



NORWEGIAN
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The Potential of Religious Peacebuilding

A Case Study from Sierra Leone

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Abstract

It is the purpose of this thesis to further knowledge and understanding of religious peacebuilding, and the added value of religious actors in peace processes. It is the proposition of this author that religious actors can play a constructive part in peacebuilding processes. From this proposition, if true, follows the question of how religious actors can contribute, and what roles they can play.

The research is done in the form of a case study, looking at the work of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone during the Sierra Leonean civil war, as remembered and presented in in-depth interviews with twelve members of the Council's executive board during the war. The above proposition is tested through an analysis of their answers to the two following questions, in light of existing literature:

1. *Why and how were the IRCSL able to achieve what they did in Sierra Leone – and did their religious foundation make a difference or not?*
2. *What, if anything, can religious peacebuilders elsewhere learn from their experiences?*

The example of the IRCSL identifies context, relationships and trust, credibility and objectivity, and a focus on the peace-enhancing principles of religion as having been vital for the Council's achievements during the peace process. Hence, though findings confirm that religious actors can contribute positively in peacebuilding, they also suggest that their potential is dependent on several factors.

In a supportive context, their often nationwide networks, combined with their position and role in society, and the particular knowledge and expertise that follows their profession, can make religious leaders ideal peacebuilders. However, to be able to capitalize on their strengths, should the need arise, they need to focus on building cultures of peace within their respective institutions – to establish a positive context – and actively seek out and build relationships with society around them.

Acronyms

1. IRCSL - Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone
2. RUF - Revolutionary United Front
3. SLA - Sierra Leonean Army
4. SLPP - Sierra Leonean People's Party
5. APC - All People's Congress
6. NPFL - National Patriotic Front of Liberia
7. NPRC - National Provisional Ruling Council
8. AFRC - Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
9. EO - Executive Outcomes
10. WCRP - World Council of Religions for Peace
11. WCRL - World Council of Religious Leaders
12. ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States
13. ECOMOG - ECOWAS Monitoring Group
14. UNAMSIL - United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
15. OAU - Organization of African Unity (Predecessor of the African Union)

Foreword

From 1991 to 2002 Sierra Leone – a land otherwise blessed with natural beauty, and a wealth of natural resources – closely resembled a living hell for its people. For a Norwegian student, rightly considered among the world’s most privileged, it was a humbling experience to meet and talk to some of the people who not only lived through that hell, but willingly stepped forward to try to make a difference. This thesis is dedicated to the current and former members of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone, who, in the face of violent conflict, found in their faith not only an encouragement, but an obligation, to stand together against brutality and violence, and help facilitate the establishment of a lasting peace.

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis alongside a full job has been a challenging experience, and it has, quite possibly, also made me a challenge to both colleagues, friends, and family members. Hence, there are several people who deserve an honorable mention.

First, I would like to thank my parents and siblings for their love and support. Also, had my parents not decided to leave behind both the culture and people they themselves knew and loved, and take their children to Côte d'Ivoire, Western Africa, for the majority of our childhood, I might have ended up doing something entirely different at this point. So technically, this thesis is partly their achievement. A special thanks goes to my dad for his comments, questions, and critique throughout the writing process.

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Any mistakes or omissions in this thesis are my own.

Lars Kristian Redse

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

“God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!”¹ Nietzsche’s famous words were first presented in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft – The Gay Science* – from 1882, and have since become something of a slogan (though with a slightly different meaning than originally intended by Nietzsche) for modern day secularists, claiming that *the religious man* is a dying breed. However, a brief look at recent history seems to suggest that God is still very much alive, and that the prophesized privatization and following disappearance of religion from the public sphere was – at best – a wrongful generalization based on a misinterpretation of a development thought to be seen in the post-enlightenment west.

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979 a long list of religiously motivated political movements has brought the question of religion’s position and role in society back into public debate. Many of these movements have been characterized by extremism and violence, and hence, though now recognized as a force in its own right, religion is more often than not seen as a source of violence and conflict. Nevertheless, perhaps as a result of the contribution of religious actors in several peacebuilding efforts in recent years, there has also been a growing acknowledgment of the potential of religion to contribute positively in conflict settings. This, in its turn, has led to a growing focus within academia on the *why*, *what*, and *how* of religious peacebuilding. With the first books coming out around fifteen to twenty years ago, the theoretical field of religious peacebuilding is still young, and, in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, there is still a need to look more closely at specific cases to better understand what the added value of religious actors in a peace process really is.

Between 1991 and 2002 the small West African country of Sierra Leone was torn to pieces by a brutal civil war that for long seemed to elude all attempts made to find a peaceful solution. For a long time, the only thing that seemed able to bring the parties together was sheer force. The war was chaotic, with blurred lines between rebel and government forces, and several changes of power within the country between 1991 and 1998. There were few, if any, serious attempts at dialogue until 1995 when the Abidjan peace accord was signed, only to fail before it was implemented.

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science* (1887) - as presented by Williams, Bernard in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 120. Available at: <http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Gay-Science-by-Friedrich-Nietzsche.pdf>.

Then, in 1997, the World Council of Religion and Peace (WCRP) approached several religious leaders in Sierra Leone, and suggested the establishment of an interreligious council. To begin with, the goal was only to bring religious institutions in the country together to promote religious tolerance and discuss shared moral concerns. However, in the final years of the war, the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) became a central player in the process that eventually led to the peace talks in Lomé and the agreement signed there, as well as in the implementation of the peace accord in the following years. Though their contribution to the Sierra Leonean peace process is generally acknowledged as having been valuable, the research done on the work and impact of the IRCSL – and more specifically, on how their religious character shaped their approach and affected their results – has been limited.

1.2. Focus Areas and Research Objectives

In this thesis I seek to further knowledge and understanding of religious peacebuilding, and the added value of religious actors – not as an alternative to other initiatives or actors, but as part of a multifaceted approach necessary to end violent conflicts. It is the proposition of this author that religious actors can play a constructive part in peacebuilding processes. From this proposition, if true, follows the question of how religious actors can contribute, and what roles they can play. With that as a starting point, I will try to lay a foundation for further analysis by looking more closely at the following three simple questions:

- 1. Why should religious actors be engaged in peacebuilding?*
- 2. What constitutes a religious approach to peacebuilding?*
- 3. How can religion and religious actors contribute positively to peacebuilding?*

As briefly mentioned above, though the theoretical field of religion and peacebuilding is continuously developing, there is still a need for more research on the role of religious peacebuilders in conflict settings, in order to ground existing theory in practice. Hence, I will consider the above questions from two different angles; first, by going through existing theory on the subject, and; second, by looking at the example of the IRCSL and their contribution to the Sierra Leonean peace process. Then, by analyzing the work of the IRCSL in light of existing theory, I seek to answer the two following questions:

- 1. Why and how were the IRCSL able to achieve what they did in Sierra Leone – and did*

their religious foundation make a difference or not?

2. *What, if anything, can religious peacebuilders elsewhere learn from their experiences?*

Finally, based on these two questions, which I will return to in the analysis and conclusion, I should be able to either defend or reject my initial proposition – to say something about the potential of religious actors in peacebuilding, and the possible roles they might take upon themselves.

The reason for the choice of focus area is the realization that the contributions of religious actors in various peacebuilding processes have not only brought credibility to religious peacebuilders. As briefly mentioned above, these contributions also raise the question of what the added value of religious actors really is, and how it can be used more efficiently. In order to answer that, we need to look at what it is that separates them and their work from other actors; to understand how religion shapes the way they interpret conflict situations, and influences their approach as well as their potential impact. In this regard, the work of the IRC SL will serve as an example.

There are several underlying themes mentioned in this thesis that potentially could deserve a thesis of their own. Using Marc Gopin's *Between Eden and Armageddon* as a foundation, the role of religion related to the soft aspects of peacebuilding could have served as a main focus. Or I could have used Appleby and Sampson, focused mainly on the negotiations and the Lomé peace treaty, and written about religion and the hard aspects of peacebuilding.² A third possibility could have been to focus on practical peacebuilding, to build on the theories of John Paul Lederach in *Building Peace* and *The Moral Imagination*, and look at how a religious approach match his theories about how peace can be achieved. However, rather than choosing one of these, in the analytical framework below, I have sought to create an overview of the potential of religious actors in peacebuilding, using all of the abovementioned authors, and others, to varying degrees, to shed light on different subjects relevant to the overall objective.

That being said, some authors have of course been given more space, and had a larger influence, than others. Scott Appleby's *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (2000), the book that first introduced me to the field of religious peacebuilding, is used to a greater or lesser extent in all three subchapters in the thesis' analytical framework, and hence, have played a large part in forming this thesis.

² Definitions and explanations of the hard and soft aspects of peacebuilding is provided in chapter two.

It should also be mentioned that due to the limits of this thesis, I will not provide a thorough introduction to peacebuilding in general before moving on to religious peacebuilding, other than presenting and defining a few vital terms in the beginning of chapter two.³

1.3. Overview of Methodology

The research done as part of this thesis is qualitative in nature, as it “emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.”⁴ According to Alan Bryman, qualitative research usually makes use of an inductive approach. Here, this is done only in relation to the second research question, attempting to provide recommendations for religious peacebuilders based on the study of a specific case. In the case of the first research question, the question itself is meant to provide answers that will serve to either support or reject the proposition that religious actors can contribute positively in peacebuilding. Hence, a deductive approach is used. The research – taking the form of a case study – is conducted from an interpretivist point of view, meaning that it seeks to understand “the ways in which individuals interpret their social world.”⁵

In early 2012, between February and March I spent six weeks in Freetown, Sierra Leone, conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with religious leaders who were part of the IRC SL’s executive board during the Sierra Leonean civil war. In total, eleven interviews were done face to face, and one was done by email. Among the twelve participants were five Muslims and seven Christians; three of which were women - Two Muslims and one Christian. These interviews serve as the main source of data on the IRC SL, their work, values, and chosen approaches. To complement these, I also had access to some of the strategy documents and public statements made by the IRC SL, as well as a few articles written about them – mainly used to support the material from the interviews.

1.4. Outline of Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter two provides a brief introduction to the field of

³ For the interested reader, John Paul Lederach’s *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1997) and *The Moral Imagination*, as well as Johan Galtung’s *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996), and I. William Zartman’s *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques* (1997), can provide further insight.

⁴ Bryman, Alan, *Social Research Methods – 4th Edn.* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

religious peacebuilding, and follows up with a review of existing literature relevant to the questions this study aims to answer. As explained above, the chapter has been divided according to the questions of *why*, *what*, and *how* religious actors can contribute in peace building. By presenting and discussing what other authors have written on the matter, the chapter aims to create a theoretical framework for the analysis of the case study.

Chapter three presents and explains the research design and methods used in this thesis, as well as the rationale behind the choice of methods and approach. It also provides a description of the field work, including a discussion about the validity of the research, possible limitations and ethical concerns.

Before presenting the research findings, a brief introduction to the chronology of the civil war is given in chapter four.

In the fifth chapter, the findings gathered through interviews and in the various documents received during the field work are presented and discussed. As with chapter two, the interviews, and hence the findings, have been divided according to the three questions of *why*, *what* and *how*. Going through the data according to these, the chapter identifies and highlights commonalities and differences of opinion relating to the questions asked and issues discussed.

The sixth chapter brings theory and fieldwork together, and provides an analysis of the work of the IRCSL, and the thoughts and reflections of the interviewed council members, in the light of the theoretical framework established in chapter two. The chapter is divided into two sub-chapters, each looking at one of the two questions presented above as the basis of the final conclusion. The first sub-chapter looks at why and how the IRCSL was able to achieve what it did in Sierra Leone, and whether their religious foundation made any difference. The second looks at what the council did, the roles they played, and what – if anything – peacebuilders elsewhere can learn from their experiences.

