



BOOK REVIEWS*

***Between Terror and Tolerance*, Timothy D. Sisk (ed.) (Georgetown University Press, 2011,) 270 pp.**

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Between Terror and Tolerance is a collection of essays on the relationships between politics, religion and violence. The contributors comprise an international team of scholars who researched the roles of religious leaders in deeply divided societies. How do religious leaders affect social forces and help define intolerant or tolerant national identities? The case studies are diverse, touching upon such issues as the Vatican influence in Lebanon; Shari'a, identity politics and human rights in Sudan; the role of religious leaders in Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka and Kashmir. In many parts of the world, understanding the interplay between religion, ethnicity and government is essential for the analysis of internal conflicts and for the evaluation of prospects for peace.

The first two chapters are general in nature. In Chapter 1, David Little analyzes the complex relationships between, religion, ethnonationalism and intolerance. In turn, in Chapter 2 Nader Hashemi investigates the complexity of the Sunni-Shi'a divide in Islam and considers its implications for conflict and coexistence in the Middle East. While most Muslim majority societies are Sunni comprising about 85-90% of the total Muslim population, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain are Shi'a majority societies. Significant Shi'a populations also live in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

The next nine chapters (3-11) present nine different cases studies. Religion plays an important role in violent internal conflicts. Often, justifications for violence and terror are found in religion. In Chapter 3, George Irani probes the role of the Vatican in the Lebanese civil war. He curiously states (p. 50) that Lebanon "has long been considered an example of coexistence of multiethnic and multireligious groups." If this were true, much of the Irani chapter might not have been written, certainly not in its present form, which addresses the role of the militias, warlords, the long Lebanese civil war, and the questionable role played by Syria—all of which deepen the religious divide and the animosity between religious factions. Intriguingly, Irani makes the controversial statement twice on the same page.



In Chapter 4, Michelene Ishay aims to explain the rise of religious and political extremism in both Israel and the Palestinian community as a consequence of globalization. She explains (p. 81) that religious fundamentalism is a response to social disparities, frustrated promises of peace and insecurity. Hamas won 76 (not 74) seats in the January 2006 parliamentary elections while the previous ruling party, Fatah, took only 43 (not 45) seats of the 132 seats in the chamber. Little is said about the role that corruption played in affecting those elections. Many people opted to vote for Hamas because they resented the corrupt PLO and wanted a party that would distribute resources also to the people, not only to the fortunate elite.

The next two chapters seem dated, as they did not address adequately the Arab Spring and its effects on Egypt and Sudan. In Chapter 5, Scott W. Hibbard analyzes religion and conflict in Egypt. He discusses the rise and fall of secularism, from Nasser's modernist vision of Arab nationalism and socialism, to Sadat's theologically conservative vision of Islam and then to the Mubarak era. The conclusion that "conservative Islam is wrapped up in political authoritarianism; it is an unholy alliance to keep people down" (p. 101) might have been true for the time those lines were written, but is no longer relevant today.

Chapter 6 suffers from a similar problem. Recent dramatic developments necessitate a crucial update. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban explains the role of religion in the conflict in Sudan in historical terms, observing the different identities Sudanese adopt—Arab, Muslim or African, and the north-south divide. Fluehr-Lobban concludes that "With independence near in 2011 [...] southern voices of compassion and forgiveness can be heard along with the practical realization that an independent South will need to cooperate with the North." (p. 119) She speaks of the need for "forgiveness" and the positive role that religious leaders can play in the process of reconciliation while underplaying the crucial economic interests.

In Chapter 7, Rosalind Hackett explores the mixed record of religious conflict and cooperation in Nigeria. This country is riddled with corruption, its infrastructure is crumbling, the gap between the small elite and the vast poor segments of society is striking, and its internal political order unstable. During the past decade religion has assumed a greater salience in Nigeria, with religious leaders exerting their moral authority to criticize the government for its failure to improve the plight of the poor. Hackett argues that the peace rhetoric of religious leaders has become conjoined with talk about national integration and communal development (p. 136).

In Chapter 8, Mari Fitzduff analyzes the role of religion in Northern Ireland's 27-years' conflict up until the power-sharing Belfast Agreement of 1998, and in Chapter 9, Karina Korostelina explores the rise of the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan during the early 1990s. Both Korostelina and Fitzduff discuss the role religious



leaders had played in the end-of-conflict peace talks. These chapters show that religious leaders try to maneuver between commitments to their church and to the people whom they serve, while taking into account political pressures.

Buddhism has been used as a source for legitimation of political policy and structure in Sri Lanka throughout its history. In Chapter 10, Susan Hayward probes the role played by the monks in the Sri Lanka peace process, which led to the 2005 ceasefire and the subsequent conflicts up until 2009. Finally, in the last chapter, 11, Sumit Ganguly and Praveen Swami discuss the role religion has played in the Kashmir conflict.

The editor, Timothy D. Sisk, wrote the volume's Introduction and Conclusion. He notes that whether countries move toward greater tolerance and political inclusivity as in Northern Ireland, or toward violence and further entrenchment of ethnic hegemony as in Sri Lanka, depends on the ways religion and state authority have mutually reinforcing attitudes to peace (p. 230). Sisk concludes that religious leaders can define the terms of conflict, tolerance and coexistence, yet with due appreciation to their influence, religious elites are still more likely to reflect social forces than to shape them (p. 235).

The book has a thorough and informative index, a valuable resource for a book that is rich with facts and condensed with information.