, a spiritual framework seeks to build the relationships needed to sustain peace over the long term from a spiritual foundation. The reason TMDR should be recognized within a spiritual framework for peacebuilding, and in relation to connection between participants, is twofold. First, if participants in a peacebuilding process share a history that employs various TMDR, then using them within a peacebuilding process can work to strengthen the connection that they share in their community. The community plays a major role in the usage of TMDR, and it is through the application and exercise of those mechanisms that a community often finds its connection manifest in a social form. An example to clarify:

A story is told about a community of people in the Youba region of West Africa who have a way of responding to people who deviate from the social norms of their community. When an offender is caught, he or she is brought in the early morning hours under the palaver hut, usually at the center of the town. He or she is asked to stay under the hut until dusk. Each member of the community comes by on their way to their fields to confront the offender. Instead of telling him or her how terrible the action was, each person thinks of a specific case when the offender behaved positively and expresses the personal satisfaction the speaker

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<sup>45</sup> Lederach, “Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework,” Ed. Rupesinghe. *Conflict Transformation*, 211-15.

gained from that experience. He or she would end, “I want to thank you for the positive impact you made on my life then, and I know that you are capable of making many more people experience the joy and satisfaction I experienced when you did that for me.” This method is not to deny that a crime was committed nor does it negate the risk of a crime being committed. Instead, it reinforces the character and values with which, it is believed, everyone is endowed.<sup>46</sup>

In an example closer to home, Dale Hunt writes about the Potlatch, a multi-family ritual practiced in First Nations communities along the west coast of Canada/USA. “As a forum for transformation, the potlatch creates empowerment at an individual level, and, an overall collective unity among the people through the songs, dances, speeches, and ritual. Tribes gather at the host’s house to witness and participate in the giving and sharing of wealth, which recreates their connection to the Creator and the people simultaneously.”<sup>47</sup> Michelle LeBaron refers to rituals like the Potlatch as “...a vehicle for creating community.”<sup>48</sup> The connection within a community, and a community’s connection to the spiritual as a collective, can be extremely powerful as a means to build the relationships needed to sustain peace. Traditional Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution can be included in a spiritual framework for peacebuilding to strengthen a connection that already exists between the participants involved.

Second, when conflict occurs in a situation where parties are from differing backgrounds, TMDR can offer an insight into the other’s worldview. Worldviews are often central to conflict, and a closer look at the development and application of TMDR

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<sup>46</sup> Doe, Samuel Gbaydee. “Traditional Conception of Restorative Justice.” *MCS Conciliation Quarterly* (Winter 2001): 375.

<sup>47</sup> Dale Hunt and Aron Tegenfeldt, “Spirituality and Conflict Transformation” (unpublished manuscript). *University of Victoria GSS01 Research in Interdisciplinary Context*, Nov., 2002.

<sup>48</sup> LeBaron, 213.

often reveals the assumptions, perceptions, and values behind certain behaviors that may otherwise remain hidden. As every society has developed their own TMDR over time, sharing these can act as a point of connection for participants, and as a bridge for overcoming obstacles they are faced with. Moreover, and again in agreement with Lederach, using imported methods that have “intrinsic cultural biases and adaptations” might not be applicable to the local context. Opportunities for empowerment and recognition can be found in the sharing or application of a TMDR in a peacebuilding process. It is the sharing process, in combination with the understanding of why one might act in a particular way, which can encourage participants to connect in process.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the type of connection developed between participants in a peacebuilding process can be deepened when spirituality is incorporated into a framework. This can be done in a multitude of different ways, but includes the sharing and recognition of what exists in the “symbolic world.” Peacebuilding frameworks that do not include spirituality can miss opportunities for empowerment and recognition within process, exclude information that can be crucial in developing a strategy for implementation, and, moreover, do not effectively address the needs of participants in certain situations. Metaphors, story-telling, rituals, and traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution are among many that can enhance connection within a spiritual framework for peacebuilding. Context in many cases determines what may or may not be successful, or appropriate. The definitions of spirituality and peacebuilding were chosen

to be broad enough to be inclusive of the many different ways that exist now and in the future, to build peace.

Certain pragmatic aspects arise when looking to build peace from a spiritual foundation. Religious and spiritual leaders, and the organizations and communities that they represent, can play a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts across many contexts. The next chapter will look specifically at the role that religion, religious leaders, and religious organizations can play as either a source of conflict, or as a resource for peace.

## Chapter 2

### RELIGION, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, and RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS:

#### SOURCE OF CONFLICT, RESOURCE FOR PEACE

#### Religion

The unfortunate truth is that, for many people, religion is seen more as a source of conflict than as a resource for peace. Their views are reinforced by examples of violent and unjust conflicts in which religion has played a central role, the world over, past and present. Historically, there are many examples of overt violence being condoned in the name of God. Countless Holy Wars, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and genocide, all in the name of one religion or another, have scarred, distorted, and acted against the messages of the great faith traditions across the globe.

There are also many examples of different religions supporting systems of structural violence. This happens when the institutions and systems of a society exploit, oppress, marginalize, or alienate a portion of the population to serve the needs of those in power. The caste system, colonialism, and slavery, have all to some degree gained legitimacy through the alignment of economic and political goals with religious doctrine. Colonialism, for example, "...was justified as facilitating missionary activities among

'the pagans.' Liberation from colonialism could then be granted proportionate to the extent to which adherence to Christianity was reported."<sup>49</sup>

In more recent years, religion has continued to play a central role in some conflicts, such as the Middle East, where different religious groups are competing for the same piece of land. Religion has increasingly become more active in conflicts as a "mobilizing vehicle" to serve economic, political, militaristic, nationalistic, and ethnic aspirations.<sup>50</sup> In South Africa, the ruling Nationalist Party was supported by the Dutch Reformed Church, which manipulated Biblical texts in order to justify apartheid rule. In that case "...religion was used as a weapon of violence to achieve a political end."<sup>51</sup> In Burma, the military regime has effectively cut off the population, including the Buddhist Sangha (community), from the rest of the world, even international Buddhist councils. In their absence, the regime has been able to put under its control various ruling bodies of the Buddhist councils in Burma, made illegal any form of protest from the Sangha through the co-option of Buddhist scriptures, and has used these scriptures and the ruling bodies under its control to gain legitimacy as rulers.<sup>52</sup>

Religion has, and will continue to play, an important role in the shaping and escalation of conflict around the world. In fact, religion is perhaps becoming more prominent as a source of conflict due to the ending of the Cold War, and the shift from ideology to identity-based conflicts. The end of the Cold War has allowed for the dramatic increase of small and non-state actor conflicts. "At the most basic level, the

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<sup>49</sup> Johan Galtung, "Religions, Hard and Soft," UNESCO (Barcelona: 1994), 4. (on-line) (<http://www.aril.org/galtung.html>).

<sup>50</sup> Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> South Africa Community Fund, *Spiritual Formation* (2003), 1. (on-line) (<http://www.southafricacommunityfund.org/sf/>).

<sup>52</sup> Janette Philip and David Mercer, "Commodification of Buddhism in Contemporary Burma," *Annals of Tourism Research* (Vol. 26, No 1, 1999), 21-54.

removal of Cold War rigidities has opened up a range of conflicts to entry and political participation by previously excluded or marginal actors.”<sup>53</sup> Many of these conflicts are characterized by a religious dynamic that did not exist in the major conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century.

The shift from an “age of ideology” to an “age of identity,” argues Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks, leads people to turn to religion, instead of politics, “...the great repository of human wisdom on the questions ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Of what narrative am I a part?’ ”<sup>54</sup> Identity-based conflicts generally operate from an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality. Thus religion, a highly visible, social phenomena, and an emotionally charged marker, attracts those who seek to frame a conflict in terms of ‘us’ vs. ‘them,’ to serve their own agenda. Expert David Steele noted the role that religion played in the war in former Yugoslavia: “The presence of religious symbols, religious targets, and even religious leaders in the war effort served as indication that a form of religious identification had accompanied nationalism into the souls of even those who were avowedly non-religious.”<sup>55</sup>

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, brought to the forefront of global consciousness the growing unrest between the US and part of the Islamic world, and is a classic example of an identity-based conflict in which religion plays a primary role. The US, and other western countries, are perceived by many as the designers of, and aggressors in, a globalized economic system that erodes traditional values, and exploits

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<sup>53</sup> Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall. *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World* (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1999), 49.

<sup>54</sup> Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks, “The Dignity of Difference: Avoiding the Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute Wire: A Catalyst for Ideas* (Vol. 10, No. 3, July 2002), 1. (on-line) (<http://www.fpri.org/fpriwire/1003.200207.sacks.dignityofdifference.html>).

<sup>55</sup> David Steele, quoted in “Curtains of Fire: Religious Identity and Emerging Conflicts,” Roy Hangué. *MCC Occasional Papers #24* (MCC Syria, Oct. 28, 1997), 2.

the rest of the world, in order to ensure their position as world superpower. The US and western support of the Jewish state of Israel in the Middle East, “Islamic territory,” reinforces the belief for many Muslims that Islam is the enemy of the West, of Christianity and of Judaism, thus Islam must defend itself. In the West, on the other hand, Islam is often perceived as a hateful religion, aimed at destroying the lives and countries of those who espouse democracy, secularism, and freedom. Consequently, international politics and governing bodies have begun to align themselves increasingly along religious lines, including “...formal and informal international cooperation of blocs of peoples of the same religion.”<sup>56</sup> The danger in this religious teambuilding, or the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ scenario on a global scale, is the high potential for violence which is often embedded in conflict along religious lines. In alliances built on religious, or ethnic terms, “...people look to their pasts for terms and frames of reference to form and describe their current conflict, thus making it more likely that they repeat the conflicts of the past.”<sup>57</sup>

Whether or not the end of the Cold War and the subsequent rise in identity-based conflicts serves to increase religiously motivated conflict, the fact remains the same: religion is increasingly intertwined with a variety of different types of conflicts in today’s world. The religious dynamic in conflicts must be properly understood if religion is to be effectively employed as a means to build peace; in the words of Professor Rabbi Sacks, “If religion is not part of the solution, then it will surely be part of the problem.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Roy Hangué, “Curtains of Fire: Religious Identity and Emerging Conflicts” *MCC Occasional Papers* #24 (MCC Syria, Oct. 28, 1997), 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks, “The Dignity of Difference: Avoiding the Clash of Civilizations,” 1.

Looking for ways that religion can be “part of the solution” means searching for ways that religion can support peacebuilding efforts, of which there are many. Religion can be a tremendous resource for peace. It is valuable to look at religions specifically for ways that this can be done, while at the same time being aware of how specific religions have acted to promote conflict in the past and present. In doing so, a more complete picture of how a religious dynamic can act within a peacebuilding strategy is achieved. The next section will look specifically at the ‘complementariness’ and ‘hindrances’ to peacebuilding within two religions applicable to the subsequent case study of Burma: Christianity and Buddhism.

### *Christianity*

There are many direct references to peace within the Christian Bible, both Old and New Testament. Within the Old Testament, for example, there are the Ten Commandments. “Thou shalt not kill” is clearly one commandment that aims at preventing deadly conflict. Other commandments such as “Thou shalt not steal,” and “Thou shalt not covet another man’s wife,” lay ground rules for relationships that, if broken, could lead to more overt and/or violent conflict.

In the New Testament, there are many references to peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9), and Paul’s message in Romans to “live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18), and to “...not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21), are some of the encouraging words given to Christians to live peaceably. However, to find examples on how to build peace and transform conflict, one

must look deeper. The life of Jesus Christ offers insights into how to transform the relationships that were at the heart of the conflicts, in his time and place.

The following excerpt comes from Walter Wink's book, "The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium." He re-examines Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount' from a historical perspective to provide what he believes to be a more accurate interpretation than what is often understood:

Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-41)

If anyone strikes you on the right cheek," Jesus begins. To strike on the right cheek requires that one use a backhand smack, assuming that the blow comes from the right hand. In ancient Jewish culture this was not so much an act of violence as an insult. It was an act done by a superior to an inferior—a Roman to a Jew, a master to a slave, a man to a woman—to "put them in their place." If the slap was done by a person of equal status, the offended person could sue in court and win severe damages (Mishnah, Baba Qamma 8:6). Robert Guelich contends that Matthew is telling Christians to forego their right to legal action, but the two following examples are of people with no legal leverage in the system, and for the person with inferior social status there was no legal recourse. Jesus' challenge to turn the other cheek is not advice to forego one's legal rights. Rather, he is calling on the powerless person to take an initiative that asserts one's own humanity and transforms the nature of the relationship.

When the humiliating backhand blow is struck on the right cheek and the struck person turns the other cheek, a number of messages are sent. First, the response says that the person is not cowed by the insult and has not assumed the inferior place the striker had in mind. The person refuses to be humiliated and claims his or her full humanity. Second, in turning the other cheek the person forces the striker to view him or herself as an equal. There is no possibility of another backhand blow; the striker would have to resort to some other form of violence, such as punching with a fist. But to commit such an assault would be to

lose the assumed superior/inferior relationship. Thus the striker is forced to recognize the humanity of the one he or she has been oppressing.

The second example of Jesus' alternative response to oppression in the Sermon on the Mount involves a court scene: "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well." The legal background to the passage is found in Exodus 22:26 and Deuteronomy 24:12, where a poor person is allowed to give his or her cloak as collateral for a loan, but it must be returned at night so that the person's suffering will not be aggravated by the evening chill. In Jesus' day the Romans were taxing people to maintain their empire. The wealthy were investing in large estates worked by poor tenant farmers. The peasant landowners had been forced to give up their ancestral lands because of debt and were then kept tied to the land by the unjust debt system. The deep animosity toward this system was such that when the Zealot insurrection erupted in A.D. 66, their first act was to burn the Temple treasury where the debt records were kept.

In Jesus' example, the person who is being dragged into court is a poor debtor. He must face the power of a wealthy landowner who is supported by a legal system that will force the poor person to give up his garment as surety for his outstanding debt. This person seemingly has no power, but Jesus tells the debtor to give up not just his coat, but his cloak as well—perhaps even all his clothes. The debtor is to strip naked in court! This surprising action exposes not the nakedness of the debtor but the moral bankruptcy of the system that was oppressing the poor. The shame of nakedness in Jewish society rested not primarily in the naked person, but in the one who caused the nakedness and in those who witnessed it (thus the strange curse on Ham in Genesis 9:20-27 for witnessing Noah's nakedness while he was in a drunken stupor). By stripping naked, the "powerless" debtor is holding up a moral mirror to the wealthy landowner and the court itself, indicting them over the systemic oppression that caused people to be deprived of their fundamental needs.

The third example from the Sermon on the Mount comes from the Roman law that civilians could be impressed to carry a soldier's baggage for one mile (literally million, one thousand paces). The roads were marked at every mile, so it

was an easy distance to judge. The law was intended to keep the armies mobile but not to create too much resentment among the populace. Resentment among the Jews was very deep, however, over this act of the occupier's domination.

Jesus turns the situation around from one where the Roman exercises his oppressive power to one of helping out someone in need: "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile." As long as the soldier can force another to do his will, then he gets the expansive feeling of having power. But when the civilian offers to carry the pack another mile, the tables are turned. What was demanded is now freely offered, and the soldier is put into a delicate situation for which he has not been prepared. It is against the law to force someone to carry his pack two miles.<sup>59</sup>

Christ's three examples illustrate the structural violence that was in place at that time, enforced by the Romans. "Jesus is calling his followers not to respond in kind to the acts of injustice and dehumanization directed against them, but rather to respond with transforming initiatives."<sup>60</sup> Wink names this approach "Jesus' Third Way," offering an alternative to the "flight or fight" responses that are so characteristic of human behavior in response to conflict. The lessons offered in the Sermon on the Mount are not easily put into practice, partly because in today's world the lessons it holds are not easy to grasp fully, without the proper background explanation. Many people have read it without understanding its radically transformational nature. However, when understood in the cultural context from which it comes, Jesus' sermon offers insights that are complimentary to peacebuilding efforts, in many contexts.

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<sup>59</sup> Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Galilee Doubleday, 1998), 98-111.

<sup>60</sup> Dan Buttry, *Christian Peacemaking: From Heritage to Hope* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 15.

In contrast, there are a number of different hindrances to peacebuilding that also come from Christianity: both inherently as part of its theology, and in its history and development. Once the Church became an institution of power, the desire to maintain that power became a factor. While this amazing local, national and international institution can be complimentary to peacebuilding, “there is also the recognition that violence is often perpetuated under the guise of preserving political stability. Historically of course, there are many instances of Christianity being co-opted for political purposes, often with the effect of inciting conflict.”<sup>61</sup> Many people in the world today are drawing lines between nations; good or bad, friend or foe, depending on whether or not they hold ‘Christian values.’ There is an intolerance to difference that has manifested itself in many churches. Moreover, in some cases where the Church and secular power have been too friendly, this intolerance to difference has resulted in state-sanctioned oppression and violence backed by the Church’s ‘moral authority.’