Finally, chapter seven sums up and presents the findings and conclusions relating to the two questions discussed in the analysis, and the thesis' main proposition – and provides a few recommendations for further research.

2. Analytical Framework and Literature Review

The subject of this thesis is the potential and roles of religious actors in peacebuilding. The term peacebuilding is itself relatively new, and builds on the idea of positive peace launched by Johan Galtung, often referred to as the father of peace studies. Galtung wanted to go beyond an understanding of peace as only the absence of war and violence. In order to do that he created the terms positive and negative peace. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence, which is of course a necessity for peace of any kind. Positive peace is a much wider concept. In *Peace by Peaceful Means* Galtung mentions three levels of positive peace. *Direct, cultural* and *structural*. A sustainable peace can only be achieved by seeking peace on all three levels. This would include striving for social justice, equality, freedom from repression et cetera; the creation of *cultures of peace* within religion, law, ideology, art and the sciences, as well as in societal institutions, such as schools and universities, the media and so on; and the establishment, or strengthening of structures (both societal and social/relational) needed to eliminate the root causes of violence and conflict.⁶ Describing what he means by cultures of peace, Galtung defines culture as the symbolic aspects of human existence, which “provides Homo Sapiens ... with a virtual reality map that serves as a guide to real reality.”⁷ The validity of culture, he says, relies on how it affects human behavior. Hence, a true culture of peace is a culture that, when internalized, enables man to handle conflicts peacefully.⁸

The importance of peacebuilding to create sustainable positive peace in post-conflict situations was acknowledged by former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his report *An Agenda for Peace*, from 1992, in which it is stated:

When conflict breaks out, mutually reinforcing efforts at peacemaking and peace-keeping come into play. Once these have achieved their objectives, only sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems can place an achieved peace on a durable foundation. Preventive diplomacy is to avoid a crisis; post-conflict peace-building is to prevent a recurrence.⁹

Religious peacebuilding would then be any contribution made by religious actors towards

⁶ Galtung, Johan, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (International Peace Research Institute Oslo, 1996), p. 31-32.

⁷ Galtung, Johan, *Cultural Peace: Some Characteristics*. Published as part of UNESCO's Peace and Conflict Issues Series, in *From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace* (UNESCO Publishing, 1996), p. 77.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75-78.

⁹ Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, *An Agenda for Peace* (1992), # 57.

preventing a recurrence of violent conflict. However, the term peacebuilding is no longer understood as something limited to post-conflict situations. In Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith's *Religion and Peacebuilding* David Little and Scott Appleby defines religious peacebuilding as "the range of activities performed by religious actors or institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence."¹⁰ Here peacebuilding is understood in a wider sense, somewhat similar to how William Zartman uses *conflict resolution* as an overarching term in the introduction to *Peacemaking in International Conflict*.

According to Zartman conflict resolution "refers to removing the causes as well as the manifestations of a conflict between parties and eliminating the sources of incompatibility in their positions".¹¹ He states that conflict resolution entails *conflict management*, meaning the removal of violence and violence-related means of pursuing differences; *conflict transformation*, referring to the replacement of conflict with positive relationships, mutual understanding, cooperation, empathy and interdependence, etc.; and *conflict prevention*, which includes the elimination of the causes of conflict. If we go back to Appleby and Little we find that Zartman's three components of conflict resolution, though not completely similar, resemble what they refer to as *conflict management*, *conflict resolution*, and *structural reform*. According to Appleby and Little "conflict management entails the prevention of conflict becoming violent or expanding to other arenas ... [including] the enforcement of existing peace accords and treaties. ... Conflict resolution ... entails removing, to the extent possible, the inequalities between the disputants ... while structural reform refers to efforts to build institutions and foster civic leadership that will address the root causes of the conflict ...".¹²

At first glance Zartman's understanding of conflict resolution seems to pay more attention to the importance of individual experiences, healing of relationships and social reconstruction; the so-called *soft aspects* of peacebuilding, which we will get back to later on. However, when going beyond the definitions of the concepts and looking at the more detailed explanations given, Appleby and Little have, at least to some extent, taken these aspects into account and included them in what they refer to as structural reform. Both Zartman and

¹⁰ Appleby, Scott and Little, David, 'A Moment of Opportunity', in Coward, Harold and Smith, Gordon S. (ed.), *Religion and Peacebuilding* (State University of New York, 2004), p. 5.

¹¹ Zartman, I. William, 'Introduction', in Zartman, I. William (ed), *Peacemaking in International Conflict* (United States Institute of Peace, 2007), p. 12-13.

¹² Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 5-6.

Appleby and Little can be said to base their approaches on the necessity of building a positive peace, in order for peace to be sustainable. When, in this thesis, I use the term peacebuilding, it will be as defined by Appleby and Little; as an overarching term that includes conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform as separate, yet interdependent and equally relevant components when striving for a sustainable positive peace.

The theoretical field of religious peacebuilding is relatively new, with some of the first major books published in the 1990ies. However, the amount of available literature on the subject is growing steadily. In this chapter I will give an introduction to the existing literature on the specific contribution of religion to the field of peacebuilding. I will present the main theories and principles within the existing literature, relating to the questions of why, what, and how religious actors can contribute in a peacebuilding process.

2.1. Why?

In order to understand why religious institutions and leaders should be engaged in peacebuilding, we need to have a look at what they can offer that secular actors cannot provide. Both internal and external strengths and weaknesses need to be factored in when considering the pros and cons. We need to better understand what drives and motivates religious actors; what shapes their understanding and interpretation of teachings and tradition; which factors might influence a religious approach, as well as; the inherent peace potential of religion. I will now look at existing arguments for why religious actors should be engaged in peacebuilding by addressing these questions.

2.1.1. Secular Shortcomings, Historical Engagement and Presence

Even as religious leaders continued to rise to prominence in many areas of the world, the role and authority of religion in society was for many years misunderstood and underestimated in the western political discourse so dominant in international affairs. During the cold war and the early 1990ies, even in the case of conflicts clearly taking on religious dimensions, the interventions usually suggested were purely materialistic in nature, targeting the socio-economic situation as the source of discontent, and failing to consider any non-materialistic motivation. In *The Missing Dimension*, Edward Luttwak blames the theory of secularization for the misconception that religion is a diminishing force in the world, and hence only a marginal factor in conflict situations, or just a political, social, economic or ethnic

phenomenon in religious guise.¹³ The theory of secularization states that a “consequence of modernity would be the institutional differentiation of the religious and secular spheres, accompanied not only by the privatization of religion, but also by its marginalization and decline.”¹⁴ However, considering the amount of religio-political hybrids still assuming positions of influence all over the world, it becomes increasingly clear that modernity not necessarily leads to the elimination of religion. Rather, in the face of modernity religion is forced to redefine itself; its nature, role in society, and scope of authority. This might just as well lead to stronger ties between religion and politics as it might to privatization. In fact, Barry Rubin, in *Religion and International Affairs*, when discussing the survival of public religion in non-western countries, even claims that “the modernization process, rather than causing religion to weaken and disappear, often makes its public role stronger and a more necessary part of the process of state-building or revolutionary transformation”.¹⁵ The New Christian Right, political Islam, Jewish fundamentalism and Hindu nationalism, are all examples of this. And all have at some point provided breeding grounds for religiously motivated intolerance and violence.

Most likely as a result of the religious militant's explosive occurrence on the public scene, compared to 1994 when Johnston and Sampson published their book, there is now a much greater awareness and understanding of the importance of religion in people's lives and in society. But due to the manner in which religion was brought back into world politics the general perception now seems to be that religious commitment, when left unchecked, invariably leads to violence. Considering the multitude of seemingly religiously inspired violence around the world, not to mention the attention given to it by the media, this is not so strange. Nevertheless, a far too simplistic understanding of religion, particularly in relation to conflict, has been created and largely accepted, based on the acts of small minorities within the different religious traditions.¹⁶

This is not to say that violence cannot be rooted in religion. It would be just as large a mistake to underestimate the role of religion in conflict situations as it would be to

¹³ Luttwak, Edward, ‘The Missing Dimension’, in Johnston, Douglas and Sampson, Cynthia (ed.), *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 8-16.

¹⁴ Appleby, R. Scott, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁵ Rubin, Barry, ‘Religion and International Affairs’, in Johnston and Sampson (1994), p. 23.

¹⁶ Appleby (2000), p. 1-5.

overestimate it. This is rather to show that the one does not automatically follow the other. As we will get back to further down, it is true that few, if any, things can inspire and engage humans into action as religious conviction. However, faith in God does not only lead to brutal acts of violence. It can also inspire love and respect for one's next, and the will to stand up against injustice and the degradation of others even to the point of self-sacrifice. Still, compared to his violent companion, very little attention has been given to the examples of the religious peacemaker; despite the role both religious institutions and religiously inspired individuals have played in peace processes all over the world.

Though public opinion in the western world might take time to change, in the last few years there seems to have been a change in attitude towards religion in international politics. Religious peacebuilding initiatives have played no small part in facilitating this change. And as the roles and contributions of different religious actors in conflict areas are becoming more widely known and recognized, they also seem to increase in number and scope - perhaps starting to realize their own potential - and are sought out more often by secular actors to take part in common approaches to peacebuilding. Perhaps the most obvious sign of change was the creation in the year 2000, of the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCRL) at the UN Millennium World Peace Summit.¹⁷ However, the World Council of Religion and Peace (WCRP), who played a crucial part in calling for the establishment of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone, has brought religious leaders from all countries and religions of the world together "to address the need for believers around the world to take action toward achieving peace" since 1970.¹⁸ Other notable actors include the Mennonites, now well known for their achievements in conflict resolution and peacebuilding research and practice; the Moral Re-Armament Movement, who played a significant role in Franco-German reconciliation post World War II, and; the Catholic lay movement of Sant'Egidio, known for having mediated the negotiations that led to a final end of the civil war in Mozambique. Perhaps more known among the general public are religious individuals like Saint Francis of Assisi, Abdul Ghaffar Khan - known as Islam's Gandhi or the Frontier Gandhi - Mahatma Gandhi himself, Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu. All of them were individuals who found in the principles of their religious traditions an obligation and a mandate to lead on in the fight against the injustice of the world.

Examples of religious actors engaged in peace work are numerous and include

¹⁷ Hertog, Katrien, *The Complex reality of Religious Peacebuilding* (Lexington Books, 2010), p. 3

¹⁸ World Council of Religions for Peace - <http://www.rfp.org/vision-history/history/>

interreligious initiatives, denominational bodies and organizations, religious or religiously affiliated NGO's, and religious individuals. How they contributed depended of course on the position and influence of religion in the given context. We have already seen that in many parts of the non-western world modernization has given religion a more prominent role in society. Building on Barry Rubin, Cynthia Sampson argues that the potential of religious peacebuilding is greatest in countries characterized by a weak state and strong religion. Through their networks of churches, mosques and temples, religious institutions are often able to reach out to the entire population of a country in way that few other institutions can match. Furthermore, due to their presence and contact with all levels of society, being from the people as well as for them, and often having a reputation for integrity and service through charity and relief work, religious leaders and communities are often highly respected. And so, if they avoid getting drawn into state politics, in societies where the government is considered illegitimate by most of the population, religious institutions may end up as the only ones retaining some measure of credibility and trust.¹⁹ In such cases religious institutions make ideal peacebuilders. Either as advocates for peace on a grassroots level, as mediators, or as a neutral third party in official negotiations.

