

Fractured Land, Healing Nations
A Contextual Analysis of the Role of Religious Faith Sodalities
Towards Peace-Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Fractured Land, Healing Nations: A Contextual Analysis of the Role of Religious Faith Sodalities Towards Peace-Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Stephen R. Goodwin

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The Bosnian War and the process of peacebuilding that followed remain the core issue of numerous academic studies about conflict resolution. Stephen R. Goodwin's *Fractured Land, Healing Nations* is not an exception. Moreover, studies connecting religion and politics, and consequently religion and conflict, are not new (e.g., Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, University of California Press, 1996, and Paul Mojzes, *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, American Academy of Religion, 1998). However, Goodwin doesn't limit his analysis to religion in general. He proposes to understand the role of particular religious faith sodalities in peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina. His main argument is that "religion is intrinsic to the identities of the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that religio-mythical elements are essential in the process of nation-building" (5). According to him, although religion was often used by nationalists in order to promote their own ideologies and to support war, religion can be valuable as a constructive force for peace building. Originally written as a doctoral dissertation, this book is the outcome of deep academic research, complemented by a large amount of information resulting from an extensive field work.

In the first part of the book, which is divided into three chapters, Goodwin explores the relationship between religion and the processes of nationbuilding and peacebuilding. First, he makes a necessary review of the role of religion in the formation of national narratives from diverse actors involved in the conflict (Serbians, Bošnjaks, and Croatians). The main conclusion couldn't be more obvious. Religion was used by both political and religious leaders on each side, and the result of such use is well known. Beyond a bloody war, characterized by mass murders and genocidal practices, hate between communities is still

alive in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Secondly, the author identifies another aspect of post-conflict Bosnia—the real limitation faced by the international community, particularly the West, in achieving an effective social restoration. The implementation of the Dayton Accord is still far from being a reality. The opposition between the two entities (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Republika Srpska) resulting from this agreement remains a huge problem to solve and presents real challenges for those concerned with peacebuilding and post-war reconstruction. In fact, Western intervention was not able to put an end to the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the country is at the present more than ever a fractured and disintegrated state. Thirdly, Goodwin presents some areas in which religion(s) and the values of religious faith contribute to the peacebuilding process, such as identity formation, the concept of peace, global ethics, human rights, and reconciliation.

The second part of *Fractured Land, Healing Nations* is constituted by the author's empirical investigation. Since, as was noted, this book was first submitted as a Ph.D. thesis, empirical confirmation of his hypothesis was absolutely necessary. Through interviews conducted in Bosnia-Herzegovina with different sets of people (religious leaders, women, and students) from diverse religious confessions (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches, and Islam), Goodwin concluded that they mostly understood religion as an instrument of peace. Some variation among them, which is the direct consequence of various personal backgrounds, is normal and constitutes an advantage for the thesis defended in the book. The plural religious backgrounds of interviewees did not affect a more or less convergent opinion about the role religion can have as part of the peacebuilding process. Moreover, all subjects expressed their confidence in religion's ability to respond positively to issues such as forgiveness, restoration, and healing and to transfer them to a larger context than personal religious faith.

Finally, in the third and last part of the book, the author offers an analytical and theological reflection on peacebuilding and social restoration, naturally focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina. An important idea from this reflection is related to the idea of restoration as a powerful leitmotif for peacebuilding from a holistic point of view. Nevertheless, this concept “must first be understood in its sociological and theological context” (227). In a nutshell, “it offers a strong holistic framework for ‘making whole again’ that which is damaged, distorted or fractured” (228). Another relevant proposal made by the author is expressed by the possibility of a shift from “imagined communities” (i.e., Greater Serbia) to

smaller but “authentic (faith) communities,” which, according to the author, provide useful resources for peacebuilding. As a result, he identifies five of them: proclamation of the Word; metánoia, or change of heart; prayer; diakonía, or service; and “seelsorge,” which he identifies with spiritual counsel and welfare of a person or community). These resources constitute themselves as significant steps for the building of this kind of community.

Goodwin makes an important contribution to peace studies as well as to religious studies. His approach is optimistic. On the one hand, the role of faith sodalities is indeed underestimated, but we should be careful about attributing a leading role in peacebuilding to them, since they have not yet been proven successful means of achieving peace. On the other hand, as a bottom-up solution, their contribution to this process could be more useful than the top-down approaches that are currently being applied by the international community in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The top-down methods have already shown their inefficiency in dealing with existing rivalries between communities. Nonetheless, *Fractured Land, Healing Nations* is useful for scholars and students interested in the peacebuilding process in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the role of religion in post-conflict contexts.

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