Another hindrance to peacebuilding found in Christianity circles deserves mention. ‘God’s will’ is a phrase often spoken by Christians to explain why something has happened. However, it is interesting to note how subjective this can be, and how (depending on the person involved) this can be used positively or negatively. Some people are prone to equating a difficult situation with ‘God’s will’ faster than others, and one result is they may give up on any efforts to change that situation. As peacebuilding is often needed in very difficult contexts, and the individuals and relationships needed to

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<sup>61</sup> Judy Carter, “Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action,” , Eds Harold Coward and Gordon Smith *Religion and Peacebuilding* (NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 367.

sustain such efforts are crucial to its success, then accepting difficulties as ‘God’s will’ too quickly and passively is a hindrance.

### ***Buddhism***

Buddhism rests upon ‘Four Noble Truths’ revealed by the Buddha in his lifetime. These truths have to do with suffering: how it arises and how it can end. In fact, the Fourth Noble Truth, the ‘Eightfold Path,’ is a list of eight guidelines given by the Buddha on how to reduce suffering, thus promoting well-being:

The eightfold path (*atthangika-magga*) consists of the following steps:

- Right understanding—understanding the four noble truths
- Right thought—having thoughts free from desire, ill will, and cruelty
- Right speech— not lying, using harsh language, or gossiping
- Right bodily action— not killing, stealing, or indulging in irresponsible sex
- Right livelihood— not engaging in work or activity that brings harm to others (fishing, contributing to military activities, deceit, trading in arms, etc.).
- Right effort— the effort to overcome unwholesome tendencies and promote wholesome ones
- Right mindfulness— self-awareness of both mental and physical dimensions of our experience. (When we walk we are mindful of the experience of walking. When we feel unhappy we are mindful of the feeling and the images associated with it.)
- Right concentration— the concentration used in meditation and associated with wholesome {*kusald*} states of consciousness (i.e., cultivation of goodwill, renunciation of desires, and obtaining a clear understanding)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John McConnell, *Mindful Meditation: A Handbook for Buddhist Peacemakers* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 1995), 9-10.

Like the Ten Commandments, these guidelines give specific instruction on how to manage and avoid conflict, maintain and develop healthy relationships, and effectively work towards peace.

An interesting part of Buddhist theory, as it relates to peacebuilding, comes from the belief in impermanence. The Buddha said that nothing is permanent, and that the root of all suffering could be found in the *akusala-mula*, which is comprised of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate), and *moha* (delusion).<sup>63</sup> Being able to look at a situation as impermanent may encourage a more positive mind frame for dealing with what appears to be an intractable conflict. Moreover, when one looks at a conflict as made up of reflexive, but defined, pieces, then strategies for transforming that conflict may become clearer. “The *akusala-mula* (unwholesome, unskilled roots of action—greed, hate, and delusion—are paralleled by three *kusala-mula* (skilled, wholesome roots)—*alobha* (non-greed), *adosa* (non-hatred), and *amoha* (non-delusion). The *akusala-mula* and the *kusala-mula* are two sides of a single coin. The difference between them is essentially that the *akusala-mula* are self-centered whereas the *kusala-mula* are selfless.”<sup>64</sup> To look at this teaching in the context of peacebuilding, one can say that to transform greed is to empower a person to see what it is they really need, and then recognize that need. Similarly, hate finds its roots in hurt, and delusion comes from ignorance and confusion. The tools provided in Buddhism to transform the *akusala-mula* to the *kusala-mula* are relevant to peacebuilders in many contexts.

The Four Sublime Abodes, *metta* (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkha* (equanimity), are tools for the cultivation and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 95.

maintenance of healthy relationships, and the transformation of negative ones.<sup>65</sup> *Metta* is a very important concept in Buddhist philosophy, and it can be used in peacebuilding when looking at certain efforts such as empathy. The ability to respond empathetically to those with whom you are in conflict with is a valuable tool, as it recognizes and validates the situation they are in. This is one step towards recognizing similar needs in another, and thus one step closer towards building a healthy relationship, or transforming one that is grounded in conflict.

Another Buddhist concept that is relevant to peacebuilding is that of mindfulness. Essentially, mindfulness is an awareness of oneself; what causes one to suffer, to be joyous, and so on. “What the Buddha taught was basically that once we turn our attention to our unhappiness and just how it arises, we gain the power to change the psycho-spiritual processes that are its continuing cause.”<sup>66</sup> What makes this concept so useful for peacebuilders is that the more deeply one practices mindfulness in one’s own life, the more aware one can become of what causes other people to suffer. Thus, “awareness is the result of a process of learning,”<sup>67</sup> and it is the connection between mindfulness/awareness and learning that is complimentary to peacebuilding. Concepts such as the Four Sublime Abodes, mindfulness, and impermanence, are reflexive in nature. The more aware you are of how you would feel in a certain conflict situation, the more skillfully you can use *metta/karuna/mudita/upekkha* in responding to that conflict. Therefore, by practicing one concept, you can enhance your ability to more effectively employ another.

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<sup>65</sup> Pategama Gnanarama, *An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy* (Singapore: Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association, 1996), 91.

<sup>7</sup> McConnell, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 186-7.

Education and learning are cornerstones to Buddhism, and are one of the charges of the Buddhist Sangha (community). The Buddha revealed certain truths and tools in his life in regards to ending suffering. The creation of the Sangha (and its guiding rules) serves to move people towards this end. “Moreover they (the Sangha) are entrusted with the task of educating them (the people) in order to widen their mental outlook.”<sup>68</sup> All these Buddhist concepts require instruction and practice if they are to be developed as a life skill. The Sangha can act at the local, national, and international level, to help accomplish this purpose. Thus the Sangha’s ability to communicate and disperse information as an organization, and to encourage the development and practice of concepts that are applicable to peacebuilding, potentially make it a valuable organization for peacebuilding.

The Buddhist context also contains certain hindrances to peacebuilding that should be noted. For example, some argue that a majority of the tools and lessons offered by the Buddha indicate a need for reflection and change within the self, and do not focus on the responsibility of that individual in a society to enact change or build peace. “The tendency to see problems only as a result of *karma*, and, thus, to be addressed exclusively within the realm of the individual responsibility, seems to have been one important obstacle for Buddhist societies in recognizing inequality, poverty, social strife and war as moral obligations awaiting concrete solutions.”<sup>69</sup> While one could suggest that this argument is shortsighted, since, after all, *karma* operates outside of the realm of the individual for many Buddhists (and in fact one can build upon one’s own *karma* by

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<sup>68</sup> Department of Buddhist Affairs, *Social Dimensions of Buddhism* (Sri Lanka: State Printing Corporation, 1995), 42.

<sup>69</sup> Eva K. Neumaier, “Peacebuilding and the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka and Tibet”, Eds Harold Coward and Gordon Smith ” *Religion and Peacebuilding* (NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 90.

aiding someone in need), a valid point is nonetheless made. *Karma*, and *upekkha*, are both concepts that place the responsibility for action more in the hands of the individual than upon societies.

*Upekkha* (equanimity) is defined through stories in the Buddha's life; one is the story of the quarrelsome monks of Kosambi. The quarrelsome monks of Kosambi is a story of a monastery divided between two factions, represented by two different leaders. In this case, the Buddha had to intervene directly. *Metta*, *karuna* and even an appeal by the Buddha to apply the *Dhamma* (Buddha's teachings) to their lives and their conflict, went unheeded. Consequently, the Buddha finally withdrew from the conflict. The act of withdrawal was so severe, that the resulting pressure from the community, which responded by withholding the food and money it usually gave to the Sangha/*pongyis* in question, worked to transform the conflict.<sup>70</sup>

The Buddha advised using the other three of the Four Sublime Abodes (*metta/karuna/mudita*) before *upekkha*, but the specifics are not explained thoroughly. As a result, some Buddhists use the Kosambi story (coupled with the concept of retribution for actions found in *karma*), to explain why a certain situation is the way it is, and to justify non-action or withdrawal as a means to deal with that situation.

### Religious Leaders

Managing and working on conflict, in a variety of ways, is an area where religious leadership has, and can continue to play, a very visible and effective role.

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<sup>70</sup> McConnell, 302.

Religious leaders have been called upon to intervene in conflict situations as mediators and advisors, because they believe that preventing violent conflict "...is often central to their identity, faith and hope."<sup>71</sup> Their position often allows them to have access to both the grassroots and the top levels of their society, if not as an individual, then through their religious organizations. In such cases, they play an invaluable role in relaying information between two levels which are often quite out of touch with each other. The position which leaders hold in their religious community, and the reputation they carry, coupled with their position in society as a whole, help make the scope of religious leadership in peacebuilding potentially broad and effective.

### ***"Middle-Out" Peacebuilding***

Religious leaders can play a strategic role in building peace, from what has been coined by John Paul Lederach as a "middle-out" approach to peacebuilding. In creating a strategy for peacebuilding in any given conflict, key people capable of bringing about and supporting the conditions for peace, need to be identified. Civil society, comprised of working professionals, intellectuals, the media, small business groups, NGOs, religious leaders and religious organizations, are crucial to the success of peacebuilding efforts in a variety of different ways. Their insider knowledge, commitment to long-term sustained efforts, access to government, and ability to organize public support, have afforded them tremendous success in the prevention of conflict in difficult economic and political

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<sup>71</sup> Carter and Smith. "Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action," *Religion and Peacebuilding*, 384.

transitions, and in national reconciliation processes, around the world.<sup>72</sup> These peoples make up an “...infrastructure that legitimates and integrates multiple levels of the population affected, in terms of both input in the peace process and its implementation.”<sup>73</sup> A typical way to illustrate a populace affected in a conflict is that of a triangle (see Figure 2<sup>74</sup>). In this diagram, levels of leadership and their specific “approaches to building peace” are delineated, in order to give a more comprehensive view of who is affected by conflict, and the methods that they can employ to build peace.

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<sup>72</sup> Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997), 110-27.

<sup>73</sup> Lederach, “Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework.” Ed. Rupesinghe *Conflict Transformation*, 207.

<sup>74</sup> *CAUX Scholars Program Participants Handbook*, 355.

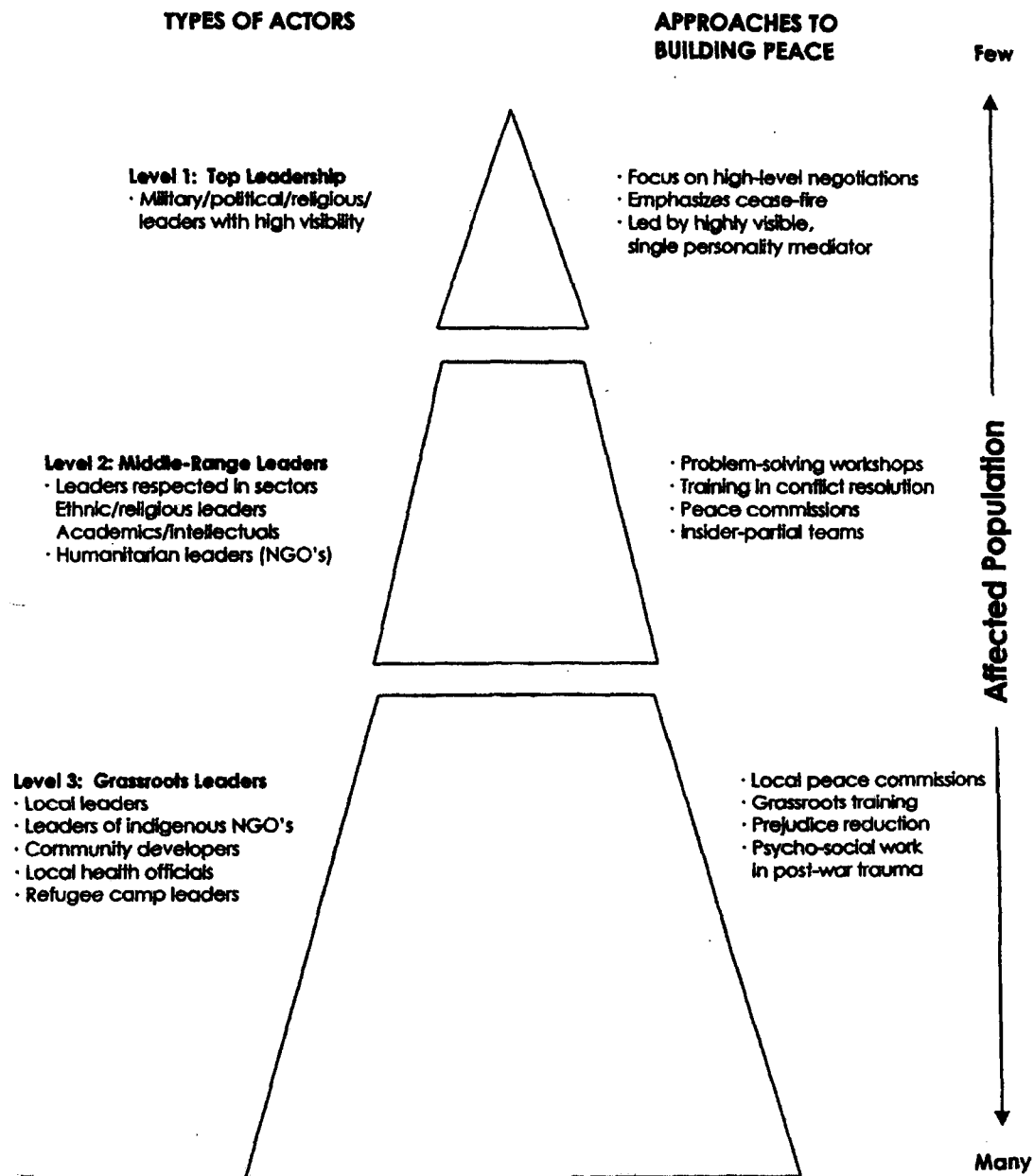


Figure 2. Approaches to Peacebuilding: The Pyramid Model (*Caux Scholars Participants Handbook*).

Often, the responsibility to negotiate for peace falls onto the top-level leadership. In contrast, a middle-out approach makes the connection of the top-level of leadership to the grassroots level of society a primary focus. The 'disconnect' between the different levels

of a society has been credited for the failings of many peacebuilding efforts. While the responsibility might fall on the top-level leaders to negotiate for peace, particularly in cases when it is an intra-state conflict, it is the population affected by those negotiations that must live out those decisions, and support peace within their communities. Often, efforts at the top-level are misunderstood by those that are affected by the decision-making. Moreover, top-level leadership has the tendency to assume that it understands the minds of those at the grassroots, thus claiming the right to speak for them, when often this is not the case. Further, in order to effectively build peace one must not discount, but strive to include, the many different ways that exist to build peace within that context. Therefore, the ability to integrate all levels of leadership in order to co-ordinate peacebuilding efforts, is a strategic necessity. "We must recognize the integrative potential of middle-range leaders, who by their place within the affected population, may be able to cultivate relationships and pursue the design of social change at a subsystem level, thus helping to make the vertical and horizontal connections necessary to sustain a process of desired change."<sup>75</sup>

Religious leaders are prime examples of mid-level leadership. Their position gives them access to various levels of their society, and their permanence in a society makes them ideal for long-term peacebuilding strategies. As well, "Religious leaders can play a uniquely informed and influential role in the detection of early warning signs of violence."<sup>76</sup> Consequently, their role in a middle-out approach to peacebuilding is a very important one. Yet religious leaders have an even greater role to play. While a middle-out approach to peacebuilding recognizes the important role that religious leaders can play in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 359.

<sup>76</sup> Carter and Smith, 295.

connecting the different levels of their society, in an integrative peacebuilding strategy, it does not specifically address the potential that religious leaders possess in regards to preventing conflict in the first place, and building peace from a spiritual foundation.

### ***Conflict Prevention***

Preventing violent conflict from happening is a task for which religious leaders have a considerable potential for success. Joseph Bock states that there are three aspects of religious leadership that are pivotal for preventing deadly conflict: encouraging disciplined information processing, cultivating a sense of belonging, and exercising authority.<sup>77</sup> He suggests that religious leaders can act to prevent rumors and hate-mongering from co-opting their followers into committing acts of violence. Inter-faith and inter-ethnic councils can act as a forum for peoples from different faith communities to discuss issues relevant to their shared situation. This type of forum encourages communication between groups that might otherwise live separately from each other. In Macedonia, for example, participants in joint ethnic Albanian and Slavic Macedonian councils were found to be less susceptible to "...manipulation by rumor mongering and conspiracy theories."<sup>78</sup> Religious leaders can also act jointly to support development, and other related projects that aim to improve the shared conditions of the community at large. These projects create a means for people from different backgrounds to work together towards a common goal. A common goal, which stresses the interconnectedness of all peoples in a community, is important in the encouragement of disciplined

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph G. Bock, *Sharpening Conflict Management: Religious Leadership and the Double-Edged Sword* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 87.