We will get back to the different roles these might have in peacebuilding in the chapter below. For now, what is important is to note that religious actors who find in their faith a calling and an obligation to engage themselves in issues related to social justice, peace and reconciliation, are already taking an active part in peacebuilding initiatives all over the world. Furthermore, strictly secular attempts at diffusing conflict situations in which religion has become a central component have often failed because of a lack of understanding of the religious aspect, and hence misinterpretation of the root causes of dissent. Finally, even in the case of conflicts without any religious dimensions, being able to draw upon both a well-known presence on the ground, access to all levels of society through institutional networks, and the authority and credibility of their leaders, puts religious actors in a unique position when trying to affect positive social change, needed to build a peaceful society.

2.1.2. Religious Militancy and the Importance of Leadership

As written above, little, if anything, can inspire and engage people to such extremes, for good and for bad, as sincere religious conviction. One of the major books in the field of religious

¹⁹ Rubin, in Johnston and Sampson (1994). p. 22-24., and Sampson, Cynthia, 'Religion and Peacebuilding', in Zartman (2007), p. 276.

peacebuilding, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, as the name connotes, addresses the mystery of the sacred, which, according to the acclaimed philosopher of religion, Rudolph Otto, is the basis of all religion.²⁰ Appleby uses Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* as a starting point for a discussion around the ability of religion to inspire both brutal acts of violence and loving self-sacrifice; how this idea or experience of the Holy can charge religion with the authority both to kill and to heal.

The Holy, here understood as the manifestation of the ultimate source of being, is amoral in nature, neither good nor bad, per se. Its presence can be experienced in many different ways. Appleby quotes Otto, writing that the “feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of gentle worship ... [or]... burst in sudden eruption, up from the depths of the soul with spasm or convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy.”²¹ The experience of such a presence, so mysterious in nature, at the same time terrifying, overwhelming and awe-aspiring, is the very core of religious emotion. Both terror and awe is the result of what Otto refers to as creature-consciousness or creature-feeling, defined as “the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures.”²² And so, religion, rather than being the direct translation of God's will for the world and humanity, is the multitude of human responses, rational and non-rational, to the experience of the Holy.

This explains to some extent the vast internal pluralism of the world's religions, as well as the ability of religious traditions to evolve and adapt according to its context. Bound, as it is, by the limitations of human perception and comprehension, religion can never fully uncover the true nature of God. Instead we are left with many more or less plausible interpretations and attempts at understanding text, tradition and experience by adherents of each respective religion living in, and hence being affected by, vastly different contexts. Considering this, it becomes more understandable how two people, followers of the same religion and equal in faith and religious fervor, might reach completely different conclusions regarding their responsibilities as *true believers*. How one might see violence as a sacred duty, while the other renounces the use of violence as an acceptable means of defending his faith, perhaps even his own life, and will in any context seek to avoid, or at least minimize the use

²⁰ Otto, Rudolph, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 5-13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12-13, as cited in Appleby (2000), p. 28.

²² Otto (1958)., p. 10.

of it. Both find justification for their actions and choices within their holy scriptures and tradition.²³

These two stands represent extreme versions of interpretation, and the large majority of adherents of any religion will find themselves somewhere in between. Both the violent extremist and the peacemaker are radicals, willing to go to extreme lengths in service of their faith. This has led Appleby to use the term *religious militants* for both groups. “It may seem counterintuitive to describe the peacemaker as ... engaged in warfare”, he says. However, military imagery and the idea of a constant struggle between good and evil are not only present, but at times almost presented as the natural state of being for humans in this world, in both Christian and Muslim text and tradition. Even “non-violent believers tend to spiritualize rather than entirely reject the ideal of the knight/warrior.”²⁴ Considering then that the ideal of *God’s Warrior* may be present both among the peacemakers and the violent extremists, what we need to try to understand in order to prevent outbreaks of religious violence is what it is that separates the two groups of religious militants; what it is that leads one down the road of peace and calls the other to war. The fact that both religious peacemakers and violent extremists base their arguments on text and tradition seem to suggest that if we want to understand the difference between the two we should not focus strictly on theology, but also look to the social and cultural context, and individual experiences of the believer, guiding their understanding and interpretation of holy scriptures, as well as which texts they choose to focus on. There seems to be a general consensus in academia regarding this. For example, in *Between Eden and Armageddon*, Marc Gopin writes that “whether religions advocate peace or conflict, love or hate, involves both the process of hermeneutic interpretation and the dynamic interaction of the hermeneutic process with the cultural horizon of the interpreter”.²⁵

Considering the inherent ambiguity of religion, the political leaders of the world and the religious peacemakers are left with a challenge and a choice. There is a growing understanding among world leaders and international actors that the influence of religion on the lives of its followers necessitates that it be taken seriously. Even if it actually is the case that the root cause of a conflict is political or economic dissatisfaction, only being expressed through religious discourse, the religiosity of it should not be underestimated. Gopin states that “religious language and symbolism are critical ways in which human beings interpret

²³ Appleby (2000), p. 28-31.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁵ Gopin, Marc, *Between Eden and Armageddon* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 126.

reality”.²⁶ From this follows that when religious discourse is used in a conflict situation it not only functions as a tool for the religious to express their discontent, but it gives the conflict a religious dimension that can only be dealt with by using religious arguments. International political leaders need to realize this (and – as we have seen – increasingly, they are), as well as work with religious institutions and leaders to find ways for them to contribute constructively in peacebuilding efforts. The religious peacemaker then has to find ways to meet the arguments and aggressiveness of the violent extremist; to focus on and highlight those texts that lift up peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, the sanctity of life and human value, et cetera, using their networks of churches, mosque or temples, to reach out to their adherents with a message of peace and reconciliation. In the words of Gopin – “... religions need to evolve prosocial models of constructive conflict, so they do not simply revert to utopian calls for peace every time there are difficult issues.”²⁷

2.1.3. The Internal Strengths of Religion

In the following, I will try to look closer at the inherent peace potential of religion. What, apart from the aforementioned presence, network, conviction and engagement, is the added value of religious peacebuilding? What characteristics of religion make religious actors natural players in peacebuilding processes?

In his essay *Religions; Hard and Soft*, Johan Galtung separates between soft and hard religion. According to Galtung, hard religion is characterized by a combination of transcendence-chosenness-monotheism-dualism and universalism-singularism. Soft religion on the other hand is characterized by an immanent God, or gods, chosen by people, and without a universalist understanding of itself. The peace potential of a religion, he claims, depends on its willingness to embrace the soft aspects. At the same time, he admits that the preferences for hard or soft may differ as much, or more within each religion, as between different religions. Hence, the importance of theological debates between hard and soft within each religion cannot be underestimated.²⁸ So far he is pretty much in line with Appleby, who states that the realization of the internal pluralism of all religions is a first step towards

²⁶ Gopin (2000), p. 14.

²⁷ Ibid.p. 127.

²⁸ Galtung, Johan, *Religions, Hard and Soft* (UNESCO Barcelona, 1994). Available at: <http://www.crosscurrents.org/galtung.htm>

tolerance.²⁹ However, I believe Galtung makes a mistake in his conclusion when he writes that “the ‘package’ of transcendence-chosenness-monotheism-dualism with universalism-singularism will never be peace productive except under conditions such as universal church/world government that in themselves (or the way to them) are not peace productive.”³⁰ He seems to be trying to argue for downplaying ideas of universalism and exclusivism in monotheistic religions, as he considers them not to be peace productive. Galtung does have a point in that these concepts can lead to confrontation. Nevertheless, considering how vital they are to an orthodox interpretation of monotheistic religions, it would hardly be productive, nor possible, to try to remove them. Rather we should seek to build mutual understanding and trust through meetings and dialogue, focusing on those aspects within each separate religion that highlights human value, freedom of choice, and the sanctity of life. So that despite difference in religious affiliation and theological stance, there can be mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

Furthermore, though I realize this is not unproblematic, I believe one of the strengths of religion when dealing with conflict is the possibility of referring to a universal morality when addressing its adherents. This is in many ways a two edged sword, and the way it swings depends on who wields it. But in any case this characteristic of monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, needs to be taken into account when discussing the peace potential of religion. The possibility of referring to a universal morality gives religious leaders great authority over their followers. Considering the multitude of different interpretations, and the already discussed inherent ambiguity of religion, this again highlights the importance of both intra- and interreligious dialogue and debate. However, in the hands of the peacemaker such an authority can become a valuable tool. First and foremost because of the weight it gives to the words of religious leaders, and the effect they might have on the general population when reaching out with a message of peace. But, it can also be of use in high level diplomacy, providing a way out in negotiations in which the parties have reached a stalemate. Luttwak mention how the introduction of religion as a third party authority can “enable the parties, if they so desire, to concede assets or claims to that authority itself so to speak, rather than to their antagonists”.³¹ Hence, concessions that would otherwise be considered intolerable, as they would cause political leaders to *lose face*, might become acceptable if they

²⁹ Appleby (2000), p. 276-277.

³⁰ Galtung, (1994).

³¹ Luttwak, in Johnston and Sampson (1994), p. 17.

are understood as acts of deference to a religious authority.

Finally, in *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding*, Katrien Hertog writes about the soft aspects of peacebuilding, and tries to show why these are so important to establish a lasting peace. Hertog defines the soft aspects of peacebuilding as:

“... the emotional, psychological, socio-psychological, and existential-spiritual issues involved in peacebuilding, such as attitudes, perceptions, cognitive thinking patterns, values, expectations, desires, emotions, traumas and wounds, assumptions, motivations, relationships, frustrations, intentions, concerns, taboos, principles, norms, beliefs, identities, loyalties, worldviews and memories.”³²

Briefly, one can say that while the hard aspects focus on the official, structural side of peacebuilding – negotiating treaties, organizing disarmament, building democratic institutions, and dealing with general security issues – the soft aspects are concerned with the subjective side of conflict and peace, such as the experiences and emotions of people affected by violence and war, seeking to facilitate social reconstruction through reconciliation and rehabilitation of damaged relationships.³³ In a world where intra-state conflict has become the norm, and, following peace treaties, former enemies still have to relate to each other, this part of peacebuilding grows increasingly important. According to Cynthia Sampson, many of the processes considered vital parts of reconciliation builds on originally religious concepts. Acceptance of personal responsibility, confession, repentance, forgiveness, mercy and compassion are all familiar concepts within most religions. The restoration of relationships, personal conversion, and social transformation all lies at the very heart of religion. Hence, religious leaders are often able to speak about these issues with a higher credibility and understanding than secular actors.³⁴

Religion deals with the most profound issues of human existence; Freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, right and wrong, sacred and profane, trauma and healing. As Hertog writes, this “makes it particularly suited to address the deeper layers of human existence affected by violence and conflict”.³⁵ Religious actors’ affinity for working with the soft aspects of peacebuilding makes them invaluable partners in conflict situations. As we will

³² Hertog (2010), p. 47.

³³ Ibid. 46-48.

³⁴ Sampson, in Zartman (2007), p. 276.

³⁵ Hertog (2010), p. 80.

see in the following sub-chapters, it can be a great asset both in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation – in which restoration of broken relationships, or the establishment of new ones, is crucial.

2.1.4. Summary

In the previous sub-chapters, we have seen that peacebuilding processes might benefit from the inclusion of religious actors because of the grassroots presence and often nationwide networks of religious institutions, and the integrity and credibility of religious leaders. Also, the influence of religion on its followers not only makes the inclusion of religious actors beneficial, but, when dealing with conflicts influenced by religion, completely necessary, as strictly secular interventions will be incapable of effectively addressing the religious dimension of it. Whenever a conflict takes on a religious dimension, it needs to be met with religious arguments.

Furthermore, we have seen that though radical faith can be a source of conflict and violence, it can also inspire its adherents to fight against injustice and cruelty – and that the cultural and social context of the believer can be a decisive factor, pushing him or her in one direction, or the other. Religious peacebuilders are already present and active in peace processes all over the world. Driven by their faith they find not only encouragement, but an obligation to stand up on behalf of others, in the teachings of their tradition.

Finally, in addition to network and presence, religious actors often come with a divine authority that can be of great value in a peace process. It should be noted however, that such an authority can of course also be misused – which again puts great responsibility and importance on religious leaders and their role when it comes to interpreting text and tradition, as well as teaching and leading their constituencies. Also, as many processes considered vital parts of reconciliation builds on originally religious concepts, working with the soft aspects of peacebuilding often comes naturally to religious leaders.

2.2. What?

Until now we have only just briefly touched upon the possible roles religious actors might play in peacebuilding processes. In the introduction to this chapter I explained how Appleby and Little use peacebuilding as an overarching term, referring to the transformation and resolution of violent conflict, which includes conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform. In the following I will look at what kind of roles religious actors can play –

and have played – within each of these three separate yet interdependent stages of peacebuilding. Many of the different roles religious actors can take on in a peace process can be overlapping, and relevant in more than one of the three aforementioned components. Nevertheless, I will accept the risk of repeating myself to some extent in order to show how all roles might be relevant within each separate stage.

I will to a large degree follow Sampson and Appleby and Little in the following chapter, though others will be used to fill in wherever necessary. It is not my intention to discuss various roles here. I will simply present them as they are described in the relevant literature, in order to use them later when presenting and analyzing the work of the IRC SL.

2.2.1. Conflict Management

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, conflict management is about preventing conflict from becoming violent, or spread to new arenas, as well as making sure that deals made and treaties signed are being adhered to. Hence, it is not only applicable where violence has already broken out, but also when tensions are building either pre or post overt conflict, it can be used to defuse the situation and avoid outbreaks of violence. Religious actors have taken on many different roles in conflict management. Though lists of possible roles are suggested by several authors, at times using different names, the content of these lists are more or less the same.

Perhaps most important to conflict management is the identification of possible sources of tension. With their often nationwide networks and moral authority few are better suited for this than religious institutions. Appleby and Little mentions how “the prophetic dimension of religion nurtures a heightened sensitivity to subtle as well as open forms of social discrimination, political oppression, and other forms of injustice”.³⁶ This, as well as their close contact with all levels of society puts religious actors in a favorable position to act as *heralds*, which is the term used by Appleby and Little, identifying and warning against widening rifts in society. This is also supported by Hertog, who writes that “local religious leaders can act as an early warning system by observing signs of incipient conflict”.³⁷

Being in a position to uncover sources of tension and conflict in society combined with the responsibility of providing moral leadership also makes religious actors natural

³⁶ Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 6.

³⁷ Hertog (2010), p. 105.

critics of society, or *advocates* for positive change. This might entail criticizing government institutions or political, military or business elites, and call for change and reform of unjust or abusive policies. Throughout the years religious advocates have taken part in fighting for improved education and conditions of labor, religious freedom, and basic human rights.³⁸ Cynthia Sampson, referring to Laue and Cormick, differs between the *activist* and the *advocate*. Though, using a wider definition, both groups can be seen as advocates, what separates them is that the activist will have a direct connection with the powerless or non-establishment party, while the advocate, in the narrower sense, though supporting only one of the parties involved, is not directly affiliated with that party and hence can promote its cause to the opposing side as well as the wider community. Sampson also mentions the *truth-teller* as a sub-category of advocates. Being a truth-teller “involves raising a voice of moral outrage against what are seen as systemic injustices or wrongful acts committed by a party to the conflict”, without actively choosing sides.³⁹ In societies with strong religious institutions, when religious leaders are able to back up their words with assertive leadership and action, they can be powerful advocates for change by bringing attention to, and raising awareness of structural injustice, discrimination and abuse of power.

In a situation where violence has already broken out, religious actors can act as *observers*. The observer offers himself up as a physical and moral presence in conflict situations meant to discourage violence, corruption, human rights violations, or other undesirable or threatening behavior.⁴⁰ Taking on themselves the role of the observer, religious actors have provided monitoring services, verifying and ensuring the legitimacy of democratic elections, and followed up dialogues and negotiations, functioning as moral guarantors for agreements and treaties signed. Others have sent groups or individuals into conflict areas to accompany people suffering from persecution or threatened by violence.⁴¹ In *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* Appleby also mentions how religious institutions have acted as safe havens for persecuted groups, providing physical protection and ideological support.⁴² All this is possible due to the unique position of religious institutions in society, which often

³⁸ Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p.7.

³⁹ Sampson, in Zartman (2007), p. 280-281.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 290.

⁴¹ Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 9.

⁴² Appleby (2000), p. 216.

makes them relatively immune from repression.⁴³

Finally, *educators* play an important part in all phases of peacebuilding. They are the ones who create the foundation for the social transformation necessary for the establishment of a sustainable peace; pointing to, and raising awareness of structural injustice; providing training in advocacy, conflict resolution and democracy; facilitating healing and reconciliation; and promoting tolerance of diversity.⁴⁴ According to Katrien Hertog, one of the most valuable contributions of religious actors in peacebuilding is their ability to support the inculcation of peace-enhancing principles and values with religious rituals, disciplines and ethics. Using their nationwide (and even global) networks to reach out to entire populations, religious educators can help spread these values by issuing proclamations and promoting non-violence; providing spiritual formation and education; organizing public events and dialogues; and being living examples in their communities.⁴⁵

The importance of dialogue for preventing conflict is also mentioned by Appleby, who points to how churches have arranged community dialogues in areas struggling with disputes over land or water rights, borders, trade, etc.⁴⁶

2.2.2. Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution, or peacemaking, refers to the removal of inequalities between the conflicting parties through means of negotiation, mediation, and advocacy or testimony. A vital part of this component is bringing the opposing sides together to identify and address their differences peacefully, as well as follow up on agreements made to ensure that they are being adhered to. Understandably then, the facilitation of negotiations is one of the most crucial components of conflict resolution. Religious communities and individuals have played important roles both pre-negotiations, bringing the sides together; during negotiations, as mediators; and post-negotiations, monitoring the process of implementing peace accords.

Observers and advocates have already been presented above. These are important roles in conflict resolution as well. Religious actors have served as observers during official negotiations and mediation as well as afterwards, to ensure that the parties live up to their side

⁴³ Rubin, in Johnston and Sampson (1994), p. 24.

⁴⁴ Sampson, in Zartman (2007), p. 292.

⁴⁵ Hertog (2010), p. 105-106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216

of agreements made, and, as mentioned, during elections, providing moral legitimacy and credibility to the process and result. Furthermore, in cases where either one or both parties to a conflict are unwilling to talk together, religious advocates can help bringing the sides together; either by preaching peace and promoting non-violent solutions to the conflict, or by advocating on behalf of the weaker side, or victims on both sides, and bring wider attention to the conflict in order to force the parties to the negotiating table.

Perhaps the most crucial phase in conflict resolution however, is the official negotiations between the warring parties. Here religious communities and individuals have been involved more frequently and with greater success than they are given credit for. Appleby and Little refer to Andrea Bartoli, the Vice-President of Sant'Egidio, when trying to explain why religious *mediators* have been so successful.⁴⁷ Bartoli, highlighting the hermeneutical gap as the greatest obstacle to peacebuilders - religious or secular - states that it is vital that conflicts are *seen* and *read* properly. This is especially so when they include major cultural, ethnic or religious components. Religious leaders, due to the training they receive and their role in society, share basic characteristics that make them particularly suitable to interpret and understand conflict correctly. They have intimate knowledge of local language and culture, access to firsthand information; political expertise; and a long-term vision for society.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as we have briefly touched upon earlier, due to their presence and close contact with all levels of society, religious actors are able to build trustworthy relationships with people on both sides of a conflict. The integrity and trustworthiness of religious leaders who have the strength to let their words be followed by action “can be critical to the success of the critical approach-and-avoidance dance that often precedes formal negotiations”.⁴⁹

In addition to being mediators there are several roles in which religious actors can contribute to a negotiation process. According to Sampson, apart from mediation, religious actors have taken on themselves, or been tasked with, fact finding missions, provision of good offices, peace-process advocacy, facilitation and conciliation.⁵⁰ Appleby highlights the provision of good offices as a natural ability of religious institutions, claiming that some of the “most direct and decisive involvement in conflict resolution came when religious actors

⁴⁷ Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 11.

⁴⁸ Bartoli, Andrea, ‘Christianity and Peacebuilding’, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 158.

⁴⁹ Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 12.

⁵⁰ Sampson, in Zartman (2007), p. 287.

provided good offices ...”.⁵¹ As we have seen, religious institutions often enjoy a high level of trust in society, and as long as they are able to retain their neutrality they have both the skills and credibility to provide necessary space and expertise for either unofficial or official dialogue or negotiations.

2.2.3. Structural Reform

Structural reform refers to efforts to build institutions and foster civic leadership that will address the root causes of the conflict. The goal is to facilitate social transformation and the restoration of positive social relations and political stability. Appleby and Little mention *social critics*, *educators* and *institution builders* as possible roles for religious actors in structural reform.⁵²

The social critics, like the heralds and advocates above, speak out against what is perceived as institutionalized injustice, discrimination, abuse of power and human rights violations, as well as cultures of intolerance and violence; raising their voices on behalf of the poor and oppressed, and advocate for positive change and reform. They are a combination of the truth-teller and the advocate.

The educator, as mentioned, lays the foundation for social transformation and reconciliation through lifting up peace-enhancing principles, preaching nonviolence and tolerance of diversity, as well as providing training in advocacy, democracy and the principles of peacebuilding.

In recent history religious actors have often shown themselves willing and able to step up and assume leadership of social reconstruction following the end of violent conflict. Either as an act of repentance for any role they may have played in earlier injustice and oppression; as a consequence of having been intimately involved in the attempt to end the violence from the start, or; because they are called upon by others to take charge. As we have seen, due to their presence in society and reputation for integrity and service, religious leaders and communities are often highly respected. And according to Appleby and Little a “process leading to genuine reconciliation ... demands leaders whose moral authority demands the respect of both sides”.⁵³ Whether as leaders of Truth and Reconciliation Councils or founders

⁵¹ Appleby (2000), p. 217.

⁵² Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith (2004), p. 13.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 15.

of Inter-Religious Councils, religious actors, as institution builders, have actively taken part in shaping and leading post-conflict societies in the process of reconciliation.

Through these roles, drawing on their intimate knowledge of myths, beliefs, and the deepest feelings of people shaped by religious faith, religious actors have the ability to create a cultural foundation for peace in their respective societies. In the words of Appleby; “religious leaders are poised to promote peace-related values, including friendship, compassion, humility, service, respect for strangers, repentance, forgiveness, and the acceptance of responsibility of past errors”.⁵⁴ Hertog agrees with this, and further claims that the will and ability of religious actors to promote peace-enhancing principles and values puts them in a unique position when it comes to the facilitation of personal transformation of people affected by conflict and violence, making them invaluable players in structural reform. According to Hertog you can find in all religions an approach to conflict and violence in terms of personal morality and the dynamics of the inner life. This is based on an understanding of aggression, intolerance, and violent behavior as only outer expressions of inner experiences of frustration, anger and hate, fueled by ignorance and jealousy. Hence, “in order to reduce violence in the world, one has to start with the internal workings of the human being”.⁵⁵ Considering this, the importance of the soft aspects of peacebuilding for the establishment of a sustainable peace becomes quite apparent.