<sup>78</sup> Janie Leatherman, "Preventing Conflict in Macedonia: A Lasting Peace or a line in the Sand?" quoted in Joseph G. Bock, *Sharpening Conflict Management: Religious Leadership and the Double-Edged Sword* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 88.

information processing; also, it acts to combat the rumor mongering, gossiping, and stereotypes that often are used to promote an 'us' vs. 'them' mentality.

An important task for religious leaders is to create a sense of belonging that is inclusive, rather than exclusive. It is easy to build up a group's identity based on 'us' versus 'them,' but the hard task for religious leaders is to break away from such polarities and "...accentuate commonalities in the traditions and heritage of people of differing identities while embracing fully their own religious traditions."<sup>79</sup>

Religious leaders need to be aware of where, and how, they can exercise their authority. Their authority is dependent on where it is being exercised (i.e. "amongst followers, or potential followers"<sup>80</sup>). Within this constituency they maintain a considerable influence, and in regards to peace and conflict, have the ability to employ their faith in the pursuit of either. An example to illustrate:

Two commanders and their mujahideen ('religious warriors') were preparing to battle over some incident that caused a rift and men were actually taking up positions in a village area to begin the battle. A mullah from the local mosque took out his loudspeaker and ran up and down the streets proclaiming that "no one will come to the funerals of anyone who dies in this conflict." This signaled his judgment that the up-coming battle had no religious justification and that people who died would not, therefore, be considered martyrs (eligible for heaven). The battle did not occur.<sup>81</sup>

The capacity to counter-attack religious leaders who are seeking to promote conflict needs to be developed as part of that authority, as well. "When political or religious leaders set the framework of any conflict in religious terms, the prejudices of

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<sup>79</sup> Bock, *Sharpening Conflict Management: Religious Leadership and the Double-Edged Sword*, 90.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

many people are validated and the development of hate for the other on religious grounds seems justified by their leaders.”<sup>82</sup> Religious leaders, therefore, have a responsibility to counter efforts by others who attempt to co-opt and corrupt followers of their own faith, through an interpretation of religious texts, scriptures, and symbols that promote their own personal agendas. The co-option, and use, of religion as a mobilizing vehicle for economic, political, militaristic, and social aspirations is not a new phenomena, but it is on the increase, and is true of many of the identity-based conflicts facing the world today.<sup>83</sup>

Preventing violent conflict is a role that religious leadership can fulfill, particularly amongst their own followers. However, preventing violent conflict from happening is only one piece of the elaborate structure of peacebuilding. After such conflict is prevented, or stopped, there are many ways in which religious leaders can work to transform the relationships that have given rise to the conflict.

### *Transforming Conflict*

Religious leaders are in a sense storytellers, revealing and making meaning out of the stories that are at the foundation of their religious traditions, for their followers. The importance of these stories in regards to identity, meaning making, and relationship to others, needs to be recognized as a contributing factor to religious conflict. Michelle LeBaron states that stories “...are the fabric through which conflicts are constructed and the threads through which relationships can be rewoven.”<sup>84</sup> Religious leaders can choose

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<sup>82</sup> Hangué, “Curtains of Fire: Religious Identity and Emerging Conflicts,” 2 (on-line) ([www.mcc.org/respub/occasional/24html](http://www.mcc.org/respub/occasional/24html)).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 1-10.

<sup>84</sup> LeBaron, 249.

to use inclusive language, and metaphors, as a means to transform and build relationships, and thus set a tone that is supportive of peacebuilding from within the context of their religion. The stories, and their interpretations, are important mediums for religious leaders to convey messages to their followers.

For example, the excerpt given previously on Christ's Sermon on the Mount chooses to focus on the transformational message contained in this sermon. By analyzing this piece through the historical context from which it came, new meaning is brought to light. The message does not call upon Christians to act meekly and turn the other cheek. Rather, "The person refuses to be humiliated and claims his or her full humanity, and, thus the striker is forced to recognize the humanity of the one he or she has been oppressing."<sup>85</sup> The tone of this story encourages its listeners to act defiantly, yet in a non-violent manner. The focus is on the message of transformation, thus laying the foundation for skills needed to transform the relationships and institutions that are often at the heart of conflict.

Another example illustrates the importance of choosing metaphors that include others as equals, in the process of peacebuilding. Consider the religious leader who, when learning that his/her organization has decided to promote inter-faith learning, introduces the process to his followers by saying it is "...like leading a horse to water." Consider another leader who describes the same process as "...a journey into an un-known land." One metaphor implies that one group will teach or lead the other, and implies that the process will be an easy one. The other metaphor portrays the process as exciting, difficult, and possibly scary. Further, it does not imply superiority of one group over

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<sup>85</sup> Buttry, *Christian Peacemaking: From Heritage to Hope*, 15.

another. “Metaphors can set the tone of a conflict, influencing behaviors and attitudes.”<sup>86</sup>

The behavior and attitudes needed to build peace and transform conflict, must be inclusive and supportive of difference. How religious leaders present the stories, what language they use, and the tone they set, can all be supportive of peacebuilding, and can work to build or transform relationships necessary to sustain peace.

### Religious Organizations

Religious organizations also have an important role to play in the field of peacebuilding due, first, to their very structure, which places them simultaneously at the community, national and international level; and second, as a result of the moral authority from which they operate. These factors have contributed to the success that many religious organizations have had in the field of diplomacy and peacebuilding.

#### *Organizational Structure*

It has been mentioned that religious organizations often operate simultaneously at various levels. Their very structure can be supportive of peacebuilding efforts, and should not be undervalued. “Each of the different faiths have their own organizational approach...the Christians have churches, Muslims have mosques, Jews have synagogues, and Buddhists and Hindus have temples.... Each of these is like a “node” in an information system that can monitor and respond to aggression and prepare people for

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<sup>86</sup> LeBaron, 194.

effective preemptive intervention.”<sup>87</sup> Religious leaders operating at these various levels have the ability to inform their organization, and from this multi-layered information-gathering, a strong analysis of a situation can be made.

### ***Moral Authority***

Religious organizations can operate as insiders at the various levels in which they exist, and do so with a certain moral authority. This has gained them access to, and made them a natural choice for peacebuilding in, many situations throughout the world. This moral authority has allowed for religious organizations to act in a multitude of different ways, to promote human rights, peace and justice -- values that are attributed to their relationship with God. This, in combination with their organizational structure, has allowed for their activities to “transcend state boundaries and penetrate the decision-making of individuals and governments,”<sup>88</sup> thus they have proven very effective in certain situations as diplomatic actors, within the various tracks of diplomacy in the global arena.

### ***Diplomacy and Peacebuilding***

#### ***(i) Track 1***

There are a number of different levels, or tracks of diplomacy in which religious and spiritual organizations have been able to wield considerable influence. Track 1 diplomacy refers to all efforts that take place at the official level of diplomacy, including dialogue and other efforts made by governments and their officials, organizations such as the UN, and regional organizations such as the OAS, OAC, ASEAN, and EU. Certain

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<sup>87</sup> Bock, 131.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Princen, “Mediation by a Transnational Organization: the case of the Vatican.” In *Mediation in International Relations*. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin (NY: St Martin’s Press, 1992), 2.

religious leaders and their organizations have had success at this level of diplomacy. One example of this is Cuba, where the Pope's visit in January of 1998 resulted in the release of political prisoners (and permission to speak freely to a national audience) and, continuing contact with Castro. This visit was also instrumental in the shift in US foreign policy towards Cuba, and subsequent easing of certain restrictions. The Vatican, and the Pope as its representative, used its moral authority to condemn both the US and Castro for the human rights violations, and sufferings, that the people of Cuba have had to endure as a result of the US/Cuban conflict.<sup>89</sup> It illustrates how a religious leader can apply his, and his organization's, moral authority over another, at the Track 1 level. Informed by his organization, operating at different levels and from multiple resources, the Pope was able to create a strategy for his visit to Cuba that created results within the country, and brought worldwide attention to bear on it as well.

*(ii) Track 2*

"Track 2, or parallel diplomacy, means...non-state diplomacy that occurs simultaneously with, but not co-coordinated with state diplomacy."<sup>90</sup> This refers to work that typically involves NGOs and other members of civil society, to create the conditions for peace. In many examples around the world, religious organizations play an important role as members of civil society, hosting trainings and skill building workshops, informal relationship building exercises, and other activities that aim to build the relationships and capacity to support peace. In South Africa, various church organizations reached out to,

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<sup>89</sup> Johnston, 22-3.

<sup>90</sup> Fabienne Hara, "Burundi: The Case of Parallel Diplomacy." In *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World*, Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1999), 158.

and were able to make connections with, Afrikaner churches along these lines. Through these connections (aided considerably by international pressure from outside church organizations), a shift in the attitude among some of the Afrikaners was noted.<sup>91</sup> Through different kinds of exchanges, information sharing, and in less formal ways such as social events and sports, the needs of the black population were introduced to Afrikaners in a way they hadn't been done before, and they began to be recognized as legitimate. At the same time, the success of these efforts to reach a portion of the white population, increasingly empowered more of the black population to participate.

*(iii) Middle Track*

Middle track diplomacy can be identified as efforts that operate within the realms of both Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy. Their insider knowledge of both levels (including the different actors' needs, interests, positions, demands, pressures and constraints that both sides face, and how this all relates to the situation at hand), provides a unique position from which to understand the larger political context of peacebuilding. From this position, middle track actors have the ability to inform both levels, make connections, co-ordinate and "synergize"<sup>92</sup> efforts of different actors, mediate between these different levels of diplomacy, and effectively broaden the scope of peacebuilding efforts.

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<sup>91</sup> Ron Kraybill, *Lecture for the Shalom Foundation participants*. Yangon, Burma: March 19, 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Bartoli, Andrea. "Mediating Peace in Mozambique," In *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World*. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1999), 248-49.

The middle track of diplomacy is an arena within which religious organizations fit well. Some of the religious organizations currently doing remarkable work at the middle track level of diplomacy in peacebuilding include: various Catholic organizations such as the Community of Saint'Egidio, and the Catholic Relief Services (CRS); the Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends); the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC); and the Baptist Peace Fellowship. These organizations work at the grassroots in the various countries they call home, to build relationships and the capacity to prevent conflict, and to encourage peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>93</sup> What makes them distinctly middle track actors is their connection to levels of government, and to organizations like the UN, through their own various organizations and committees. The Quakers have a seat in the United Nations General Assembly, while the other groups maintain working offices designed to coordinate decisions made within the UN, with their offices stationed throughout the world. These groups have been involved in diplomacy and peacebuilding, as a result of their interpretation of their own faith, and have built on the skills and knowledge needed to operate in this field, from a spiritual foundation. They are leaders among a growing number of religious organizations that are taking a place in the field of peacebuilding and diplomacy today.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> CRS, *webpage*. ([http://www.catholicrelief.org/what we do overseas/peace/diplomacy.cfm](http://www.catholicrelief.org/what_we_do_overseas/peace/diplomacy.cfm))

MCC, *webpage*. ([http://www.mcc.org/bi/un/mcc\\_mission.html](http://www.mcc.org/bi/un/mcc_mission.html))

BPFNA, *webpage*. (<http://www.bpfna.org/relpolsoc.html>)

Community of Saint'Egidio, *webpage*. (<http://www.santegidio.org/en/pace/index.htm>)

The Quakers (QUNO), *webpage*. (<http://www.afsc.org/quno.html>)

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

### *Summary*

A spiritual framework for peacebuilding moves to incorporate the potential that religious and spiritual movements contain as a resource for peacebuilding, for a number of different reasons, and, in a variety of different ways. First, religious dynamics in conflict have received less attention than others, yet seem to be characteristic of many of the conflicts currently taking place across the globe. Often, religion is either central to a conflict, or acts as a mobilizing vehicle to serve economic, political, militaristic, nationalistic, and ethnic aspirations. In either case, “Whatever one discovers in the roots of war must become a principal part of recovery, growth, and the visioning of new civilization.”<sup>95</sup> Therefore, by recognizing the role that religion can play in regards to conflict and peace, and, by incorporating the potential that it offers as a resource for peace, a spiritual framework can provide a useful approach to building peace in many contexts.

Second, religious and spiritual movements contain a wealth of insights, lessons, and rules, all useful in the management of healthy and peaceful relationships. And when the relationships are themselves creating conflict, insights into how they can be transformed to support peace, can also be found. These lessons of transformation are also applicable to situations where the societal institutions and systems themselves are generating conflict, which is why they are so important for peacebuilding in those contexts. Each religious and spiritual movement offers different ways of building peace,

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<sup>95</sup> Marc Gopin, “The Challenge of Co-existence.” *Engaging the Future: Religion, Human Rights, and Conflict Resolution* (on-line). ([http://64.4.16.250:80/cgi-bin/linkrd?\\_lang=EN&lah=61ca560b00ee060ddd54eb4335d68c25&lat=1070326294&hm\\_\\_action=http%3a%2f%2ffacinghistory%2einfo%2enet%2f3%2fOpenTopic%3fa%3duprf%26s%3d720294726](http://64.4.16.250:80/cgi-bin/linkrd?_lang=EN&lah=61ca560b00ee060ddd54eb4335d68c25&lat=1070326294&hm__action=http%3a%2f%2ffacinghistory%2einfo%2enet%2f3%2fOpenTopic%3fa%3duprf%26s%3d720294726)).

but by looking at them specifically for ways to build peace and transform conflict, as in the examples of Christianity and Buddhism in this chapter, similarities arise, and strong examples that may be applicable to peacebuilding in many contexts, can be found.

Third, religious and spiritual leaders, and the organizations that they represent, can be extremely valuable actors in a peacebuilding strategy. In any strategy, there is a need to identify key actors, and organizations, to support the conditions for peace, on a variety of different levels. Religious and spiritual leaders live and work permanently at the community, national, and international level, and so do the organizations that they represent. Thus they are very capable of supporting long-term peacebuilding processes.

Religious and spiritual leaders are often able to inform the different levels of political leadership, if not through their own ability then through that of their organizations, of matters that may affect peacebuilding efforts underway. As a result, they can play a key role in the prevention of conflict, and in connecting peacebuilding efforts between the different levels of a society. Further, and in a similar way to Lederach's "middle-out" approach to peacebuilding, these organizations have the ability to act within, and connect, the various tracks of diplomacy that often remain out of touch with each other: "synergizing" efforts between states, and regional bodies, with those on the ground, to build peace in a more comprehensive manner.

Religious and spiritual leaders, and their organizations, also have the ability to strengthen peacebuilding processes from a spiritual foundation. These leaders can discourage the 'us' vs. 'them' mentality that so often leads to violence, through the support of religious stories, texts, and scriptures, that teach tolerance, and promote peace. Joseph Bock's argument that they can play a key role by "encouraging disciplined

information processing, cultivating a sense of belonging and exercising their authority,” provide examples of how religious leaders can work in conflict prevention, from a spiritual foundation.

But there is more; religious and spiritual leaders can elevate a peacebuilding process to a higher level by exercising their moral authority, and appealing to higher values. In June of 1979, Pope John Paul II returned to his native Poland, which at that time was heavily involved in a non-violent direct action campaign against their Soviet rulers, for the first time since becoming Pontiff. By appealing to Christian values and solidarity, and condemning the human rights violations carried out by the atheist/communist regime from a spiritual foundation, Pope John Paul II was able to strengthen, and add momentum to, a non-violent movement that successfully ended the Soviet domination of Poland.<sup>96</sup> In fact, the Pope’s visit set in motion a process that was credited “...by none other than Mikhail Gorbachev as having been responsible for the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe.”<sup>97</sup>

Religious and spiritual organizations can also strengthen a peacebuilding process when operating from a spiritual framework by upholding the values that they carry, and looking for ways to put them in practice. As indicated previously, this is necessary particularly when religion has been a part of the conflict: as a means to address the wrongs done in the name of a religious or spiritual movement, and to reconcile the different faiths that are apart of the conflict. To elaborate on the example of South Africa, while “...religion was used as a weapon of violence to achieve a political end,” it later played a crucial role in the demise of apartheid rule. Church groups in South Africa, and

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<sup>96</sup> Ackerman and Duvall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, 132-33.

<sup>97</sup> Johnston, xii.

the rest of the world, fought together, to bring to light the hypocrisies and evils of a system that justified oppression through the co-option of the Christian faith.

It is the moral vision, and authority, combined with the multi-leveled organizational structure, and long-term presence of religious organizations around the world, that make these organizations resources for peacebuilding in many contexts. Religious/spiritual leaders are extensions of these organizations. Through their personal commitment, they can in many ways harness the potential that religious and spiritual movements possess, in regards to building peace.