Finally, the importance for religious institutions to focus on building a common identity is mentioned by Appleby and Little. When stating this, they refer to Patrick Grants chapter on Northern Ireland in the same book, in which Grant, despite admitting that religion might not be among the main causes of that conflict, shows how sectarianism within both Catholic and Protestant communities has been fueling the conflict and served to undermine the peace process. Particularly in the case of efforts made by Catholic and Protestant leaders to support peace, and in the process of building multi-religious and multi-ethnic political and civic institutions. From this follows that building unified, tolerant religious institutions are a significant part of building unified, tolerant civic and political institutions, and hence a unified, tolerant society.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Appleby (2000), p. 169.

⁵⁵ Hertog (2010), p. 107.

⁵⁶ Appleby and Little, in Coward and Smith ((2004), p. 17-18.

2.2.4. Summary

Rather than one, or even a few typical roles in one of the three different stages of peacebuilding, we have seen that there are a multitude of various roles religious actors can play in each of them. What is common for all of them, however, and therefore important to note, is that they all build on roles religious actors are already playing (though perhaps only in the scope of their own institutions, or on a smaller scale), and specific characteristics, or qualities, attributed to religious institutions or leaders.

2.3. How?

Considering the number of different religious actors working in widely different context, a straight forward recipe for a religious approach to peacebuilding might be a little too optimistic. Nevertheless, I will try to provide an answer to how religion and religious actors can contribute positively to peacebuilding by looking at three questions or themes. I will begin by describing what Appleby presents as *three modes of religious peacebuilding*. These three modes have emerged in the years following World War II, and represent the different ways in which religious peacebuilding approaches have grown forth since then. I will then move on to look at how the potential of religious peacebuilding is affected by the social and religious location of religious actors – discussing Appleby’s thoughts about strong and weak religion, and what is needed for a religious approach to make an impact. Finally, I will look at what John Paul Lederach calls the BOIDS of peacebuilding. These are, according to him, the absolute basics, without which you will never be able to bring two opposing parties to a conflict back together. Briefly, they describe a mindset, or a set of qualities, that should define a peacebuilder.

2.3.1. Three Modes of Religious Peacebuilding

According to Appleby, three *modes* in which religious actors have been engaged in conflict transformation, or peacebuilding, emerged during the final half of the twentieth century; The *Crisis Mobilization* mode, the *Saturation* mode, and the *External Intervention* mode.

In the crisis mobilization mode religious engagement in peacebuilding is spontaneous and unplanned – sparked by the historic role, institutional presence, and active involvement in the social dynamics of political change, of churches, mosques, or other religious bodies, in

conflicted societies.⁵⁷ In the face of violent conflict charismatic and innovative leadership emerges, drawing from a wealth of religious resources to counter the chaos threatening their faithful. Both Gandhi's *Satyagraha* and the South African *Ubuntu* are examples of how religious leaders, forced to reinterpret their theology and tradition according to the surrounding circumstances, used their creativity to lift up the peace-enhancing values of their faiths and turn the financial resources and networks of their adherents to the work of conflict transformation. In addition to India's non-violent revolution and the South African struggle to establish 'the rainbow state' following the fall of Apartheid, Appleby describes the Roman Catholic Church's role in ending the Soviet-sponsored communist regime in Poland and in the People's Power revolution in the Philippines as examples of crisis mobilization. However, in all these cases, once the conflict died down, the religious institutions struggled to maintain momentum. Peacebuilding initiatives, inclusive language, and theological innovation disappeared, and churches, temples and mosques reverted to their usual *modus operandi*.⁵⁸

The saturation mode and the external intervention mode both show a greater extent of planning and intentionality than the crisis intervention mode. Still, in the saturation mode, religious peacebuilding begins much like in crisis intervention – as spontaneous and unstructured responses by indigenous religious institutions, to the emergence or threat of violent conflict. However, in this case, new initiatives and practices do not disappear, but are further developed. Religious actors “diversify, creating offices, interreligious or intercommunal dialogues, and programs of education and formation for peace”.⁵⁹ In the saturation mode, the general understanding of peacebuilding among practitioners is that it should be a full-time, long-term enterprise, including post-conflict reform and the social reconstruction of society. Its strength is that it builds on the continued presence and efforts of religious peacebuilders operating on every level of society over time, persisting for years, perhaps decades, until they become a natural part of the social and institutional landscape. In the words of Appleby, the saturation mode emerges “gradually from within the peaceable heart of conflicted societies ... [offering] a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy for ending violence and achieving and sustaining reconciliation.”⁶⁰ Focusing on relationship building and on analyzing and addressing the root causes of the conflict – realizing that true peace can

⁵⁷ Appleby (2000), p 230.

⁵⁸ Hertog (2010), p. 89.

⁵⁹ Appleby (2000), p. 237

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238

never be achieved without dealing with the social inequalities and grievances fueling the violence – peacebuilding initiatives in the saturation mode have great potential. Especially when dealing with the post-cold war ethno-religious conflicts, in which psychology and culture are at least as important as economy and political discontent. The problem with the saturation mode is that it depends on a cultural and historical context that can support its development. This would be a context characterized by the presence of strong religious and cultural institutions - deeply entrenched in society - whose fragile initiatives for peace and reconciliation were supported by external religious and secular actors; a community with a functioning civil society and a tradition for democracy. That effectively excludes many of the areas in the world struggling with violence and war today, leaving us with the interventionist approach.⁶¹

As the name states, the external intervention mode is characterized by the intervention of external religious and cultural actors, looking to initiate or sustain a peace process. This normally takes place following an invitation from one or more of the parties to the conflict and in collaboration with religious institutions on the ground. Appleby presents two forms of external intervention; Mediation and Magisterial. Nonpartisan religious actors, when able to win the trust and confidence of both sides to the conflict, may act as mediators, working to bring the opposing parties together to start talking, or helping them find acceptable compromises and overcome disagreements. Though they might be vital to establishing negotiations and help moving them forward, religious actors will rarely play a leading role in these situations. Rather, they will be supporting a variety of other actors. The UN, different NGO's, local actors, or other interested states usually take the lead. The primary focus of mediation is to bring about a cease-fire or a settlement. However, even when successful these do not automatically lead to a sustainable peace. To some extent it was this realization that led to the development of the magisterial model. Assuming the necessity of external intervention, but seeing the limitations of mediation, different religious actors started working towards “the development, over the long term, of indigenous religious (and other) actors dedicated to sustaining cultures of peace in their respective societies.”⁶² In many ways, the long term goal of the magisterial mode is to lay the foundation necessary for leading a community in conflict into the saturation mode, for them to take charge of the peacebuilding process themselves.⁶³

⁶¹ Appleby (2000), p. 238

⁶² Ibid., p. 240

⁶³ Ibid., p. 238-240.

Considering the saturation mode's dependence on a supportive context, the external intervention mode, including both mediation and magisterial intervention, may be the one that has the highest probability of success. However, bringing in resources and ideas from outside is never unproblematic. Foreign intervention, if not welcomed by both parties to the conflict, can easily bring forth accusations of neocolonialism. Furthermore, a successful intervention demands in-depth knowledge of local culture and customs, and the ability to contextualize. It can end up doing more harm than good if conflict resolution models and concepts are seen as imposed from outside.

Though different in terms of initiation, approach, and perhaps also ability to create a lasting cultural change within its own tradition, the three modes of religious peacebuilding introduced by Appleby share in that their applicability is to a large degree decided by the social and religious location of potential peacemakers.

2.3.2. The Importance of Strong Religion

So how can we build the foundation necessary for indigenous religious institutions to develop their peace potential? What is necessary for the development of a Saturation approach, and how can religious actors contribute towards that?

Earlier I referred to Rubin and Sampson arguing that the potential of religious peacebuilding is greatest in countries characterized by a weak state and strong religion. That is to say countries in which government authorities are widely seen as illegitimate and corrupt, and lack the infrastructure, resources and state apparatus to effectively stay in control, while religious institutions enjoy strong, nationwide, possibly international, networks, have a decent economy, religiously literate adherents, as well as leaders that are generally trusted. This is also in line with what we have seen Appleby mention about strong religious and cultural institutions that are both willing and able to look at their teaching and tradition in new and creative ways when facing a conflict situation.

Appleby argues that a strong religious presence might reduce the chance of religion being used to encourage violence and increase its peacebuilding potential. To better understand his argument, we need to look at how he defines *strong* and *weak* religion. According to Appleby there are two ways in which religion can be understood as either strong or weak. First of all "religion is strong ... if its institutions are well developed and secure, and its adherents literate in its doctrinal and moral teachings and practiced in its devotional, ritual

and spiritual traditions.”⁶⁴ Weak religion on the other hand is characterized by religious practice disconnected from the larger tradition and its network of fellow believers, leaders, educators, publications, rituals, etc. This kind of isolation opens up for other worldviews and ideologies to influence teaching and practice, increasing the chance of ethnic, nationalist, secular-liberal, or other ideas shaping religious ideals. Religious illiteracy then, here understood as religious belief and practice that is out of touch with its wider tradition, whether based on lack of knowledge or understanding, or on flawed theological interpretations and arguments, weakens religion. Secondly, religious movements that lift up and glorify violence, and thereby “inhibit religion’s capacity to promote pluralistic and tolerant political cultures” are weak in a normative sense, despite often being strong in terms of religious literacy.⁶⁵

Here Appleby admits to be basing his argument on a normative judgment. However, if, as we have seen, religious scriptures and traditions can be used to defend both violence and pacifism, when facing a potential conflict religious actors need to make that call in any case. Considering this, one might argue that what is most important for the potential of religious peacebuilding is actually the willingness and ability of religious leaders to choose peace instead of violence, to defend that choice theologically, and to successfully pass on to their followers an understanding of active non-violence as a religious norm. From this we can infer two things. First of all, as Appleby states, religious leaders – because of their role and responsibility, and the authority they possess – are key to successful religious peacebuilding. It is the responsibility of the religious leader to interpret text and tradition, and hence, to make that normative judgment and choose what is to be considered ‘right’ and what is to be seen as heresy. Second, this highlights the importance of religious education and *formation* for peace. To be formed in a religious tradition is to take in its teaching and ethical doctrines to the point where it becomes part of you. To let it shape every aspect of your life. As seen above, what Appleby calls religious formation for peace is similar to what Hertog describes as the inculcation of religion’s peace-enhancing principles. Considering that violent extremists often take religious formation quite seriously, it is of vital importance that religious leaders and communities are willing to invest both time and resources in education and formation of their adherents, in the peace-enhancing values of their faith. First of all to arm them with the knowledge, values and skills necessary to meet the arguments of those whose interpretation of their religion only serves to feed ethnoreligious hatred and violence, but also to engage and

⁶⁴ Appleby (2000), p. 77.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

encourage them to stand up against injustice whenever and wherever they might face it, and provide them with tools to address conflict situations should they arise.⁶⁶

2.3.3. The BOIDS of Peacebuilding

According to John Paul Lederach the *moral imagination* is the heart and soul of peacebuilding. Though the concept might be somewhat difficult to grasp, as I understand it, it is about having the ability to envision what is currently not there – a peaceful future, or a restored relationship – the willingness and courage to reach for it, and the creativity needed to make it reality. In the book entitled *The Moral Imagination* Lederach discusses what he has dubbed the BOIDS of peacebuilding. Originally, BOIDS was the name of a computer program made to imitate the incredibly complex, unpredictable, yet coordinated movement of a flock of birds, or a school of fish. It was created as part of an experiment looking at complexity theory and application. Somewhat surprisingly, what was needed to achieve this was just a small set of simple rules guiding the movement of each individual member of the group. From simplicity comes complexity. This realization led Lederach to the question of what constitutes the BOIDS of peacebuilding. Considering the incredible complexity of a peace process, he wanted to see if he could identify a few simple bare necessities without which a lasting peace could not be achieved. What he came up with was four disciplines that all are born out of what he describes as the moral imagination. They are *relationship*, *paradoxical curiosity*, *creativity* and *risk*.⁶⁷

In a way what Lederach tries to communicate in *The Moral Imagination* can be summed up in one sentence; it's all about relationships. Using a quote from Margaret Wheatley, he states that “nothing in the universe exists as an isolated or independent entity. Everything takes the form of relationships, be it subatomic particles sharing energy or ecosystems sharing food. In the web of life, nothing living lives alone”.⁶⁸ Our ability to break out of a self-perpetuating cycle of violence depends on our capacity to see ourselves as incorporated in this web of life – as part of a web of relationships that include even our enemies. Seeing us as connected with our enemies can help us acknowledge our

⁶⁶ Appleby (2000), p. 282-286.