## Chapter 3

## BURMA: A CASE STUDY

Burma is situated in Southeast Asia, and shares borders with Thailand, Laos, and China to the east and north, and India and Bangladesh to the west. Burma is divided into seven states (Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan) and seven divisions (Ayeyawadi, Bagu, Magwe, Mandalay, Sitgine, Thanintari, and Yangon).

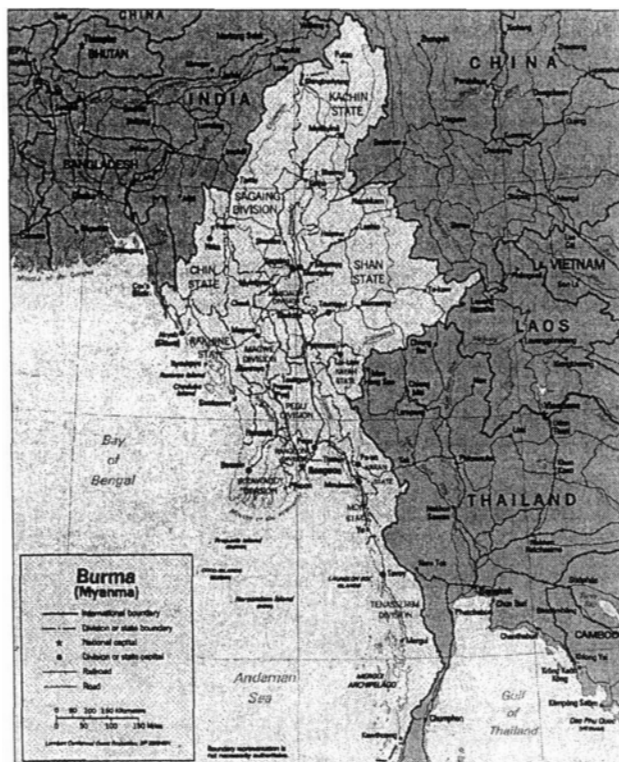


Figure 3: Map of Burma ([www.shalommyanmar.org](http://www.shalommyanmar.org))

The major ethnic nationality groups include the Burman (Bamar), Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan, but there are also many smaller groups. The population is estimated at around 50 million, with an ethnic division of roughly 60-65% Burman (Bamar), and 35-40% of combined ethnic nationality groups, the largest of these being the Karen. A lack of infrastructure, and years of war, has made any statistics hard to corroborate.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Journal Note*. Shalom Foundation, Meeting. Yangon, Burma: March, 2003.

While the Burmese language remains the official language in the country, each nationality group has its own distinct language, cultural identity, and customs. The religious diversity is almost as great, including the majority and state religion of Buddhism, as well as Christianity, Islam, Animism, and Hinduism.

“Its total area is over 675, 000 square kilometers, making it the largest and least densely populated country in mainland South-East Asia. Once known as the rice basket of Asia, Burma is now regarded as one of the world’s poorest nations.”<sup>99</sup>

### Political Realities in Burma Today

Burma regained its independence in 1948 from British colonization.

The fledgling democracy faced ethnic unrest, a growing communist threat, and political assassinations-- including the hero of the independence movement, General Aung San. In 1962, General Ne Win took control of the government from Prime Minister U Nu. Following this he “...instituted the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism,’ which systematically impoverished a country that had a 90% literacy rate and was rich in natural resources. Ne Win dismantled the independent judiciary, the legislature, and the multiparty system. He also effectively cut off Burma from the rest of the world.”<sup>100</sup> Burma expert David

Tegenfeldt notes:

After years of colonial domination, at the time of independence personal and group aspirations were very high and, naturally, some of these aspirations were in

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<sup>99</sup> The Irrawaddy, “About Burma” *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition* (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma.html>).

<sup>100</sup> Mathea Falco (Chair), “Burma: Time for Change.” *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations*, 7.

direct conflict with one another. With little capacity existing to deal with conflict through nonviolent means, shortly following independence the communist and ethnic insurgencies began. During the next five decades more groups took up arms against the central government and sometimes against one another, ushering in a period of one of the longest running civil wars in this planet's modern history. The insurgency and counter-insurgency efforts of the past 50 years have brought immense destruction, suffering, and distrust between groups and within ethnic groups.<sup>101</sup>

Since then, many of the armed groups that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s have reached cease-fire agreements, and/or have exchanged 'arms for peace' with the military government of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), now called the State Peace and Development Committee (SPDC). These cease-fires have come at a very high cost, and in some cases are threatening to fall apart for various reasons. They will be explored in greater detail, later on in this chapter.

The 1988 student protest brought about the most obvious change since 1962. General Ne Win had recently stepped aside (while remaining an unofficial guiding force), and the new military government, SLORC, took over government power as a means of restoring law and order. After students and others demonstrated in protest, thousands of people were killed across the country, in response to the protest, and many thousands more were forced to flee, either out of the country, or to border areas. At that time, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of assassinated leader Aung San, emerged as a political leader of the pro-democracy movement. The 1990 landslide victory for her party,

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<sup>101</sup> David Tegenfeldt, "Burma: Reconciliation in Myanmar and the Crises of Change." *SAIS Conference Panel V: Minority Questions*. November 23, 2002.

National League for Democracy (NLD), was not recognized by the regime. Instead, it would be used as a catalyst for a period of brutal oppression over any forms of dissidence, and tighter control over the already isolated population. Daw Suu Kyi would be placed under house arrest from 1989-1995, and again from 2000-2002. Her selfless pursuit for democracy in Burma would earn her a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

On May 30, 2003, after being released from house arrest, Daw Suu Kyi was attacked by a mob, orchestrated by the regime, outside of Mandalay.<sup>102</sup> Widely referred to as “Black Friday,” this unsuccessful attack on her life resulted in the deaths of a number of her supporters, and the return of Daw Suu Kyi to house arrest, “for her own protection.” International pressure in response to the gross human rights violations committed by SLORC/SPDC has been mixed, but has translated for the most part into either limited regional pressure, or, in the form of international sanctions, primarily from the US, UK, EU, and other western countries including Canada and Norway, among others. Outrage over the Black Friday attack has further tightened the sanctions, and resulted in more regional pressure, with the hope of encouraging necessary reforms in Burma.

The SPDC has recently responded to this pressure with a reform process titled the “7 Point Road Map to Democracy,” which is to start on May 17, 2004, with the reconvening of the National Convention: a constitution-drafting body that fell apart in 1996, due to protests over regime manipulation of the process. There is wide skepticism over the sincerity of the SPDC in regards to both the road map and the National Convention. Thus far, a majority, but not all, of the ethnic groups have been invited to

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<sup>102</sup> Falco (Chair), 1.

attend. While the NLD has been invited, there has been no reference as to whether or not Daw Suu Kyi will be allowed out of house arrest, to attend.<sup>103</sup>

Other forms of negotiations and peacebuilding processes within Burma are very limited. These include the tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, the UN, and the NLD; and some efforts by local leaders and organizations, often from the ethnic nationality groups, aided by members of the international community, to support peace within their various constituencies. The tripartite dialogue has been virtually stalled since the Black Friday attack. Certain efforts within and amongst the ethnic nationality groups are operating with considerable success despite the many hardships that they face--not the least of which are the fragile cease-fire agreements between their ethnic armies and the SPDC.

The preceding overview of Burma's political scene shows that the obstacles to peace in Burma are many, and the situation is bleak. Successive military regimes have bankrupted the economy, destroyed the infrastructure and capacity needed to function as a nation, isolated the country from the rest of the world, and created a culture of fear and oppression in which dissenting thought and action invites violent retribution. There are currently between 1300-1400 known political prisoners in Burma, over two million refugees who have fled Burma for economic and political reasons,<sup>104</sup> and there are as many as one million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP's) currently in the country,<sup>105</sup> with a disproportionate amount of these being ethnic nationalities. The military regimes have

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<sup>103</sup> Kyaw Zwa Moe, "Junta Invites NLD to Attend Convention—NLD Calls for Suu Kyi's Release," *Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/print/news/april08b.html>).

<sup>104</sup> Falco (Chair), 1.

<sup>105</sup> Jana Mason, quoted in The Carnegie Endowment, *Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced People in Burma*. May 24, 2000. (on-line) (<http://www.ceip.org/programs/migrat/burma.htm>).

mastered the ability to exploit the diversity of Burma, along ethnic and religious lines, to support their own rule.

However, the situation in Burma is not one without hope. International pressure, and continued mismanagement by the regime, have made it much harder for the SPDC to maintain the same control over the population it's predecessors enjoyed. A strong religious community (of a number of different faiths), committed individuals within a growing civil society, and continuing international support, may work to bring about change in Burma.

This chapter will explore in greater detail the situation in Burma, specifically looking at the conflict and peace generating factors that exist within that context. As a result, a case will be made for why there is a need for a spiritual framework for peacebuilding in Burma, based on the theoretical groundwork laid out in the first two chapters.

### Conflict Generating Factors

#### ***Ethnic Insurgency***

In any analysis of Burma, understanding of the context of the ethnic nationality groups is key to any strategy for peacebuilding. As previously noted, there are a number of distinct ethnic groups within Burma, which retain their own languages, cultures, customs and traditions. Following independence, a long period of ethnic insurgency was carried out against the military government of General Ne Win, then the SLORC, and now the SPDC. All the ethnic groups still retain at least one standing

army/insurgency/resistance group, if not more. An interesting point is that while some of these insurgent groups are based on ethnicity (and their desires for political independence/greater autonomy), others are based on political ideology (communism) or economic trade (drugs/natural resources).

However, over the past 15 years, many of these groups have signed cease-fires with the SLORC/SPDC. Currently, the most powerful and longstanding of the insurgency groups, the Karen National Union (KNU), representing the largest of the ethnic nationalities, is involved in negotiating a cease-fire with the SPDC.

The cease-fires have resulted largely from fatigue, felt on both sides of the conflict, after decades of overt violence. Under the regime's current bid for national pacification, all are offered an 'arms for peace' deal on similar terms, despite their different aims. Many of the 'drug lords' have retired after exchanging 'arms for peace,' but those groups who have negotiated cease-fires for the purpose of building peace and development in their communities (until their political aspirations can be met), continue to suffer.

The cease-fire in Kachin State provides an example of the latter scenario. The cease-fire between the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the SPDC addresses a nationwide cease-fire, tripartite dialogue, economic trade and development, and amnesty.<sup>106</sup> It has "...brought an end to the bloodshed in Kachin State. Years of civil war have had a huge impact on the population. Civilians can now travel more freely and farmers no longer fear being shot at while working in their fields."<sup>107</sup> There has also been a positive impact on issues related to development, not the least of which is the

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<sup>106</sup> *Journal Note*. Rev. Saboi Jum, Shalom Foundation Meeting: Yangon, Burma: March, 2003.

<sup>107</sup> John S. Moncreif and Htun Myat/Kunming, "The War on Kachin Forests" in the *Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, Oct./Nov., 2001 ([www.irrawaddy.org/database/2001/vol9.8/cover.html](http://www.irrawaddy.org/database/2001/vol9.8/cover.html)).

creation of some NGO's representing a reemergence of civil society within the region. However, the negatives are also very real, and, in many minds have begun to overshadow the positive effects of the cease-fires. Primary here is that there is no ability to address political concerns,<sup>108</sup> because the regime has continually stressed that (despite over 40 years of military rule in Burma) "...it is only a military transitional government and is therefore not entitled to make any political agreements."<sup>109</sup> Unable to address political concerns, while equally unable to address economic disparities that are occurring in part due to the negotiation of cease-fires, these agreements are, in some cases, threatening to fall apart. In fact, the two most longstanding cease-fire agreements ( with insurgent groups in Kachin and Mon States) are under serious strain due to lack of development, and an increasing presence of military and pro-SPDC forces in their states.<sup>110</sup>

### ***Structural Violence***

#### ***(i) Cease-fires***

Behind the regime's willingness to enter into cease-fires is a larger strategy of structural violence that emphasizes one group's needs over another's. It can be argued that cease-fires are designed "...as a strategic move on the part of the military regime to minimize demands for political change in Burma,"<sup>111</sup> while increasing opportunities for revenue and military presence within insurgency zones. Another example from Kachin State illustrates this. The KIO/SPDC cease-fire allows different groups to extract resources from specific areas. Because the extraction costs of teak are so expensive, most

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<sup>108</sup> *Journal Note*. Rev. Saboi Jum, Shalom Foundation Meeting. Yangon, Burma: March, 2003.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>110</sup> *Journal Note*. Shalom Foundation, Meeting: Yangon, Burma: January, 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Janette Philp and David Mercer, "Commodification of Buddhism in Contemporary Burma," *Annals of Tourism Research* (Vol. 26, No 1, 1999), 28.

Kachins cannot afford to do so themselves. They must then contract the work out to the SPDC, or to Chinese corporations, for a poor share of the profits. Replanting is rare, as thoughts for maintaining these resources for future generations are not prevalent. Many feel that these resources will be gone soon anyway, so they should get some value out of them while they still have the chance. This "environmental fatalism" has increased tensions between groups competing for teak and other natural resources (jade, rubies, gold), and will continue to give rise to conflict in the future.<sup>112</sup> In fact, arguments over who should profit from these resources, and how the cease-fire has led to these resources being exploited by 'non-Kachins,' has recently led to renewed infighting in Kachin State. Conflicts like these threaten to derail their cease-fire agreement.

*(ii) Human Rights Violations*

Other examples of structural violence in Burma, outside of the cease-fire processes, are numerous. Ethnic nationalities need permission to build churches and to travel to certain places; they (like all people in Burma) can be detained for long periods of time; their language is not encouraged outside of their ethnic groups; and upward mobility in government positions (particularly the military), has a ceiling if one is not Burmese. They are also subject to gross violations of human rights including murder, rape, torture, imprisonment without trial, forced labor and forced relocation.<sup>113</sup> Living conditions and access to resources in ethnic states are also very poor, compared to other parts of the country.

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<sup>112</sup> *Journal Note*. World Concern, Meeting, Yangon, Burma: December, 2000.

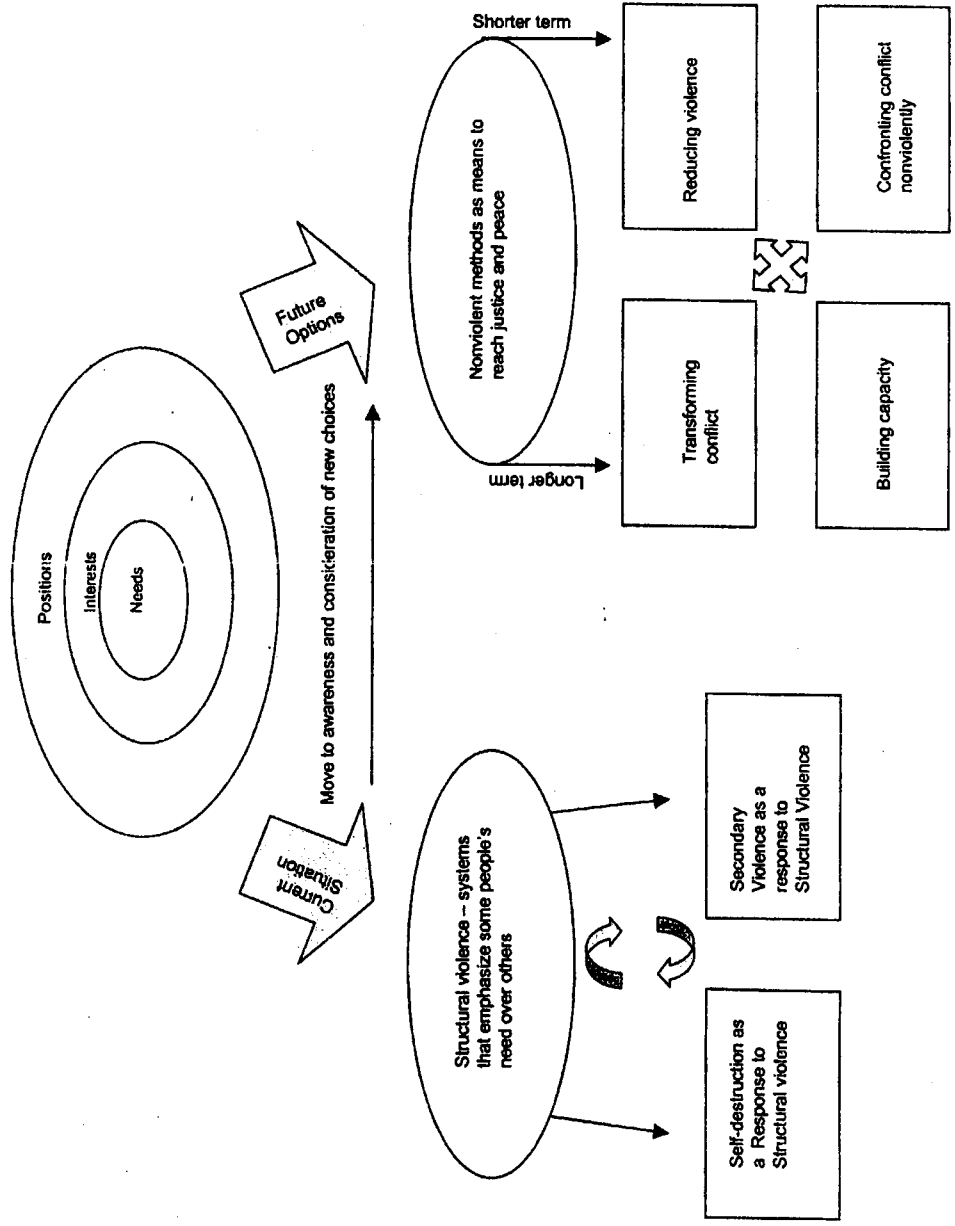
<sup>113</sup> Falco (Chair), 1.

*(iii) Self-Destruction*

According to Schirch's "Justpeace" map, there are two responses to structural violence: "self-destruction, and secondary violence," (see Schirch's "Justpeace Map," modified by Carol Gowler for a Shalom Foundation workshop, Figure 3).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Carol Gowler, *Modified Schirch Justpeace Map*. Shalom Foundation, Meeting. Yangon, Burma: March, 2003.



Two possible responses to unmet needs – modified Schirch Justpeace Map, Gowler, July 2002

Figure 4

In Kachin State, as in other ethnic nationality contexts, it is possible to find many examples that support both responses to structural violence. Secondary violence was evident in the decades of insurgency between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and the various governments since Ne Win's coup in 1962. In the post-ceasefire years; however, self-destruction, in various forms, has been a more common response to the structural violence. Drug addiction, alcohol abuse, and prostitution are growing in alarming numbers in Kachin State, particularly in areas such as Pagan.<sup>115</sup> This jade mining area is home to thousands of migrant laborers, from a variety of ethnic groups, among which prostitution, drugs/alcohol, and gambling dens have proliferated. Some have likened the conditions there to that of the "Wild West."<sup>116</sup> Burma is experiencing what UNICEF refers to as a "... 'silent emergency,' a health crisis of epidemic proportions. HIV/AIDS is spreading rapidly."<sup>117</sup> The sex trade, and intravenous drug use, are leading causes of this growing crisis.

In-fighting, and divisions within the Kachin community over different issues, are further indications of self-destruction taking place in response to structural violence. In the post-ceasefire years, the SLORC/SPDC, and Chinese firms, a few members of the Kachin community, and some higher ranking KIA officers, have all been able to profit from the extraction of resources in Kachin State. At the same time, promises for development and political reform are slow moving, or have gone completely

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<sup>115</sup> *Journal Note*. Conversation with Kachin men. Train ride from Myitkyina, Kachin State, to Mandalay: Feb. 18, 2003.

<sup>116</sup> *Journal Note*. Hope International, Meeting. Yangon, Burma. Jan. 27, 2003.

<sup>117</sup> UNICEF report, quoted in Mathea Falco (Chair), "Burma: Time for Change." *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations*, 1.

unaddressed. So, although the fighting has stopped because of the cease-fire, which removes the regime as the obvious 'common enemy' for the Kachins, there are economic, social, and political injustices that many of the Kachin population are still forced to endure. Now, it is often the very structures supporting their own society which are perpetrating the violence. Thus, the regime has been able to encourage its adversaries to fight among themselves, which is clearly self-destructive.

In this scenario, the interests of the regime are, of course, well served. As long as the cease-fire holds, then business for the regime continues as usual. It has also used the pause in overt fighting to strengthen its military might, and increase the number of soldiers in insurgency areas. "KIO sources ... point out that after the ceasefire the Burmese army has dramatically increased the number of its battalions in Kachin State."<sup>118</sup> This is a similar story for ethnic nationalities throughout the country. Moreover, shortly after the 1988 student uprisings, China and Burma began to increase economic trade and political relations. "Subsequently, China sold Burma more than US \$1.5 billion worth of military hardware, including tanks, warplanes and patrol boats."<sup>119</sup> The end result: the regime is militarily stronger and the insurgency groups are weaker. If the ethnic nationalities do indeed split over how to bring about political reform, and opt for the more traditional response of insurgency (secondary violence), they will find that the battlefield is much less even than it once was. Now their ability to defend themselves has been seriously reduced, and the regime's military strength is significantly increased.

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<sup>118</sup> John S. Moncreif and Htun Myat/Kunming, "The War on Kachin Forests" *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*.

<sup>119</sup> Aung Naing Oo, "Good Neighbors: Just What the Junta Needs" *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, Jan. 30, 2004. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/com/2004/com02.html>).

(iv) *The Military*

The strategy of structural violence within its own military institution, the *Tatmadaw*, has also been effective for the regime. The system has been set up to compel soldiers to be aggressive and violent in order to survive and have any acceptable income themselves. Salaries are so minimal that military officers and soldiers have to supplement their incomes through any business they can create. As a result, they tend to be involved in extracting natural resources, smuggling, the drug trade, taxation/bribery, and other forms of money making opportunities offered as a result of their position.<sup>120</sup> These types of businesses flourish in ethnic nationality states especially, due to their proximity to border areas, and their natural resources. Therefore the business interests of the regime are often in direct competition with those of the ethnic nationalities, and/or profit from the exploitation of ethnic nationalities through taxation/bribery, forced labor, and the extraction of resources.

The *Tatmadaw* is an institution that denies its soldiers certain needs to make them more effective at carrying out the regime's orders. They too can be seen as victims in the cycle of violence that the regime uses to perpetuate its power and authority. In her article "School for Rape," Betsy Apple writes about the use of violence within the *Tatmadaw*:

The *Tatmadaw* is a brutally hierarchical institution which both conscripts and recruits immature, uneducated, and inappropriate soldiers. These soldiers are then subjected to a course of training which simultaneously denies them necessary fighting skills and teaches them that the exercise of power requires savage violence. They experience significant deprivations—of food, comfort, medicine, money—and unyielding physical and mental abuse. Throughout their tenure in

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<sup>120</sup> *Journal Note*. Shalom Foundation, Meeting. Yangon, Burma: March 11, 2003.

the Tatmadaw, they are barraged with messages, both explicit and oblique, which reinforce the ideas that men, in order to be good soldiers, must be powerful; in turn, those with power exploit those more vulnerable through dominance, violence, and cruelty.<sup>121</sup>

The result is an army for which the use of violence and terror is not only normal, but in fact, made necessary for survival.

*(v) Disintegration of Civil Society*

Another important aspect of structural violence should be mentioned: the lack of civil society in contemporary Burma. Previously mentioned, civil society is comprised of working professionals, intellectuals, the media, small business groups, NGOs, religious leaders and religious organizations. The decline of civil society began with the coup d'état led by General Ne Win, and the ensuing nationalization programs. "Nationalization of most business and industry, private schools, and hospitals was carried out during 1963-66,"<sup>122</sup> which affected the freedom and power that civil society networks had previously enjoyed, and marked the beginnings of further state control over that portion of the population. Ashley South, author and researcher for the MacArthur Foundation, writes : "Under the 1974 constitution, all political activity beyond the strict control of the state was outlawed. Particularly hard hit were trade unions and most professional associations, such as journalists' groups."<sup>123</sup> In the context of the ethnic nationalities, insurgency

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<sup>121</sup> Betsy Apple, "School for Rape." *An Earthrights International Report*. February, 1998. ([http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/docs/school\\_for\\_rape.html#4](http://www.ibiblio.org/freeburma/docs/school_for_rape.html#4)).

<sup>122</sup> Herman Tegenfeldt, "A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma" (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1974), 72.

<sup>123</sup> Ashley South, "The Need for Two-Way Traffic (Part Two)" in the *Irrawaddy On-Line Edition* (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/com/2003/com49.html>).

destroyed and prevented the re-emergence of most of the networks, institutions, and organizations, that made up the civil society within those groups.

Many of the skilled and educated have fled the country for various reasons, also; so the ability of Burma's civil society to re-establish itself has been seriously reduced. Author/scholar and Burma expert David Steinberg notes the "brain drain" of professionals from Burma: "After the riots of '74, (the government) quietly began to allow citizens to leave Burma... Since the 1988 coup, the "drain" has become a virtual flood, as the government rids itself of unemployed, dissident intellectuals."<sup>124</sup>

### ***Religion: Source of Conflict***

#### *(i) Manipulation of Religious Differences*

Alongside its strategy of structural violence, the military regimes of Burma have shared in a long history of manipulating religion to serve their various needs. Although the regime cannot be blamed for all conflict between religious and ethnic groups, it certainly benefits from encouraging the conflict. The mistrust which exists between ethnic groups, and within them, often fall along religious lines. This adds to, and creates, conflict between individuals, organizations, ethnic, or religious groups, which is then ripe to be exploited. So, the regime has mastered the ability to promote ill feelings between ethnic groups, and to encourage disunity and conflict within ethnic groups, often along religious lines.

"The SLORC/SPDC has manipulated religious differences to create dissension among the Buddhists, Christians, and Muslim groups, particularly in the border regions,

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<sup>124</sup> David I. Steinberg, *The Future of Burma: Crisis and Choice in Myanmar* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1990), 55.

as a means of creating political divisions and gaining military advantage.”<sup>125</sup> In another specific example: “Personal disagreements between the predominantly Catholic Kayans...and Baptist Karennis...were largely responsible for the continued separation of Mongpai and its estimated 30,00 inhabitants from their close Karenni cousins in 1948. With the spread of the Kayan insurrection in the 1960’s, the *Tatmadaw* tried to exploit these religious differences by promoting the Buddhist community and minority Shans.”<sup>126</sup>

In Karen State, after years of fighting without positive advancements for their people, and with pressure applied by the regime along religious lines, there has been a split in the Karen insurgency front.<sup>127</sup> What exists now are the KNU (Karen National Union), and the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army): two insurgency efforts from the same ethnic group, divided along Christian and Buddhist lines, competing for resources and fighting with each other, rather than the regime.

*(ii) Assimilation*

Religion has been a part of the regime’s strategy in another way as well: in a campaign to assimilate ethnic nationalities into its own concept of the ‘Union of Myanmar.’ “The SLORC/SPDC has sought to mould a coherent, Burmese, Buddhist identity shared by all inhabitants of the modern country through the elimination or

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<sup>125</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, in Janette Philp and David Mercer, “Commodification of Buddhism in Contemporary Burma,” *Annals of Tourism Research* (Vol. 26, No 1, 1999), 43.

<sup>126</sup> Bishop Suter, “History of Insurgency in Karenni or Kayah State,” 8

<sup>127</sup> Bradley, 1997, in Janette Philp and David Mercer, “Commodification of Buddhism in Contemporary Burma,” *Annals of Tourism Research* (Vol. 26, No 1, 1999), 43-4.

synthesis of racial, cultural, and religious difference.”<sup>128</sup> Gustaff Houtman, Deputy Director, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, names this campaign the “Myanmafication”<sup>129</sup> of the country. The phrase refers to the regime’s extension of Burmese language, culture, nationality, and religion (Buddhism) over the entire country, or, in other words, “. . . the attempt to Burmanise Burma.”<sup>130</sup>

Ethnic/religious diversity gets in the way of the regime’s vision of an ideal, unified Myanmar, and this strategy has been devised to address the problem.

The majority of the Christians and Muslims in Burma are from the ethnic nationality groups. The Chins, Kachins, Karens, Karenni and Kayin, in particular, represent Christianity of various denominations. Rakhine State is the home of the majority of the Muslims from Burma’s ethnic nationality groups, although across the country there are many Muslim communities, whose roots were originally from other places, such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Animism was the traditional religion for many of these different ethnic groups, and in a number of the states and divisions aforementioned, there remain sizeable communities still holding these belief systems. For many of them, being Christian, Muslim, or Animist is central to their identity, which in part entails being non-Burmese and non-Buddhist.

It is clearly in the regime’s interest to subdue these diverse loyalties. Thus the Myanmafication campaign “. . . has turned into a programme that fits in snugly with a

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<sup>128</sup> Janette Philp and David Mercer, “Commodification of Buddhism in Contemporary Burma,” *Annals of Tourism Research* (Vol. 26, No 1, 1999), 44.

<sup>129</sup> Gustaff Houtman, “Buddhist Meditation and Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and Mental Culture in an Authoritarian State” *Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Monograph Series No. 33* (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999), 1-400.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

number of other military interests,”<sup>131</sup> and one of the “...central roles of the army (*Tatmadaw*) is the unification of the ethnic minorities...”<sup>132</sup> Unification in this context appears to be closer to assimilation, and if successful, would settle much of the unrest that threatens the political control, and economic power, of the regime.

*(iii) Use and Misuse of Buddhism*

In line with its ‘unification’ strategy, the regime has co-opted the majority religion of Buddhism in order to limit and control the influence of the Sangha over the Buddhist population at large, and to further legitimize its own authority as rulers. Though specifically not a political body, the Sangha remains an influential force in Burma that demands recognition. The Ne Win government knew this, and initiated a number of different Sangha reforms to try and bring this religious body under tighter control. In 1980, and “under state-imposed direction,” a new Supreme Sangha Council was created; superseding the powers of the original one, through the unification of the various orders under one council, to “...strengthen the authority of the state over the monkhood...”<sup>133</sup>

In another significant move, the regime has altered a facet of Buddhist philosophy in order to prohibit any type of protest against the regime from the Sangha, and from individual *pongyis*. There are “3 baskets” of regulations (*winezas*) that govern the Sangha: the Buddha’s discourses, rules (for *pongyis*), and philosophy. In Burma, the regime has added a fourth basket to the list, one that disallows the Sangha from acting/protesting within what *they deem* to be the political sphere. The ramifications of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>133</sup> Bruce Matthews, “Buddhism Under a Military Regime: The Iron Heel in Burma” in *Asian Survey* (Vol. 33, No. 4, April 1993), 415.

this need to be noted. By creating a fourth basket of rules in a traditional framework, the regime has cleverly aligned political and religious (Buddhist) interests, allowing themselves not only to control the political sphere of the Sangha to some degree, but also to brand opponents/dissidents from within the Sangha as acting against the will of the Buddha. When a *pongyi* acts against these baskets, then he/she is not only subject to a number of different punishments, but can also be stripped of his/her title and thrown out of the Sangha. For example, in January 2003, two *pongyi* “nuns” protested publicly against the regime. They were stripped of their robes, forced out of the Sangha, and thrown in jail as political prisoners.<sup>134</sup>

Along with the Supreme Sangha Council, and the fourth basket, another aspect of the regime’s Buddhist strategy has been to continue the tradition of building and restoring temples, and donating money and food to the Sangha. “Ironically, at the same time that political repression entered its harshest phase, the SLORC regime encouraged programs for the promotion of Buddhism, including the teaching of the faith in high schools and improving standards of monastic education, and the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs continues to offer support for the upkeep of pagodas.”<sup>135</sup> These are all merit-making activities that rulers have subscribed to throughout the history of Burma. “The well known behavior of the generals in renovating and visiting their ‘Wish fulfilling Pagodas’ in a superstitious attempt to consolidate their power bears a striking resemblance to the behavior of the kings who originally built much of Pagan.”<sup>136</sup> The

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<sup>134</sup> *Journal Note*. Hope International, Meeting. Yangon, Burma: March, 2003.

<sup>135</sup> Matthews, “Buddhism Under a Military Regime: The Iron Heel in Burma” in *Asian Survey*, 417.

<sup>136</sup> Myint Nain Oo. Sydney, Australia. Guest book on the government Internet home page (<http://www.myanmar.com/guest/guest.html>), quoted in Gustaff Houtman, “Buddhist Meditation and Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and Mental Culture in an Authoritarian State” *Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Monograph Series No. 33*, Appendix 1, 13.

Sangha exists at the community and national level in Burma, and *pongyichangs* (Buddhist monasteries) can be found in every village and town across the country. Thus, the regime believes that by supporting the Sangha, they "...have organized power structures in villages, towns, and districts for their own manipulation."<sup>137</sup>

So far, various conflict generating factors that exist in Burma's society today have been reviewed: a pervasive strategy of structural violence that is visible in cease-fire agreements and their self-destructive effects on ethnic minorities, in human rights violations, in the regime's own military system, and in the systematic elimination of the country's civil society. Religion is also used as a weapon in the regime's strategy of manipulating religious differences, assimilating ethnic groups into a Burmese, Buddhist whole, and changing Buddhist structures and rules in some ways to bring them into closer alignment with military/political interests.