⁶⁷ Lederach, John Paul, *The Moral Imagination; The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 31-34.

⁶⁸ Wheatley, Margaret, *Turning to One Another* (Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2002), p. 89. As cited in Lederach (2005), p. 34.

interdependence, and understand that our choices and actions can either serve to uphold or to break a destructive pattern. If we realize that we are part of a pattern of violence, we might be more willing to take personal responsibility for the choices we make, and try to affect change. The centrality of relationships to peacebuilding is undeniable. If there is no will or capacity to see oneself as part of a greater whole in which the enemy can be included, there is no foundation for peace. Only by recognizing how we are connected and depend on each other, and understanding that our own well-being is directly tied to the well-being of our enemies, can we hope to achieve it.⁶⁹

In a conflict setting it is natural for people to see things as more black and white – both in order to strengthen identity and fellowship within the group and to clearly separate between us and them. ‘We are right; they are wrong’. This somewhat reductionist approach to truth is damaging in its separation between us and them, and serves only to keep people apart. The peacebuilder has to rise above the temptation to simplify reality by forcing it into categories of either-or. This requires what Lederach calls paradoxical curiosity. The paradox has the capacity to hold seemingly contradicting truths together in order to identify a greater truth beneath, while curiosity contains the willingness to go beyond accepted meaning. Hence, paradoxical curiosity, he claims, is made up of an acceptance and embracement of complexity that denies a dualistic understanding of reality, and an inquisitiveness that seeks a greater whole with the capacity to contain directly contradicting truths. It can help us uncover a deeper truth, by at the same time seeing and accepting what is presented as truths – however contradictory they might be – and moving beyond mere appearance, seeking to understand how events are perceived and interpreted by people. As I understand it, a paradoxical curiosity can help us acknowledge the experiences and suffering of the enemy, and open up for a greater understanding of the other as equal to oneself, thereby breaking the hold of the social polarization that sustains the cycle of violence. Furthermore, by accepting the stories presented by both sides to a conflict as truths to them, without judgment, and at the same time looking past what is presented to what lies beyond, it reaches for a deeper understanding of the very roots of the violence and broken relationships.⁷⁰

Finally, Lederach talks about the importance of providing space for the creative act, and the willingness to risk that important first step into the unknown. The moral imagination is of no use unless it is given a chance to creatively unfold itself through concrete action.

⁶⁹ Lederach (2005), p. 34-35.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 35-37.

Drawing a parallel to the creative act of an artist, he states that “creativity moves beyond what exists towards something new and unexpected while rising from and speaking to the everyday”.⁷¹ Going back to what was said above about the moral imagination helping us envision what is not there, providing space for the creative act is about giving that which is not there, that new and unexpected something, what it needs to move from imagination to reality – from thought, through creative act, to action. However, knowing that in deeply divided societies violence is what exists, while peace is the unknown; to be the one taking that first step into the unknown, without any guarantee of one’s own safety or success, requires conviction about one’s purpose, and willingness to risk.⁷²

2.3.4. Summary

In this sub-chapter three different themes have been presented. We have seen that religious interventions since World War 2 has taken the form of one out of three modes, described as Crisis Mobilization, Saturation, and External Intervention. According to Appleby, the Saturation mode holds the most potential, but is also the rarest, as its occurrence depends heavily on a favorable context. Therefore, the External Intervention mode – including both mediation and magisterial intervention – may be the approach with the highest probability of success.

Then, considering what is needed for the Saturation mode, and what a magisterial intervention seeks to achieve, it is clear that the strength of religious institutions to a great extent defines the limits of their potential as peacebuilders. This, again, highlights the importance of education and formation for peace within religious institutions.

Finally, we have seen that, according to Lederach, there are certain qualities without which there can be no peacebuilding. Focusing on the importance of relationships for the establishment of a lasting peace, the BOIDS of peacebuilding presents the bare necessities for bringing an envisioned peaceful future, born of the moral imagination, into being.

⁷¹ Lederach (2005), p. 38.

⁷² Ibid., p. 38-39.

3. Research Design and Methodology

In the following, I will present the research design and methods used to address the questions raised in this thesis. I will explain why I have chosen these methods and then give a description of my fieldwork, before moving on to the presentation of the research findings.

3.1. Research Design and Strategy

As stated in chapter one, the aim of this thesis is to test the proposition that religious actors can play a constructive part in peacebuilding processes. Furthermore, it aims to use the case of the IRC SL to provide general recommendations for how religious actors can approach a peace process. This will be done by answering the following two questions related to the work and impact of the IRC SL during the Sierra Leonean civil war:

1. *Why and how were IRC SL able to achieve what they did in Sierra Leone – and did their religious foundation make a difference or not?*
2. *What, if anything, can peacebuilders elsewhere learn from their experiences and replicate in other conflict settings.*

The research conducted as part of this thesis is qualitative in nature, as it “predominantly emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.”⁷³ In doing this, it seeks to “discover the meaning that participants attach to their behavior, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues”.⁷⁴ This method was applied as the goal was to attain a deeper understanding of how the interviewed members of the IRC SL see their own participation in the peace process, as well as what their thoughts are regarding the role and importance of religion in peacebuilding.

The study of the two areas of interest, namely the potential of a religiously inspired contribution to peace (the why and how) and the possible roles of religious actors in peacebuilding (the what), needs to be approached differently. When looking at the potential of religious actors in peacebuilding I make use of a deductive approach, using the example of the IRC SL to either prove or disprove my initial proposition. Deductive theory is described by

⁷³ Bryman (2012), p. 36.

⁷⁴ Woods, Peter, *Successful Writing for Qualitative Researchers - 2nd Edn.* (Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

Chambliss and Schutt as a “type of research in which a specific expectation is deduced from a general premise and is then tested.”⁷⁵ Then, regarding the roles of religious actors in a peace process, I turn to an inductive approach. In inductive research “general conclusions are drawn from specific data.”⁷⁶ In other words, I will use what I have learned about the experiences of the Council to provide some recommendations for how religious actors should approach peacebuilding.

This raises the question of whether this study can be seen as strictly a case study. Bryman states that the “case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case.”⁷⁷ Reaching for a complete understanding of the object of interest, it demands a greater focus on context than other research designs, realizing that the setting is vital to the understanding of any case. From this follows that every case is unique, and therefore, according to Gary Thomas, you cannot make generalizations about a broader field based on a case study.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, though I realize that the particular context made out of the culture of Sierra Leone and how the civil war developed was crucial to the IRC SL's influence on the peace process, this thesis, as stated, aims to at least make some suggestions as to what other religious actors might learn from the experiences of Sierra Leone's religious leaders. As I see it though, this would not be to make generalizations, unless of course one states that a specific intervention would, without a doubt, lead to a similar result as it did in the case. However, the idea is to present lessons learned for other religious actors to consider, based on their understanding and knowledge of their own context. Hence, as the focus is placed firmly on the unique case of the IRC SL and their contribution to their country's peace process, I would argue that the research is, for all intents and purposes, within the limits of what can be defined as a case study.

3.2. Methodology

As part of my research I spent six weeks in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. During this time, I met and interviewed eleven, former and current, members of the IRC SL's executive

⁷⁵ Chambliss, Daniel F. and Schutt, Russel K., *Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation – 3rd Edn.* (Pine Forge Press, 2010), p. 25.

⁷⁶ Chambliss & Schutt (2010), p. 29.

⁷⁷ Bryman, Alan, *Social Research Methods – 3rd Edn.* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 52.

⁷⁸ Thomas, Gary, *How to do Your Case Study, A Guide for Students and Researchers* (SAGE Publications Ltd., 2011), p. 3.

board. In addition to these eleven, one former member was interviewed by email – taking the total number of respondents to twelve. The prerequisite for taking part in the interviews was that the participant had to have been a member of the Council's executive board during the final years of the war, and as such had direct knowledge of the work of the Council during the war, internal discussions regarding strategies, and relations between members. Though any differences between the two religions represented on the Council is not of primary interest for the research, it was considered important that the selected group included a relatively equal number of Muslims and Christians. Contact with the participants was established through the current General Secretary of the Council, Reverend Usman J. Fornah.

This approach could be described as purposive snowball sampling, as it combines two different methods for sampling defined by Chambliss and Schutt as *purposive sampling* and *snowball sampling*. While purposive sampling entails that each sample element is selected purposely, usually because they have either a position or knowledge that is considered valuable for the research – snowball sampling is a method in which the researcher only identifies the first sample element, and then asks the him or her to identify the next.⁷⁹ Having written to Reverend Fornah and explained the basics of my thesis, he provided a list of people that fit the aforementioned criteria, including contact information, which he thought would be of help. In some cases, the reverend would also call persons of interest on my behalf, to establish initial contact.

Though I had spoken on the phone with some of the people presented to me before I traveled to Freetown, most of the appointments were made once I got there. Among the twelve participants were five Muslims and seven Christians. Three of these were women - two Muslims and one Christian.

The interview participants were:

Muslims:

- **Haja Saiminatu Kassim:** Current second vice-president and founding member of the IRCSL. Originally representing the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Sierra Leone.
- **Alhaji U.N.S. Jah:** Senior elective executive and founding member of the IRCSL. Former Minister of Religious Affairs, 1996-1997.

⁷⁹ Chambliss & Schutt (2010), p. 123-124.

- **Professor Alhaji A.B. Karim:** Treasurer of the IRCSL. General Secretary of the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress.
- **Mariatu Mahdi:** Co-chairperson of the IRCSL during the war. Former Emira of the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Sierra Leone.
- **Sheick Abu Bakarr Conteh:** Current President and founding member of the IRCSL. Originally representing Sierra Leone's Muslims' Missionary Union.

Christians:

- **Reverend Usman J. Fornah:** Current General Secretary of the IRCSL. Regional Coordinator of the northern region during the war.
- **Reverend Moses B. Khanu:** Co-Chairman of the IRCSL and President of the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone during the war.
- **Bishop Thomas J. Barnett:** Executive Board member in virtue of being the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone.
- **Reverend Doctor Joseph C. Humper:** President of the IRCSL. Served on the Council as representative and Bishop of the United Methodist Conference in Sierra Leone.
- **Mabel M'Bayo:** Member of the IRCSL executive board and Acting National General Secretary of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) during the war.
- **Reverend Canon L.B. Roger-Wright:** Member of the IRCSL Executive Board during the war.
- **Bishop Emeritus George Biguzzi:** Member of the IRCSL Executive Board during the war. Served the Roman Catholic Church as Bishop of Makeni at the time of the war.

All interviews conducted were of a semi-structured format. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher uses an interview guide consisting of a set of questions or topics that are to be covered during the interview.⁸⁰ Questions does not have to come exactly as outlined in the interview guide, and additional questions may be asked to pick up on issues of interest mentioned by the interviewee. Furthermore, a lot of freedom is given to the interviewee in

⁸⁰ For the interview guide used in this study see Appendix A.

choosing how to answer the questions.⁸¹ This is because “open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretation of events, understandings, experiences and opinions.”⁸²

Each interview took between sixty and ninety minutes. The participants themselves chose the location for the interviews, which resulted in five interviews done in the offices of the IRCSL, five done in the different offices of the respective participants, and one done at the guesthouse where I lived. All interviews, apart from the one done by email, were recorded on tape and then transcribed. All participants were fluent in English, so language was never a challenge. However, during some of the interviews conducted in the IRCSL office, the noise from traffic or music played on the street outside of the compound proved to be a challenge during the transcription. Hence, to avoid any mistakes, and ensure that none of the interviewees felt misrepresented or misunderstood in any way, each of them was given the opportunity to read through and comment on the transcription of their own interview.

While in Freetown, I was also given access to a small collection of documents, official statements and project reports written by the IRCSL during the war. These included the following:

- M'Bayo, Mabel, *The Role of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC SL) in the Peacebuilding Process of the Conflict in Sierra Leone* (1999) – a brief presentation of the background, objectives and work of the IRC SL between 1997 and 1999.
- IRC SL, *Communiqué* (1999) – a communiqué published by the IRC SL on February 25th, 1999.
- Koroma, Alimamy P., *IRC SL in the Peace Process* (1999) – a report on the work of the Council finalized July 14th, 1999.
- IRC SL, *Peace in Sierra Leone* (2000) – Statement of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone, published on May 10th, 2000.

Information from these documents were added to the transcripts of the interviews, and organized as part of these; complementing, and adding to, the data gathered.

⁸¹ Bryman (2008), p. 438.

⁸² Silverman, David, *Interpreting Qualitative Data, 3rd Edn.* (SAGE Publications Ltd., 2006), p. 114.

3.3. Analysis

“The focus on text – on qualitative data rather than numbers – is the most important feature of qualitative data analysis.”⁸³ As is often the case, in this study the 'text' consists mainly of transcripts of interviews. However, as mentioned, it also includes, to some extent, documents provided by the IRCSL to complement the data gathered through the interviews. When the transcriptions were done and approved by the interviewees, all data gathered was classified in two major ways. First, it was grouped according to how it related to the three questions of why, what, and how, that, as explained in the thesis' introduction, is supposed to lay a foundation for the actual analysis of the work of the IRCSL – along with the analytical framework established according to similar questions in chapter two. Second, according to recurring themes within each of the three initial groups, deemed relevant to answering the two main research questions that are to be discussed in the analysis.

This study is done from an interpretivist point of view. Interpretivism is based on the “view that the subject matter of the social sciences – people and their institutions – is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. The study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order”.⁸⁴ According to Bryman, what separates interpretivism from the positivist approach, is that where positivism seeks to explain human behavior, interpretivism seeks to understand it. This, he states, “requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.”⁸⁵ In other words, the focus of this research is on the descriptions, thoughts and reflections of each of the interviewed Council members, regarding their experiences with the IRCSL during the war, and the interpretation of these in light of existing theories about religious peacebuilding.

3.4. Research Validity

Validity, considered by many the most important criterion for the evaluation of social research, concerns itself with the integrity of the research and the conclusions derived from it.⁸⁶ Due to the different nature of qualitative- and quantitative research there is an ongoing

⁸³ Chambliss & Schutt (2010), p. 250.

⁸⁴ Bryman (2008), p. 15.

⁸⁵ Bryman (2012), p. 28-30. The quote is taken from page 30.

⁸⁶ Bryman (2008), p. 31-32.

debate on whether or not one can apply the same means of validation for the two. In this study I make use of Woods three main features of assessing the validity of qualitative research: *Unobtrusive, sustained methods; Respondent validation, and; Triangulation.*⁸⁷

Unobtrusive, sustained methods are methods that leave the situation as undisturbed as possible. This was assured through the use of semi-structured interviews, taking at most an hour and a half out of the day of the interview subjects, as the main method of gathering data. Furthermore, as already explained, the interview subjects decided on the location of the interview, allowing them to choose a place they were comfortable with. By handing out an information sheet containing all necessary information about the research and what it entails to participate before starting the interview, and asking them to sign a form of informed consent (ICF) if they still wanted to go through with it, I also wanted to make sure that none of my participants felt pressured, deceived, or used in any way.

Respondent validation, as the words imply, entails letting the participants of the study review the data gathered to make sure that it is their meanings and perspectives, not the researchers', that are presented. As mentioned, all the participants were asked to read through the transcript of their own interview and comment on it, to avoid any misrepresentation or misunderstandings.

Finally, triangulation refers to the “use of different researchers or methods, at different moments of time, in different places, among different people and so on, [as that] strengthens the account.”⁸⁸ Using more than one way of approaching a case, or gathering data, will help creating a more complete picture of the object of interest. Unfortunately, the size and scope of a master’s thesis hardly allows for a wide enough approach to fully satisfy the demands of triangulation. Two separate methods – interviews and study of documents – were indeed used during the research, but the number of documents made available by the IRC SL were quite limited. I do however, believe that the different answers given by each of the twelve participants to, for the most part, the same questions during the interviews, might reinforce and complement each other, and thereby provide a full(er) picture of the role and importance of the IRC SL's efforts during the war. Comparing my findings with existing theory on religiously inspired peacebuilding efforts may also serve to strengthen the validity of the research.

⁸⁷ Woods (2006), p. 4.

⁸⁸ Woods (2006), p. 4

3.5. Ethical Concerns

Regarding possible ethical pitfalls, I have to the best of my ability tried to make sure that no harm can come to any of the participants as a result of their taking part in this study. All who participated in the interviews were informed in advance about my intentions and my research, their rights as participants – Including the right to withdraw from the research – and my obligations as a researcher. They were then asked to sign an ICF if they would still allow me to talk to them. Both in the information sheet provided and on the ICF I asked for the right to present their full names and religious affiliation in the thesis, to which they all consented. Before starting the research, I presented my project to the *Norwegian Social Science Data Services* (NSD) for them to approve according to their guidelines for ethical research.

Fortunately, the religious and political situation in Sierra Leone is such that the chances of any information given in the interviews coming back to haunt the participants are practically non-existent. The IRC SL's involvement in the peace process is not considered a sensitive issue at all, and it is my impression that most of the participants were proud to speak of how religious actors in Sierra Leone came together to make a stand against the violence that was tearing the country apart.

4. Historical Background

The Sierra Leonean civil war lasted from 1991 to 2002. During those eleven years, over 50 000 were killed and two million people, more than one third of the total population, were displaced in the neighboring countries. Thousands more were molested and mutilated as both rebels and soldiers performed brutal attacks on defenseless civilians.

In this chapter I will be giving a brief chronological overview of the civil war. Due to the limits of this thesis I will not go into detail, but I do feel that a short presentation is needed, if for no other reason than for the reader to know a bit more about what was happening in the country, and about the circumstances under which the IRCSL was established and worked.

4.1. The Beginning of the War, and the End of APC

When Sierra Leone entered the 1990ies, the country was in a terrible shape, having been mismanaged by successive leaders almost since they got their independence in 1961. While their first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, and the Sierra Leonean People's Party (SLPP), had kept the country peaceful throughout the first few years as an independent state, his brother, Albert Michael Margai – who was sworn in when Sir Milton died in 1964 – started a negative spiral towards authoritarianism that only increased in strength with the ascent to power of Siaka Stevens and the All People's Congress (APC) in 1968, following the chaotic aftermath of the 1967 elections.⁸⁹ Hence, when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), supported by soldiers and mercenaries from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), crossed the border from Liberia into Sierra Leone on the 23rd of March 1991, they met little resistance.

The Sierra Leonean civil war was chaotic, and extremely violent; with blurred lines between government and rebel soldiers, and suspicion of cooperation for mutual gain between the warring parties, contributing to increased distrust and fear. In the eleven years the war lasted, control of the Sierra Leonean state changed hands four times; twice through military coups, once after elections, and once with the restoration of the democratically elected government.

⁸⁹ Pham, J. Peter, *Child Soldiers, Adult interests: The Global dimensions of the Sierra Leone Tragedy* (Nova Science Publishers, 2005), p. 33-34, and; Conteh-Morgan, Earl and Dixon-Fyle, Mac, *Sierra Leone at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), p. 77-79.

At the outset of the war, the country was still being ruled by Siaka Stevens successor and the APC. However, the country was close to bankrupt at this point, and among those carrying the financial burdens of the misgoverned state were the soldiers at the war front. About a year into the war, a group of soldiers, led by Captains Valentine Strasser and Julius Maada Bio, had had enough, and decided to march on Freetown in protest against unpaid salaries and lack of medical treatment of wounded soldiers. Upon their arrival, on the 29th of April, 1992, they demanded to speak to the president. However, Momoh, fearing a coup, fled, and twenty-seven year old Valentine Strasser, chosen by his companions, suddenly found himself the head of state – leading the newly formed National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).⁹⁰

4.2. A Return to Democracy, and a First Attempt at Peace

The NPRC remained in power from 1992 until 1996. Initially, they were met with widespread support and optimism, as the majority of the people were happy to see the APC gone. Furthermore, the new leaders promised a quick end to the war, a reorganization of the economy, and a return to multiparty democracy.⁹¹ The optimism, however, was short-lived, as the NPRC quickly turned to authoritarian means of keeping control. Furthermore, in an attempt to ensure a complete victory over the rebels, they started boosting the ranks of the Sierra Leonean Army (SLA). In four years the SLA went from numbering about three thousand to seventeen thousand soldiers. However, the new recruits consisted to a large part of unemployed youth and convicted criminals, pushed, not necessarily of their own free will, into the ranks of the army with little, if any, training.

Though, at first, enabling them to quickly push the RUF even further towards the Liberian border, the quality of the new rank and file of the SLA would soon prove as much of a problem for the people they allegedly fought for, as the rebels they fought against. The level of loyalty among the first conscripts became apparent when, in 1994, it was estimated that nearly forty percent of the new recruits had deserted, either running away or joining the rebels. The term *sobel*, soldier by day, rebel by night, was also introduced after the mass enlisting of soldiers, to describe soldiers participating in rebel activities, such as attacking and

⁹⁰ Pham (2005), p. 87-89.

⁹¹ Stovel, Laura, *Long Road Home: Building Reconciliation and Trust in Post-War Sierra Leone* (Intersentia, 2010), p. 90-91.

looting civilians, or illicit mining and trading.⁹²

The reign of the NPRC was characterized by increasing chaos, the turning to guerilla tactics by the RUF, and growing distrust among the public. However, by involving the South African mercenaries from Executive Outcomes (EO), towards the end of 1995, they were close to a complete victory over the rebels. It was a dear-bought success though, as the price of EO's services reached a total of thirty-five million US dollars. The recapture of the diamond fields provided a temporary solution for the broke government, who allowed EO to extract resources from conquered areas as part of their payment.⁹³

At this point, several things happened. Starting to feel the effect of the public's discontent with the continued military rule, the NPRC organized two conferences – Bintumani 1 and Bintumani 2 – in which they tried to argue for postponing democratic elections until the war was officially over, but failing to convince anyone. The majority wanted elections before peace, and hence, plans were made to organize an election on the 26th of February 1996. In between the first and the second conference, however, Julius Maada Bio led an internal coup against Valentine Strasser, and replaced him as the NPRC's leader. Strasser was arrested and sent into exile, and Foday Sankoh – the leader of the RUF – was approached, and convinced to send a delegation to Abidjan, in Ivory Coast, to initiate peace talks. Despite a series of extremely violent attacks by the RUF, meant to scare people from participating, the elections were held as planned. And after two rounds of voting, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP was declared the winner, despite well documented reasons for suspicions of cheating. Sierra Leone was once again a democracy.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, peace talks were going on in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. For a long time, negotiations seemed to be going nowhere, but eventually Sankoh seemingly gave up. The Abidjan Agreement was signed on the 30th of November, 1996.