### Peace Generating Factors

#### ***Religion: Source of Peace***

A strong civil society is key to many peacebuilding strategies, in any country. The individuals and organizations that make up civil society relate to the grassroots level of their society, putting them in an important position for feeling, understanding and responding to conflict as it develops. Mid-level leaders can assist top-level leaders with decision making, using information gleaned through their relationship with the grassroots

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<sup>137</sup> Min Zin, "Engaging Buddhism for Social Change" in *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/database/2003/vol11.2/culture.html>), 1.

community, and can in turn explain or communicate information from the top level back to the grassroots. Lederach's "middle-out" approach to peacebuilding, described earlier in Chapter Two, specifically targets civil society, in which these mid-level leaders and organizations exist, for precisely these reasons.

The very lack of a civil society in Burma has left, as its primary representatives, various religious organizations and its leadership. In fact, religious organizations "...are among the few non-government controlled institutions allowed to exist in Burma."<sup>138</sup> Consequently, the importance of the role, duties, and responsibilities of these organizations and individuals have dramatically increased, and they have become essential to many peacebuilding efforts in Burma.

*(i) Christian Context*

In Kachin State, for example, the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) works in education, development, acts as mediators for some disputes, and is generally regarded as the primary organization for all Kachin Baptists (roughly 85-90% of Kachins are Baptist<sup>139</sup>). The KBC also has strong ties with the KIO, and thus the KIA. Nationally, their convention shares ties with other Baptist conventions and share ties internationally with American Baptist Conventions, including the Baptist Peace Fellowship North America (BPFNA) mentioned in Chapter Two, and of course, other Baptist organizations worldwide. The Myanmar Baptist College (MBC) in Yangon is accessible to all Christians in Burma, though the number of Burmese Christians represented at this college is extremely low. (There exists a strong culture of distrust and ill feelings amongst ethnic

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<sup>138</sup> Ashley South, "The Need for Two-Way Traffic (Part Two)" in the *Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*.

<sup>139</sup> *Journal Note*. World Concern, Meeting. Myitkyina, Kachin State: Jan., 2001.

nationalities towards the Burmese.) Catholics, Anglicans, and other Protestant groups have varying support depending on the area of the country, and all play crucial roles within their ethnic group, and on the national level. However, there has been little effort in crossing these religious boundaries, even when it is within a specific ethnic group.

The various Christian organizations, and leaders, have played an important role in the peacebuilding efforts in Burma to date. Christian leaders are often part of the mediation teams that have worked on the cease-fires, between the SLORC/SPDC and various insurgency groups. Rev. Saboi Jum is a Kachin religious leader who played an essential role in the negotiations between the regime and the KIO, to bring about the cease-fire agreement that was reached in 1994. The cease-fire has created space for issues of development to be addressed, and as a result of this space, "...a few indigenous NGO's have been allowed to register legally with the authorities."<sup>140</sup> The two most well known are the Shalom Foundation (peace and development), and the Metta Foundation (development).

In 2001, Rev. Saboi Jum approached the SPDC with a proposal to set up an organization, the Shalom Foundation:

...to act as a forum towards breaking down old misunderstandings and prejudices among the various groups, and, to develop a common understanding and respect between the ethnic nationalities and majority Bamar ethnic people. The Shalom Foundation aims to promote peace and reconciliation among, and between, the various ethnic nationality groups and with the national government (SPDC). This includes facilitating conflict resolution and trust-building on many issues, including culture, natural resources, and economics. Through trainings and workshops, seminars and meetings, we aim to build up the capacity of local

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

organizations to resolve conflicts, build peace, and promote trust and reconciliation. A number of different trainings and workshops are offered that include;

- Peacebuilding
- Peace and Reconciliation
- Conflict Transformation and Resolution
- Fear Reduction (Trauma Healing)
- Mediation and Negotiation Skills
- Dialogues
- Training of Trainers (TOT)
- Parliamentary Procedures<sup>141</sup>

The Shalom Foundation also acts as an umbrella organization under which other ethnic nationalities have been able to find support, share their experiences, and create a community for building peace in Burma.

The Metta foundation was the first indigenous NGO in Burma, created in 1998.

Metta's main objectives are to:

- create a framework for self-help initiatives
- support sustainable community-based projects
- facilitate skills training
- establish partnerships with like-minded organizations or individuals<sup>142</sup>

While primarily working in issues related to development, Metta's commitment to establishing partnerships, working at the community level, and its connections to the

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<sup>141</sup> Shalom Foundation, *webpage*. ([www.shalommyanmar.org](http://www.shalommyanmar.org)).

<sup>142</sup> Metta Foundation, *webpage*. ([www.metta-myanmar.org](http://www.metta-myanmar.org)).

international community, has made it a valuable resource for building the relationships and capacity needed to encourage, and support, peace in Burma.

*(ii) Buddhist Context*

Buddhism is a part of Burmese culture, and it receives respect from even the most powerful in Burma: if not from truly religious devotion, than at least out of recognition of the important role that it plays in Burmese society. While merit-making (the act of giving to improve one's *karma*<sup>143</sup>), and the co-option of Buddhism in various ways, is done to legitimize the regime's power and to control the Sangha, it would be incomplete to argue that it is done solely for these reasons. For example, when SLORC's first leader, Saw Maung, took power in 1988, his first public address was an appeal to the Supreme Sangha Council (State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee) for support.<sup>144</sup> Further, the only time the regime agreed to mediation with the NLD, outside of the UN's efforts, it was facilitated by certain individuals in the monastic community. The regime has taken painstaking steps to ally itself with Buddhism, believing that a controlled Sangha will also aid in the control of the Buddhist population at large. Thus Buddhism, and the Sangha, have access to, and influence over, the regime, to a degree, unlike no other person(s), or organizations, inside of Burma.

As previously mentioned, the Sangha exists at the community and national level, and is represented across the entire country. The organizational structure of the Sangha, in conjunction with its moral message, importance in society, and vast membership, potentially make it a formidable force. "The Sangha now poses both a moral and

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<sup>143</sup> Philp and Mercer, 40.

<sup>144</sup> Houtman, "Buddhist Meditation and Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and Mental Culture in an Authoritarian State," *Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Monograph Series No. 33*, 62.

organizational challenge to the military. With almost half a million Buddhist monks in Burma, the Sangha is roughly the same size as Burma's army. But the regime contains the monastic order with intimidation and repression, and controls monks by awarding special titles to those loyal to the regime."<sup>145</sup> However, despite this control and manipulation, there have been a number of examples, over even the past twenty years, that illustrate the power which the Sangha can wield in regards to building peace in Burma, when they choose to.

The most famous of these examples took place in 1990, and is commonly referred to as 'the overturning of the begging bowls.' This happened in response to the regime's restrictions placed on the Sangha; the killings and other human rights violations that followed the 1988 protests; and the refusal by the regime to uphold the elections of 1990, in which the NLD won by an overwhelming majority. The begging bowls, or alms bowls, are used to collect food and other alms from the Buddhist lay community every day, in order to support the local *pongyis*. In protest, and for over two months, "...an estimated 20,000 monks across the country refused to accept alms from anyone in military uniform.... By refusing to accept gifts from the soldiers, the monks kept them from acts of merit, the most important practice for Burmese laymen, and effectually expressed the opinion that the military was behaving as non-Buddhists."<sup>146</sup> This brilliant example of a non-violent direct action strategy, grounded in a Buddhist framework, forced the military to think about their actions in relationship to their religious beliefs, and to the community at large, as it also empowered the general public to participate. "The public at large showed their agreement by refusing to share public transport with

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<sup>145</sup> Min Zin, "Engaging Buddhism for Social Change" in *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, 2.

<sup>146</sup> Robert Florida, *Buddhism and Human Rights* (Wesport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, In Press), 15.

soldiers or to sell to their families in the market.”<sup>147</sup> Using their shared beliefs as a means to criticize certain actions, the Sangha and the general public were able to come together and exert real pressure over the military.

There are also a number of peace generating factors in the Buddhist context that relate to civil society. Similar to the other religious groups in Burma, a number of cultural, literary, and educational organizations exist in the Buddhist context. “Although emergent civil society networks are often associated with Christianity, many Buddhist associations exist too, and the Sangha has great potential as a catalyst in civil and political affairs.”<sup>148</sup> The Sangha’s important position and role in Burmese society, their ability to communicate and disperse information as an organization, and to encourage the development and practice of Buddhist concepts that are applicable to peacebuilding, potentially make it a valuable ally within any strategy to build peace in Burma.

### ***Traditional Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution (TMDR)***

Finally, there are traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution (TMDR) in Burma that are important to the unity of ethnic groups, and offer an encouraging alternative to violent conflict. An example of the use of TMDR comes from Carol Gowler’s studies on traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution (TMDR) in Kachin society. She comments on the application of a TMDR, on a contemporary conflict in Burma.

In 2001, a dispute amongst the KIO and KIA broke out in regards to the leadership of then KIO Chairman Zau Mai. “In keeping with Kachin conflict resolution traditions, assistance was sought from a group of highly respected and trusted elders to

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ashley South, “The Need for Two-Way Traffic (Part Two)” in the *Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*.

help resolve this conflict.”<sup>149</sup> After appropriate deliberation and consultation, a decision was reached that led to the resignation of Zau Mai as Chairman of the KIO.

In contrast to recent patterns in Burma/Myanmar, the most remarkable aspects of the serious conflict within the KIO were that 1) there was no overt violence; and 2) there was no split within the KIO as a result of the dispute. Instead, a traditional conflict resolution method was successfully applied, using recognized and experienced elders and a long-standing tradition of extensive discussion, to address serious concerns and bring about an orderly transition in leadership while preserving the unity of the KIO.<sup>150</sup>

In Burma, structural violence has encouraged fragmentation and in-fighting within various groups. The above example, an application of a traditional mechanism for dispute resolution, is an encouraging contrast. Using TMDR in such situations is very important to the unity of an ethnic group. It reinforces traditional values in a contemporary framework, makes use of local knowledge rather than imported methods, and through the education and application process, it can provide a point for connection between the older and younger generations that otherwise might have been lost. Moreover, as each group develops its' own TMDR over time, sharing these can act as a point of connection for participants, and as a bridge for overcoming obstacles, in situations where there are more than one ethnic group involved. Because opportunities for empowerment and recognition can be found in the sharing or application of a TMDR in a peacebuilding process, they should be considered valuable to the process of building peace in Burma. “Supporting the indigenous conflict resolution methods that exist among

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<sup>149</sup> Carol Gowler, “Conflict and Unity: Kachin Society and Traditional Conflict Resolution Methods.” *SAIS Conference*, 15. (on-line)  
(<http://www.lpsmultilingual.co.uk/gh/bsc2002/C0302CarolGowler020912.pdf>).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 16.

the ethnic nationalities directly contributes to these groups finding their way forward, not only for themselves, but for the Union of Burma/Myanmar.”<sup>151</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The conflict in Burma is very complex. It exists at multiple levels, and involves diverse groups of actors operating at different levels within the conflict. Compounding the problems are the many minority groups who have at times been in conflict with each other, while also fighting oppressive military rule. Successive military regimes have proven themselves very deft at manipulating the complex dynamics surrounding that situation, internally and externally, to support themselves as rulers.

Structural violence, in which the very structures and institutions of a society are set up to privilege one group's needs over another's, has been employed by the regime in effective ways. Cease-fires, the disintegration of civil society, and the *Tatmadaw* or military system itself, are all examples of such a strategy. What is left is a seemingly intractable conflict in which self-destruction and secondary violence seem to be the only response, both of which serve the needs of the regime.

In addition, religion has played a prominent role in the conflict in Burma. Religion is closely associated with ethnic identity throughout the country, for the ethnic nationalities as well as the majority Burmese population. So religion has been used by the regime as a means to encourage, and create, conflict and disunity within and between ethnic nationality groups, to weaken their opposition to military rule.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 18.

Religion has also played a role in a campaign to target and unify the non-Burman, non-Buddhist population (or as Houtman names it, the “Myanmafication” of minorities). The regime’s goal is closer to assimilation than unification, for the purpose of further political control, and economic power. Thus, religion has encouraged an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality in Burma, often as a result of manipulation by the regime.

In regards to the Buddhist population, the regime’s strategy is different. Buddhism is central to Burmese culture, and remains a powerful dynamic in the culture, so the regime has allied itself very closely with it, to benefit from its power. But it has also attempted to make some changes to Buddhist structure and philosophy, in order to enhance its control over the Buddhist population and the Sangha, and to legitimize the regime’s rule.

The situation in Burma, despite its conflicts, still offers certain peace generating factors that can play an important role in a peacebuilding strategy there. Because of the important role that Buddhism plays in Burma, the regime has chosen to identify with it. Consequently, the regime has made itself vulnerable, revealing an ‘Achilles heel’ — the very strength of the Buddhist community itself. Although it hasn’t happened often, the Sangha and the Buddhist population have proven themselves capable of exploiting this vulnerability in the past, with limited success.

This vulnerability arguably extends into the context of the role that all religious organizations and leadership can play, across the entire country. In an effort to limit the power wielded by the populace, the various military governments and regimes have effectively driven the civil society of Burma underground, or out of the country. Religious organizations and its leadership were allowed to remain, however, and as a

result, became the most important non-governmental institutions in the country. These actors—while often but not exclusively Christian-- have played an important role in education, mediation, negotiation, and peacebuilding and will continue to play an important role at the community and national level in the future.

Outside the religious context, there are also strong indigenous systems for dealing with conflict non-violently in Burma. Gowler's example of a traditional mechanism for dispute resolution in Kachin society illustrates the importance of using traditional systems as "a tool to foster group unity," an issue that deserves serious attention. Encouraging the use and practice of these indigenous systems within ethnic groups, and finding ways to share and apply them across cultural boundaries, will be an important step in building what Lederach refers to as "a peace constituency."

### ***Why a Spiritual Framework for Peacebuilding is Needed.***

#### *(i) Who is Involved*

Any peacebuilding strategy requires certain individuals and organizations to support it. In Burma, religious organizations are by far the most well-equipped actors to sustain any long-term peacebuilding effort. Therefore, a spiritual framework for peacebuilding is suitable to the conflict in Burma, in one way, because it considers religious organizations as key to its efforts. These actors have the ability to access the various levels of their society, as well as the international arena, utilize their organizational capacity, remain committed to long-term efforts, and provide a moral vision for its membership to follow.

The leaders of these religious organizations also have a specific role to play in a spiritual framework for peacebuilding. Strong religious leadership can act as a barrier to manipulation of conflict by the regime, and can increase dialogue between religious organizations in an effort to prevent conflict from happening, or to transform negative relationships into more positive ones. Religious leaders are often compelled to act because their religious convictions motivate them to work toward peace. This connection transcends their individual faiths, and in some cases, has encouraged them to build relationships with others who value peace.

*(ii) Connection*

Connection is crucial in the building of relationships needed to create and sustain peace. Relationships are as important to peacebuilding in Burma, as they are in many other contexts. The regime has worked hard to suppress the building of any relationships that might support peace, and has tried to destroy any relationships which stand in opposition to it. In a context like that, a spiritual framework for peacebuilding is particularly relevant because it sees relationship building as a means of peacebuilding. Further, because religion is so integral to life in Burma, a spiritual framework is again particularly relevant as it recognizes how religious and spiritual values, systems, and lessons can play a valuable role in connecting participants within process. Such a framework empowers participants to act as a result of their own spiritual convictions, providing the basis for connection that can encourage the relationships needed to build, and sustain, peace.

One obstacle to connection in Burma is the issue of religious and ethnic identity, and the role it plays in creating an 'us' vs. 'them' mentality along these lines. Religion must be a part of the process that addresses this issue. A peace process that does not carry with it some sort of spiritual dimension would most likely be inappropriate, and/or ineffective. In this case, by excluding a spiritual dimension from the peacebuilding framework, a resource for building peace would be lost.

Traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution are one example of a spiritual system in Burma, outside of the realm of organized religion, which encourages group unity. In situations that involve more than one ethnic group, opportunities for empowerment and recognition can be found in the sharing or application of a TMDR in a peacebuilding process. It is the sharing process, in combination with the understanding of why one may act in a particular way, which encourages participants to connect in process.

For all these reasons, a spiritual framework for peacebuilding would work well in Burma: it takes into account the various dynamics that exist there, and gives space and structure for them to function at capacity.

The following chapter, Chapter Four, will explore the peace processes that are currently underway in Burma. Discoveries and observations in regards to the current peace processes will be made, including specific comments on how a spiritual framework for peacebuilding may enhance peacebuilding efforts now, and in the future, in Burma.

## Chapter 4

### PEACEBUILDING IN BURMA TODAY

There are, in fact, three levels of dialogue in Burma, which have the potential to enact change and create political reform. These are the tripartite dialogue involving the NLD, the SPDC, and the United Nations, the “7 Point Road Map to Democracy” which will begin with the National Convention, and the community to national level of dialogue.

#### *Tripartite Dialogue*

Tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, the NLD and the UN, has been the highest level of political dialogue and negotiations. It has been facilitated in country by a Swiss-based NGO, Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). However, since the “Black Friday” attack and re-house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in May of 2003, this process has been stalled. It is impossible to speculate on the future ramifications of this process, but it is useful when trying to understand the broader picture of peacebuilding in Burma, to note some of the details that have characterized the process.

In 2002/2003, the tripartite dialogue was the only high level of political negotiation in Burma. Frequent visits by the UN’s Special Envoy, Ismail Razali, supported the perception that the UN was committed to democratic reform in Burma, and increased optimism that there could be a change in the deadlock between the SPDC and the NLD. At that time, certain ethnic nationality leaders approached both the SPDC and

the NLD to request that they play a role in this process. Unfortunately, neither group supported their requests. Because the SPDC and the NLD did not want the ethnic nationalities to be part of that process, Razali and the UN also upheld that decision.<sup>152</sup>

### ***The “7 Point Road Map for Democracy” and the National Convention***

The second level of political dialogue in Burma surrounds the “7 Point Road Map for Democracy” outlined by Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in August, 2003. This process is scheduled to start May 17, 2004, with the re-convening of the National Convention, a constitution-drafting body that disbanded in 1996, due to accusations of regime manipulation of the process. There remains serious doubt about the sincerity of the regime in regards to the National Convention, the “7 Point Roadmap,” and political reforms in Burma.

While the ethnic nationalities were not included in the tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, the NLD, and the UN, they seem to be the focus of the regime’s attention in the National Convention. Since the regime has announced the re-convening of the National Convention, it has succeeded in gaining a commitment from the majority of the ethnic nationality groups to attend. On the other hand, the NLD did not receive an invitation to attend the National Convention until early April 2004, and there is still no indication to whether or not Daw Suu Kyi, NLD Secretary-General, will be released from detention to attend the convention.<sup>153</sup> In a press release on April 16, the NLD expressed its concern over attending the National Convention if certain changes are not made to the process. “Should the same procedure and rules be adopted in the holding of the National

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<sup>152</sup> *Journal Note*. Yangon, Burma: Feb., 2003.

<sup>153</sup> Kyaw Zwa Moe, “Junta Invites NLD to Attend Convention—NLD Calls for Suu Kyi’s Release,” *Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/news/2004/april09.html>), 1.

Convention, it will not be appropriate for us to attend. The formation of a National Convention has to conform to democratic principles and its rules and procedure and process must follow suit.”<sup>154</sup>

Many argue that the regime is trying to split its opposition by favoring certain groups over others within this process. “This phenomenon dates back to the colonial era. In fact the Burmese junta continues to use colonial methods to divide the opposition. The British used a divide and rule strategy to derail the opposition movement, in the same manner as the current military junta uses now.”<sup>155</sup> Other criticisms about the National Convention include the vague time frame and agenda for the convention as laid out by Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, and particularly “...the infamous ‘Number 6 Guideline,’ which calls for a constitutional leading role for Burma’s armed forces in the future affairs of the state.”<sup>156</sup> This is one provision that stands in the way of true political reform in Burma. Furthermore, the regime is not permitting any open criticism of the process by the public. “A court in Rangoon sentenced six Burmese students to long-term imprisonments for allegedly distributing leaflets denouncing the ‘roadmap’ plan of Burma’s military junta.”<sup>157</sup>

However, the National Convention and the “7 Point Road Map for Democracy” are still not yet underway, and should be given a chance to succeed before they are

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<sup>154</sup> NLD press release, quoted by Kyaw Zaw Moe and AP, “National Convention Will Stick to Old Objectives, Junta Says” *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, April 20, 2004.

<sup>155</sup> Wai Moe, “The National Convention: The Bait on the Hook” *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, Feb. 12, 2004, 1. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/com/2004/com04.html>).

<sup>156</sup> Aung Naing Oo, “Resist Where One Must” *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, Feb., 11, 2004, 2. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/com/2004/com03.html>).

<sup>157</sup> Democratic Voice of Burma, “Six Students Given Prison Sentences for Distributing Leaflets” *The Democratic Voice of Burma* (on-line), Feb., 23, 2004, 1. ([http://www.burmatoday.net/dvb/2004/02/040224\\_student\\_dvb.htm](http://www.burmatoday.net/dvb/2004/02/040224_student_dvb.htm)).

condemned. The six objectives of the National Convention as outlined by the government include:

1. Non-disintegration of the Union;
2. Non-disintegration of national unity;
3. Perpetuation of national sovereignty;
4. Promotion of a genuine multiparty democracy;
5. Promotion of the universal principles of justice, liberty and equality;
6. Participation by the Defence Services in a national political leadership role in the future state.<sup>158</sup>

These objectives, if upheld, are inclusive of the various groups in Burma, and, could theoretically offer a framework in which their needs might be addressed.

The National Convention has the potential to enact political reform in Burma. In fact, “The convention should be considered as the best hope right now for resolution of the political deadlock.”<sup>159</sup> Participants, and those interested in political reform in Burma, have a right to be suspicious of this process and the regime’s intentions, but this does not mean that the convention should not be considered, or supported, by those seeking reform.

### ***The Community to National Level of Dialogue***

The third level of dialogue in Burma exists at the community to national level, and has been led by NGO’s such as the Shalom Foundation, and the various religious organizations in the country, receiving some assistance from members of the international

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<sup>158</sup> The Irrawaddy, “The Irrawaddy/Chronology: The National Convention” *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, 1. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/print/chron-nc.html>).

<sup>159</sup> Wai Moe, “The National Convention: The Bait on the Hook,” 4.

community. At this level, relationship and capacity building is a primary focus and strategy for building peace. So far, this work has existed primarily in the context of the ethnic nationality groups, but is by no means exclusive to them.

The ability to work across ethnic and religious boundaries is a necessity at this level of dialogue, because of the religious and ethnic diversity of the country. The greater the ability to do so, the larger the scope in which these peacebuilding activities can take place, and thus, the greater the ability to work at the national level. The Shalom Foundation notes, "This is a long road and for it to be sustainable, the process must be truly participatory, and involve all the actors. This process must cross cultural and religious boundaries."<sup>160</sup>

*(i) Obstacles*

There are many obstacles that pose a threat to these grassroots, community to national peacebuilding initiatives. As mentioned before, mediation and any other peacebuilding efforts which include insurgent groups, is illegal.<sup>161</sup> In many cases, the regime turns a blind eye if notified through the correct channels, but those that work in peacebuilding in Burma still stand to face persecution, depending on the political climate. In some cases, as in the example of the Chins in northwestern Burma, insurgent groups have their strongholds in border areas and/or neighboring countries. In order to work with those groups, mediators are forced to travel outside of Burma. Passports for travel outside the country are very expensive, and very difficult to obtain.<sup>162</sup> Though permission for this

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<sup>160</sup> Shalom Foundation, *webpage*. ([www.shalommyanmar.com](http://www.shalommyanmar.com)).

<sup>161</sup> *Journal Note*. Shalom Foundation, Meeting. Yangon, Burma: February, 2003.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*.

community to national level dialogue and peacebuilding may exist, the regime is not encouraging, or making it easy, for it to happen.

The most serious obstacles facing this work in Burma; however, are first, the lack of relationships needed to build and sustain peace, and second, the lack of capacity for dealing with conflict non-violently. For example, if either the National Convention, or the tripartite dialogue, were to make any decisions that would have an impact on the situation in Burma, the ability to support those decisions at the community and national level might not yet exist. Thus, peacebuilding at the community to national level is important to the overall goal of peace and political reform in Burma. In order to cross the “cultural and religious boundaries” necessary to build peace amongst the peoples of Burma, a framework that addresses these dynamics, as a way to cross these boundaries, can be a tremendous asset to those efforts.

### ***How a Spiritual Framework Can Assist the Community to National Level***

#### ***(i) Relationships/Connection***

Peacebuilding in this paper has referred to a number of possible activities that encourage the growth of relationships, in a way that is capable of sustaining peace. Peacebuilding strategies in a spiritual framework recognize these relationships as key to the successful implementation of any plan, and employ conflict transformation theory and practice as a means to manage, build, and transform said relationships, in regards to building peace. Thus, a spiritual framework for peacebuilding is very suitable to situations where relationships, or the lack thereof, are a contributing factor to the conflict.

A spiritual framework seeks to enhance connection between participants by including that which is spiritual to the participants within that process. Instead of excluding religious or spiritual values, systems, and lessons, a spiritual framework recognizes them as valuable to the process of building relationships. This is particularly relevant to peacebuilding in Burma as ethnic and religious identity, and the co-option of religion to promote conflict and disunity, have been salient features in many of the conflicts there. This has contributed towards an 'us' vs. 'them' mentality along religious and ethnic lines, that in many situations acts to generate conflict, and/or, prevent peace from taking root.

*(ii) Identity*

Some would argue that because of the role that ethnicity and religion has played in the conflict in Burma, both should be minimized or downplayed in a peacebuilding process in order to contain, and manage, their effect on that process. A spiritual framework would disagree for a number of different reasons. First, because ethnic and religious identity have played such a prominent role in the conflicts in Burma, they need to be addressed within a peacebuilding process. This relates to the point made by Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks when he stated, "If religion is not part of the solution, then it will surely be part of the problem."<sup>163</sup> By incorporating spirituality into a peacebuilding framework; these aspects of identity can be addressed, creating a process that responds appropriately to the spiritual needs of the participants.

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<sup>163</sup> Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks, "The Dignity of Difference: Avoiding the Clash of Civilizations," 1.

Second, there are ways to build peace from a spiritual foundation that relate to both ethnicity and religion, and thus, may be more appropriate for the people involved. The examples from Christianity and Buddhism in Chapter Two, offer spiritual insights, lessons, systems, and values that support peacebuilding. Though some other religious and ethnic groups in Burma were outside the scope of this research, the same principles can still apply. A spiritual framework searches for the insights, lessons, systems, and values that relate to peacebuilding, in any spiritual context, and finds ways to apply them in process.

Religious identity can be used as means to build unity amongst those of the same faith. The insights, lessons, systems, and values, from their own religion that relate to peacebuilding, can be used to accomplish this. Ethnic identity can also be used as a means to encourage group unity. A focus on local knowledge and systems, argues Lederach, offsets the tendency for those in conflict to look to the “outside” for solutions, and makes space for the transformation of the conflict to take place through the resources found *within* the setting.<sup>164</sup> Traditional mechanisms for dispute resolution (TMDR), such as the example given by Gowler in Kachin State, can provide ways for a group to strengthen their own unity, while dealing with conflict in a non-violent way.

There are inherent dangers, however, in strengthening the unity of a group along religious and ethnic lines. Examples from around the world, past and present, illustrate the dangers that can occur when group unity turns into an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality, a tendency that has happened along religious and ethnic lines, far too often. There are, unfortunately, many examples of the intolerance for difference within religious groups in

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<sup>164</sup> Lederach, “Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework,” Ed. Rupesinghe, *Conflict Transformation*, 211-15.

Burma, for example. Structural violence and a history of violent conflict lie at the foundation for much of this. My experiences in Kachin State in regards to this were very pronounced. There is little communication, organization, or understanding even between different Christian groups in Kachin State (Roman Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, and so on) despite the fact that they are from the same ethnic group. This is even more pronounced in situations that involve some ethnic nationalities and the Burmese. Efforts by certain religious leaders to counter such feelings are few, but they do exist. I accompanied one professor from the Kachin Biblical College for the first visit of a class from that college, to a Buddhist *pongyichang*. It was very hard for him to enter a *pongyichang*, and to get the support of the community to take the class there was also very hard. For many Christians from ethnic nationality groups, being Christian is central to their identity, which in part entails being non-Burmese and non-Buddhist.

Examples like this show why the inter-ethnic/inter-faith dialogue taking place at the community to national level, is extremely important to the situation in Burma. There is a great “culture of distrust” among the different ethnic and religious groups in Burma.<sup>165</sup> While building up group unity is important and necessary for the situation in Burma, it must be done in recognition of the role that each group has to play at the national level. Cultivating a sense of belonging, without excluding others, will be one of the greatest tasks that peacebuilding at this level will have to face.

A spiritual framework for peacebuilding can assist at this inter-ethnic/inter-faith level, along the same lines as it does at the intra-ethnic/intra-religious level. By searching for and sharing spiritual insights, lessons, systems, and values within process, an

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<sup>165</sup> *Journal Note*. Shalom Foundation, Workshop. Yangon, Burma: January, 2001.

understanding of the other in relation to that situation can be reached. A spiritual framework for peacebuilding recognizes that a broader look at spiritual values, systems, and lessons can play a valuable role in connecting participants within process. Empowerment and recognition are intrinsically connected in this process; however, empowerment does not necessarily lead to recognition. A connection between participants needs to happen in order for this recognition to be “given willingly.” Incorporating spirituality into peacebuilding processes can help create a connection between the participants, which encourages that recognition to happen.

For example, during my time in Burma, I observed the power of storytelling in connecting people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Each meeting with the Shalom Foundation, and other, less formal meetings, included a form of storytelling. Representatives from each group would tell a story about the history of their people and struggle. Stories were told as a form of introductions. Stories were told from Buddhist and Christian scriptures in order to find inspiration or encourage work, and provide examples for how to build peace in a certain context. Stories were told by representatives from each ethnic group and each faith, and seemed to be universally used as a means to get one’s message out and understood. While one person talked, the others would listen, and the stories were indicative of the thoughts, feelings, and actions, of the individual telling the story. As an observer, gauging the effect that each story had on the listeners, I realized how important this mode of communication is in this culture, existing across “cultural and religious boundaries,” and what great power and potential it has as a means of getting the message of peace out to the people.

*(iii) Intractable Conflicts: Conflict Transformation and Non-Violence*

The various military governments in Burma have employed an overt and structural violence campaign against its citizens, in various degrees, since shortly after Ne Win took over control of the government, in 1962. A whole generation of people has grown up under a system that privileges a few, at the cost of many. For the people of Burma, an end to the conflict in which they are living may be hard to imagine. Secondary violence and self-destruction have been typical for many people in Burma as a response to the situations they face. However, conflict transformation and non-violent direct action can offer an alternative response, a “third way,” that is very applicable to a number of growing problems in Burma.

In one example, the lack of capacity to deal with conflict non-violently is a real threat to the cease-fire agreement in Kachin State. Certain elements of their society, particularly amongst the youth, are becoming agitated with their cease-fire agreement. Infighting over the lack of development and political reform since the cease-fire was signed, increased presence of the SPDC in their state, increased signs of self-destruction including prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of revenue from the extraction of their resources, is becoming more common. Many of those who are too young to have fought in the decades of civil war that preceded the cease-fire, either do not comprehend fully the ramifications of what fighting a war might entail, or they have become so frustrated with their situation that they don't care, they just want to fight.<sup>166</sup>

As mentioned previously, the SPDC is militarily in a much better position to fight the insurgency groups than ever before. In fact, it is arguable that the employment of a

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<sup>166</sup> *Journal Note*. Myitkyina, Kachin State, Burma: March, 2003.

structural violence strategy is aimed at either antagonizing ethnic nationalities into a position where they re-engage militarily, or to encourage their self-destruction. In either case, the regime's interests are well served. A spiritual framework for peacebuilding recognizes that non-violent direct action "...can be the cutting edge of a strategy to undermine and displace a seemingly intractable opponent."<sup>167</sup> Further, a spiritual framework searches for ways to transform conflict through non-violence, and finds inspiration for this from spiritual sources, of which there are many.

For example, the Sermon on the Mount was first introduced to me in the context that I presented it in this paper, in January 2001. The presenter was Daniel Buttry, of the Baptist Peace Fellowship North America (BPFNA), at one of the workshops hosted by the Shalom Foundation. The message of transformation found within one of Christ's sermons was an excellent way to present this concept to the Shalom Foundation participants. For the Christian leaders, it presented a new way of looking at one of Christ's teachings, offering insights and lessons into the application of CT and a non-violent direct action strategy, while stressing the Christian value of non-violence, in response to structural violence and a seemingly intractable conflict. It followed that these religious leaders would be able to convey these messages to their congregations, to introduce them to some of the concepts of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. For the Buddhists, they were able to make connections between these concepts and their own religious teachings. For the participants as a whole, this message of transformation and the power of non-violent direct action was inspirational, as there were such clear similarities to be drawn between ancient Rome, and their current situation in Burma.

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<sup>167</sup> Ackerman and Duvall, 5.

### *Summary*

The third level of dialogue, taking place at the community to national level in Burma, is extremely important to the overall goal of peace and political reform. First, the lack of relationships between the various actors in Burma, and the incapacity to deal with conflict non-violently, is a threat to any efforts made to build peace, or, to reform the political situation. The work being done at the community to national level aims to create the conditions to support peace, should that opportunity arise. Relationship and capacity building are primary goals at this level of dialogue.

Second, the higher level dialogues have been fraught with difficulties. The tripartite dialogue has been stalled since the “Black Friday attack” on Aung San Suu Kyi. The “7 Point Road Map for Democracy,” beginning with the National Convention, has yet to be convened. There is much speculation that this process is merely a smokescreen aimed at appeasing the international community, while offsetting the opposition within Burma, and that political reform will not follow. These processes should be given consideration and support, inasmuch that they are currently the only recourse offered to address the political situation. However, this support should be provisional, until it is clear what effects that support will have on the political situation in the future.

In lieu of forward progress made at the higher levels of dialogue, or as a means to support decisions made there, the community to national level of dialogue will play an important role in establishing the precursors for peace in Burma. In addition, “Given the government’s lack of incentive to engage in dialogue, such bottom-up approaches may be considered valuable in their own right, and constitute an alternative vehicle for gradual

democratization.”<sup>168</sup> The efforts and aims of this level of dialogue, and the resources through which it draws support, may be assisted through the use of a spiritual framework for peacebuilding.

A spiritual framework encourages relationship building, and provides examples for peacebuilding and dealing with intractable conflicts, through the use of non-violence, inspired and supported by spiritual insights, lessons, systems, and values. Moreover, this type of framework recognizes the important role that religious leaders and religious organizations can play in regards to building peace. They can connect and pass along information between the various levels of society, find support from the international community, provide a moral vision for its membership to follow, prevent conflict from happening, discourage and break down ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentalities, and encourage relationship building and the practice of non-violence. Religious organizations and leadership already play a larger and more important role in Burma than in many places, due to the lack of civil society in that context. Therefore, empowering them as key actors within a peacebuilding process, supports and makes use of, the most important social institutions, systems, and networks, in Burma, that exist outside of the regime’s control.

### Conclusion

In closing, I would like to summarize those areas, which, I believe, have the most potential for successful peacebuilding in Burma today. One of the most exciting discoveries of my experience was how complimentary certain aspects of Buddhism were

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<sup>168</sup> Ashley South, “The Need For Two-Way Traffic (Part One)” *The Irrawaddy On-Line Edition*, Oct., 16, 2003, 7. (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/com/2003/com48.html>).

towards peacebuilding. *Metta*, mindfulness, and many other tools and concepts offered by Buddhism are in line with the skills needed for mediation, and for managing and transforming the relationships that support peacebuilding efforts.

Secondly, the educational capability and influence of the Sangha should not be undervalued, as it has great a potential for building peace in Burma. Through its existing structure, the Sangha can disseminate information that will help inform its community about peacebuilding concepts. For example, John McConnell's "Mindful Mediation" is the type of literature that is needed in Burma in order to promote peacebuilding concepts within the Buddhist community. The educational role that the Sangha already fills would allow for the introduction of such concepts, in a religious context, through channels that are already in place.

The research done by Carol Gowler provides an encouraging example of TMDR in the Kachin context. Strong ethnic identity throughout the country indicates that there may be many indigenous systems in which spirituality already plays a role in building peace. The application of these need to be encouraged, and recognized as important to the overall goal of peace in Burma.

Perhaps the most pertinent discovery that I made during my time in Burma is how much the different religious and ethnic groups stand to learn from each other. Each group's strengths were made evident by contrasting them with the other groups. For example, the organizational role that the Christian churches play in Burma, particularly amongst the ethnic minorities, impressed me and led me to think about the potential for peacebuilding that the Buddhist Sangha holds.

Peacebuilding efforts, such as the ethnic nationality groups have undertaken, have been more characteristic of the Christian context than the Buddhist; yet, the most successful example of non-violent direct action ('overturning the begging bowls') has come from the Buddhist majority. It is also true that each group holds inherent concepts that both compliment and hinder peacebuilding. There is much that the different religious and ethnic groups stand to learn from each other.

Lederach states that peacebuilders must have imagination, discipline, and creativity as well as the ability to take a risk, when opportunities for peacebuilding arise.<sup>169</sup> These risky opportunities involve relationships, both those that are involved in the process, and those that will be affected by it. In other words, relationships are key to peacebuilding in Burma, and elsewhere. Encouraging rapport and connection between religious leaders of different faith and ethnic communities is an important place to start this process. These leaders are among the few in Burma that have access to the various levels of their society, and are a part of valuable networks capable of disseminating information and organizing people. They also have the ability, and spiritual conviction, to encourage and teach the values of non-violence as it relates to their specific faith and/or ethnic group. The efforts and successes of various Christian and Buddhist leaders to build peace at the community and national level, that I either met, or heard about while in Burma, were inspirational. It made me think about what a tremendous resource that religious leaders, as a whole, are for peacebuilding in Burma. It is vital to develop a culture of sharing ideas and learning from each other, "across cultural and religious

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<sup>169</sup> *Journal Note*. John Paul Lederach. Myanmar Baptist College, Lecture. Yangon, Burma: March, 2003.

boundaries,” in order to transform the relationships that are an obstacle to peacebuilding in Burma.

### *Final Remarks*

This paper does not argue that a spiritual framework is appropriate for all situations in which peacebuilding is required. There are many cases where spirituality may have little or no part to play in a peacebuilding process. This paper argues, instead, that in certain situations, the integration of a spiritual dimension into a framework for peacebuilding, may enhance those efforts to build peace. Each case is unique, and should be treated that way. An analysis of the conflict and surrounding dynamics is necessary to decide if, and how, a spiritual framework may be useful.

In the case study of Burma, a spiritual framework is appropriate: first, because of the important roles that religion has, and continues, to play in that situation; second, because of the lack of both the relationships needed to support peace, and the capacity to deal with conflict non-violently; and third, because of the encouraging use of TMDR. The example given for TMDR in this paper is in the Kachin context, but the potential also exists within the numerous other ethnic groups throughout Burma.

Research into this question has identified certain types of situations as more ready for the application of a spiritual foundation than others. Factors that are present in these situations include the following:

**1) All participants come from a religious/spiritual tradition.**

If participants are from the same religious group, their common religion can be used as a means to guide the process, through specific religious stories, scriptures, texts,

lessons, and values that convey messages relating to peacebuilding. Moreover, religious leadership can be involved, and/or the church/temple/mosque/synagogue can be used as a meeting place, thus integrating the spiritual further into the framework.

If participants are from different traditions, then an inter-faith dialogue approach may be useful as a means to highlight similarities and super-ordinate values, shared by both traditions. In cases where the process is going well, and inter-faith learning/sharing seems to be truly taking place; comparing and contrasting complementariness/hindrances to peacebuilding in the respective faith traditions, may be useful as a means for inter-faith learning, or for a deeper understanding of the other's worldview, as informed by their spiritual/symbolic world.

**2) One participant comes from a religious/spiritual tradition.**

When only one of the participants is from a religious tradition, an explanation of another's worldview may serve to increase understanding between the two groups. Docherty's example of the tragedy that took place in Waco provides a negative example of what can happen when an awareness of the other party's /group's symbolic/spiritual world is excluded from the process.

**3) One or more participants come from an indigenous/community-based population.**

When conflict occurs in a situation where parties are from differing backgrounds, TMDR can offer an insight into the other's worldview. Opportunities for empowerment and recognition can be found in the sharing or application of a TMDR in a peacebuilding

process. It is the sharing process, in combination with the understanding of why one might act in a particular way, that can encourage participants to connect in process. Moreover, the application/usage of TMDR should be privileged over imported techniques and methods for the same purposes, as they are more appropriate, and they play an important role in building up what Lederach refers to as “a peace constituency.”

**4) Religion has played a role in the conflict.**

When religion has played a role in a conflict, either directly or indirectly, that role needs to be addressed. If not, the seeds of dissension left behind may give rise to conflict in the future. The recent conflicts in the Balkans illustrate the power that historical wounds, along ethno-religious lines, can have on present-day conflicts.

**5) There are strong religious/spiritual leaders, networks, or organizations, that can assist the peacebuilding process.**

The case study of Burma illustrates the weighted importance of these actors in a context where a functioning civil society no longer exists. However, religious and spiritual leaders, networks, and organizations can play an important role within a peacebuilding strategy, in other types of contexts as well. Wherever some type of religious network exists and holds a valued position in society, a spiritual framework for peacebuilding can be valuable in maximizing the potential that these actors can play in regards to building peace.

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## APPENDIX A

Returning Refugees, and the Exiled Population of Burma

If/when a change in the political situation in Burma occurs, there is a potential for conflict to arise between the returning populations, and the people that have continued to live in Burma. Numbers have been hard to corroborate, particularly in regards to the refugees and Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) of Burma, but the estimates are startling. “As many as two million people have fled Burma for political and economic reasons,”<sup>170</sup> and there are as many as one million IDPs currently in the country.<sup>171</sup> The eventual reintegration these people represents a potential for conflict on a number of different levels.

First, in regards to the returning refugees and IDPs in Burma, many of these people’s villages may or may not have been destroyed. If they have, people will either have to create new homes, or join existing villages/towns/cities. Competition over limited resources may be the first staging ground for conflict to arise.

Second, many of those who left the country have formed the backbone of existing dissident movements and lobby groups, which have been able to encourage international pressure against the regime, from the various countries they now call their home. There are large populations of Burmese and other ethnic nationals in the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, Norway, Sweden and Japan, to give some examples. There is also an exiled government, the National Coalition Government of the Union Burma

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<sup>170</sup> Falco, 1.

<sup>171</sup> Jana Mason, in The Carnegie Endowment, *Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced People in Burma*. May 24, 2000 (<http://www.ceip.org/programs/migrat/burma.htm>).

(NCGUB), and numerous ethnic national councils, who are all waiting to return to Burma, when the situation allows for it.

The education and economic disparity between the exiled population and those who have remained, will also contribute to the potential for conflict in Burma. Those who have left the country, and those who have remained, may believe for different reasons that they are more suited to lead the country, if/when that opportunity arises. Accusations of sidelining with the regime, versus bailing out on the country, will be obvious places for conflict to develop.<sup>172</sup>

A spiritual framework can assist in the process of the reintegration of these peoples, providing ways to work on the conflicts that may arise. Finding ways to incorporate the spirituality that these groups share, be it through religion, ethnic identity, or their connection to their home and each other, may establish a basis for building relationships between these diverse groups/peoples.

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<sup>172</sup> *Journal Note*. Caux, Switzerland: August, 2003.



University  
of Victoria

APPENDIX B

**University of Victoria - Human Research Ethics Committee**

***Certificate of Approval of Waiver***

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Aron Tegenfeldt Graduate Student <u>Co-Investigator(s):</u>	<u>Department/School</u> IFDR	<u>Supervisor</u> Gordon Smith	
<b>Title: The Need for a Spiritual Framework for Peacebuilding: Burma and Beyond</b>			
<u>Project No.</u> 014-04	<u>Approval Date</u> 05-Feb-04	<u>Start Date</u> 05-Feb-04	<u>End Date</u> 04-Feb-05

**Certification**

This is to certify that the University of Victoria Ethics Review Committee on Research and other Activities Involving Human Subjects has examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

J. Howard Brunt  
Associate Vice-President, Research

**This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions/minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of "Request for Continuing Review or Amendment of an Approved Project" form.**

Office of Vice-President, Research - UVic  
Room 424, BEC - P.O. Box 1700  
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2

Tel: (250) 472-4362  
Fax: (250) 721-8960  
E-mail: ovprrc@uvic.ca

014-04 Tegenfeldt, Aron

**APPLICATION FOR WAIVER OF ETHICAL REVIEW OF HUMAN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA**

**RECEIVED**  
JAN 30 2004

Submit **one original and three (3) copies** to the Office of the Vice-President, Research. Handwritten applications will be returned immediately.

*Use of the accompanying Ethics Application Guidelines is strongly encouraged in completing this form.*

**OFFICE USE ONLY:**

VPR File No.:	<b>014-04</b>	Received:	<b>JAN 30/04</b>	To Chair:	<b>FEB 3/04</b>
Sent Rev1:		Sent Rev2:		Notice:	
Return Rev1:		Return Rev2:		Annual Review:	<b>FEB 4/05</b>

Special Review Information:

Reference Information for funding source

Committee Chair Approval Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**A. APPLICANT INFORMATION**

Principal Investigator:	<b>Aron Tegenfeldt</b>
Department:	<b>Institute for Dispute Resolution</b>
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Phone number(s):	<b>658 4243</b>

Are you:  Faculty  Staff  Graduate Student  Undergraduate Student

Thesis Supervisor (if applicable)

Name of Supervisor:	<b>Gordon Smith</b>	Department:	<b>Centre for Global Studies</b>
E-mail address:	<b>gssmith@uvic.ca</b>	Phone:	<b>472 4337</b>

**B. PROJECT INFORMATION**

Title of the Project:	<b>The Need for a Spiritual Framework for Peacebuilding: Burma and Beyond.</b>
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Have you applied for funding for this project?  No  Yes (if "Yes" complete the following):

Source(s) of funding:	Exact title of grant(s):

Other Investigators on this project:

	Name(s)	Affiliation(s)	E-mail address(es)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Note: Investigators are NOT employees (research assistants etc.)  
If investigators change, provide this information to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

**C. SIGNATURES**

Your signature indicates that you agree to abide by all policies, procedures, regulations and laws governing the ethical conduct of research involving humans.

**D. REQUEST FOR WAIVER**

It is important to note that waiver of the requirement for ethical review is only permitted in very limited circumstances and such a waiver does not release researchers from any other applicable legal obligations such as violating a person's right to protect privacy, fulfilling copyright requirements etc.. If your study does not meet one of the following requirements, you will be required to apply for ethical approval.

Which of the following best represents the reason you believe this research qualifies for a waiver from ethical review:

- This research is limited to the use of materials that are in the public domain and for which all applicable copyright, patent, or other legal requirements and approvals have been either fulfilled or received. Databases must be supplied to the researcher in a completely anonymous form (attach a description of the materials you will use, all required approvals or permissions to use these materials and describe your methods).
- This research involves a living individual in the public arena, or is about an artist, based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works, performances, or archival materials (attach a brief description of this research, including the name of the individual who will be the object of the research, your methods, and the types of materials you will be using in the course of the research).
- This is a quality assurance study, performance review or testing within normal educational requirements (attach a description of who will participate in the study, the context of the study, your methods, and copies of materials such as questionnaires etc.).
- This study involves observation of participants who are seeking public visibility such as speakers at public political demonstrations, public meeting etc.(attach a description of the types of people involved, the context in which the research will be conducted and your methods).

**Provide details of your project on a separate page**

*Revised Nov 23, 1999*

To Whom it may concern,

My name is Aron Tegenfeldt, and I am writing to you concerning my thesis that I am writing for the Institute for Dispute Resolution. Anne Marshall spoke with Theresa Hunter earlier today and I am writing to follow up on that conversation, introduce what it is that I am writing about, and see how that relates to the human ethics research committee.

The title of my thesis is;” In Need of a Spiritual Framework for Peacebuilding: Burma and Beyond.” I am using a case study methodology, and will be creating a theoretical framework in which the case study of Burma that I will present can be grounded in and compared to. Data collection is through books, journals, on-line sources and commentaries, all which exist within the public domain. As well, I want to use some of the experiences that I have had living and volunteering in Burma, basically what I wrote down in my journal. I will not be using interviews, surveys, or questionnaires as a means of data collection, or quoting without a documented source that exists in the public domain. Let me introduce the “what I did, and when I did it,” in regards to my time in Burma.

In January 2002, I volunteered for 2.5 months with an American health development NGO named World Concern. I did a number of different duties while volunteering with them, from teaching english to facilitating workshops. I spent half the time in Yangon, and the other half in Northern Burma in Myitkyina, Kachin State. During this trip, I also had the privilege of attending a series of workshops that were held in Yangon. The workshops were hosted by the Shalom Foundation and were to focus on inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue. This was the beginning of what the Shalom Foundation hoped would be ongoing dialogue and relationship- building between the various ethnic groups of Myanmar in matters of development and peacebuilding. What I experienced through these workshops has made a profound impression on me, both personally and on my studies in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. In fact it was upon return from this trip that I applied and was accepted to the IDR here at UVic.

From January to May 2003, I had another chance to volunteer in Myanmar, this time directly for the Shalom Foundation. This opportunity allowed me to observe different places and ways in which some of the peacebuilding processes are being

undertaken in Myanmar, and I was able to work closely with a variety of people who were attempting to build peace in that context.

I appreciate you taking the time to advise me on whether or not this relates to, or requires, human ethics approval, and if so, on what steps I should take to make sure it fits any necessary requirements.

Sincerely,

Aron Tegenfeldt