4.3. The Road to Peace

With an agreement in place and the RUF seemingly willing to cooperate, Kabbah terminated EO's contract in January 1997. This was partly due to pressure from international donors, and demands from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cut government spending. The

⁹² Pham (2005), p. 93-94, and; Richards, Paul, *Fighting for the Rainforest* (The International African Institute, 1996), p. 9-13

⁹³ Keen, David, *Conflict & Collusion in Sierra Leone* (James Curry Publishers, 2005), p. 151-152.

⁹⁴ Pham (2005), p. 115-116.

decision would soon prove disastrous, as things quickly started to unravel.

In March Sankoh was arrested for buying arms in Lagos, Nigeria. After Sankoh's arrest, Sam 'Mosquito' Bockarie, Sankoh's second-in-command, quickly seized control of the rebel group, and removed anyone he considered a threat to his control. With Bockarie as its new leader, and anyone within the RUF willing to embrace peace effectively removed from any position of influence, the Abidjan Agreement was dead before implementation had even begun. Then, on the 25th of May, SLA soldiers started pouring into Freetown. As EO had preferred working with local militias – known as *kamajors* – since their arrival, the SLA had been largely neglected, and they were not happy about it. Having raided army barracks for weapons, they turned to Pandemba Road Prison and released all the prisoners there. Among the released were Major Johnny Paul Koroma, the former head of security for Valentine Strasser turned rebel. The coup left large parts of Freetown in ruins. Throughout the day more and more soldiers joined in the fighting, and as President Kabbah escaped to Guinea, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) officially announced their takeover, appointing Major Koroma their chairman.

Having secured control of government, the AFRC quickly banned kamajor activities and alternative political parties, and then went on to invite the RUF to join them in the capital, promising Sankoh the position of Vice-Chairman. In return, Sankoh, still in detention in Nigeria, encouraged his rebels over the radio to put down their weapons and join the new government.⁹⁵ Many saw this AFRC-RUF alliance as proof of earlier suspicions of the SLA cooperating with the rebels. The AFRC in power for less than a year. Their rule was characterized by chaos, civilian protests, violence and clashes between ECOMOG peacekeepers, and the military junta. Forced by both international sanctions and pressure from a population defying their every word, the leaders of the junta, after negotiations in Guinea, agreed to cede power in April 1998. However, provoked by continuing clashes with AFRC forces, ECOMOG, with the support of kamajors, launched a full scale military attack on Freetown in February. Another mercenary company with strong ties to EO, Sandline International, was also involved, giving tactical advice and providing helicopter backup to the ECOMOG soldiers. After several days of fierce fighting, they managed to force AFRC and RUF out of the capital, but again, the city was left in ruins. To avoid further bloodshed the

⁹⁵Pham (2005), p. 117-124, and; Stovel (2010), p. 100-103.

ECOMOG forces allowed the remaining AFRC-RUF soldiers to withdraw from the capital.⁹⁶

As we will see later, it was during the reign of the AFRC that the IRCSL established themselves as a player to be reckoned with in the peace process.⁹⁷ The Council was established on the 1st of April, less than two months before the coup, and were quick to criticize the coup makers, telling them to step down and calling for a return to democracy. Originally, the Council was intended to discuss issues of shared moral concerns. However, following the coup, their objective changed to identifying “common religious commitments and principles conducive to the peace of the human community”, and to “undertake actions for peace”.⁹⁸

In March 1998, Kabbah was reinstated as president, and taken back to Freetown. But he returned to a city in chaos. Mobs were walking the streets, pointing out, at times lynching, supposed collaborators of the AFRC. The parliament did not bother coming together, while the cabinet only met sporadically. Meanwhile, the remaining junta-rebels reorganized and went back on the offensive, returning to their former hit-and-run tactics. On the 6th of January 1999, AFRC forces forced their way back into Freetown. Meeting little opposition from the surprised peacekeepers, they quickly gained control over most of the city, pushing ECOMOG out into the western edges of town. For six weeks the fighting over the capital went on. At least three thousand civilians were killed, and the city almost completely destroyed, before control was returned to the government.⁹⁹

After the January attack Francis Okelo, a Ugandan diplomat serving as the UN General Secretary's special envoy in Sierra Leone, approached the IRCSL, asking them to try to convince President Kabbah and Foday Sankoh, currently on death row, to start talking together. After meeting with both leaders separately; meeting and discussing with RUF in the bush; travelling to Liberia to include Charles Taylor in the process, and; having consulted with both traditional chieftains, members of parliament, and representatives of a variety of civil society groups, the IRCSL convinced the President and the rebel leader to begin new negotiations for peace in Lomé, Togo. Their position severely weakened since Abidjan, the Kabbah government had little choice but to accept RUF's demands of political influence. As

⁹⁶ Pham (2005), p. 129-132, and; Keen (2005), p. 210-218.

⁹⁷ The establishment and work of the IRCSL will be presented in detail as part of the presentation of my research findings, in chapter 5.

⁹⁸ M'Bayo, Mabel, *The Role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone in the Peacebuilding Process of the conflict in Sierra Leone* (1999).

⁹⁹ Pham (2005), p. 134-140.

part of the agreement signed on the 7th of July, Sankoh, having been released from death row to take part in the negotiations, was appointed vice president and subsequently pardoned. In total, seven ministerial posts were given to RUF representatives. Sankoh was also made chairman of a newly set up commission on mineral resources, basically putting him in control of the country's mineral wealth. This angered many Sierra Leoneans, who saw the rebel's ascension to positions of influence as a mockery of the suffering they had been through the last eight years. Some also voiced concerns over how Sankoh's control over the diamond fields could provide the RUF with much needed resources to continue fighting.¹⁰⁰ The agreement has been widely criticized, for the concessions given to the RUF, the immunity given to perpetrators of crimes against humanity, and for not including the AFRC in the negotiations despite the fact that it was they, not the RUF, who had been the main antagonist of the state in the last phase of the war. This, however, was made up for by the appointment of Johnny Paul Koroma as chairman of the Commission for Consolidation of Peace, and the reintegration of many ex-AFRC/SLA combatants into the new national army, in October the same year. As feared, the Lomé peace did not last for long.¹⁰¹

Despite Sankoh's pledges to live up to the agreement, his original second-in-command, and in his absence self-appointed leader of the RUF, Sam Bockarie, refused to disarm. Hence, frequent clashes between rebel forces and peacekeepers sent by the newly established United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) took place. On several occasions, the UNAMSIL forces given the task to supervise the disarming of rebel soldiers were themselves forced to surrender their weapons, and soon, the rebels started taking UNAMSIL soldiers as hostages. Then, having humiliated the UN peacekeepers on several occasions, they turned their eyes towards Freetown, and began boosting their numbers again by forced conscription, going from village to village, demanding men and boys to join their ranks.

In the end, it took the arrival of the British Royal Navy, sending seven warships and about seven hundred paratroopers to Freetown, and a severe reinforcement of the UN forces – from six thousand to seventeen thousand five hundred soldiers to stop the RUF offensive. Furthermore, internationally, measures were being taken to stem the flow of smuggler diamonds out of Sierra Leone, thereby removing RUF's main source of income. Finally, on the 1st of May 2001, the RUF agreed to restart the disarmament process and release several

¹⁰⁰ Pham (2005), p. 142-148.

¹⁰¹ Keen (2005), p. 251-252.

thousand child soldiers from their ranks. From this point, the process went more or less as planned, and on the 17th of January 2002, a ceremony was held to mark the end of the disarmament program. The following day, the decade-long civil war was officially declared over.¹⁰²

¹⁰²Keen (2005), p. 262-269, and; Pham (2005), p. 148-151.

5. Research Findings

As mentioned in the previous chapter, between February and March 2012 I spent six weeks in Freetown, where I met and interviewed eleven, former and current, members of the IRCSL's executive board. On top of which, one interview by email was done at a later stage. What I was hoping to achieve during my six weeks in Freetown was to understand why the members of the IRCSL got engaged in peacebuilding, as well as their own thoughts relating to why they believed they were able to take on the particular role they played in the peace process; to know what exactly they did and how they did it, the rationale behind their choices, and what, according to themselves, they achieved. What was their specific contribution to the peace process? To learn this, I needed them to talk to me about the creation of the IRCSL, and how and why they came to be part of it. I needed to hear about their experiences during the war, and their reflections on what they did and how it worked out for them. Hence, I divided the interview into three parts.

The first part – looking at why religious actors would and should be engaged in peacebuilding – focused on the reasons for the creation of the council, and the motivation and theological foundation, both for member organizations and representatives on the executive board, to join. Here, I also asked what it was that brought them together across religious lines. Why would Christians and Muslims come together and cooperate towards a common goal? And finally, I wanted to know what, according to their experiences, were the strengths of a religious approach to peace, as opposed to a strictly secular one.

The second part of the interview was concerning what exactly they did from the creation of the council to the end of the war. I wanted to find out what their initial goal was, and what role they came to play following the coup d'état and rule of the AFRC. I knew that several council members had received praise for remaining in Freetown throughout the AFRC's time in power, and I wanted to know what happened during those months and how that affected their work leading up to the peace talks in Lomé, as well as in the years it took from the signing of the Lomé treaty until the war was officially declared over. And, of course, I wanted to know exactly what they did.

Finally, the last part looked at how they worked. How did they cooperate as Muslims and Christians? How did their faith and religious background affect their work? Was the context they were working in conducive to a religious approach? Furthermore, I wanted them to tell me what they thought was the most important contribution of the IRCSL to the peace process, as well as if they had experienced any failures, or if there was anything that in

retrospect, they should have done differently.

In the following I will present the findings gathered through my interviews and the different documents received. Going through the material according to the three general themes mentioned, I will look at commonalities and differences of opinion relating to the questions asked and issues discussed.

5.1. Why Religion and Peace?

As mentioned above, in this part I will focus on the questions related to why my informants felt that they, and the different religious institutions they adhered to, should engage in peacebuilding.

5.1.1. Personal and Organizational Motivation

The IRCSL was founded on the 1st of April 1997, following informal meetings between several of Sierra Leone's religious leaders and a few representatives of the WCRP. Initially, according to my interviewees, they met to discuss religious tolerance and shared moral concerns. However, realizing the potential for religious leaders to contribute towards ending the violence that had marred the country the last few years, it was suggested that the Christian and Muslim organizations of the country come together to form an interreligious council that would be able to reach out to both sides of the conflict.

Based on my interviews, it was difficult to get clear answers regarding the different member organizations' motivation for joining with the IRCSL, but the widespread suffering caused by the civil war was mentioned by several of the interviewees as a reason in itself. "There was a lot of suffering at that time. People were being killed, houses were being burned, and the women were suffering because men were being dragged into the bush to become members of their organization [the RUF]."¹⁰³ Because of all this suffering there was "a need for religious leaders to come together to address national issues. ... We needed to come up with a prophetic word."¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, it was said that the ministry of the church calls us "into promoting peace, love, and service to the people. ... Because of the call to mission, the churches – and by extension, the Muslims – they call to peace, call to love. That

¹⁰³ Haja Saiminatu Kassim

¹⁰⁴ Reverend Moses Kanu

is what holds us together.”¹⁰⁵ It was also mentioned that religious dialogue and diapraxis was already common in Sierra Leone, as a result of the high degree of religious tolerance in the country. One of my informants even stated that when you consider the three monotheistic religions, “there are only a few theological differences and concepts.”¹⁰⁶ They share a belief in one true God and life after death, and the rest, he stated, should be considered denominational issues. Hence, the establishment of the IRC SL was considered a natural development of that, or simply a formalization of something that was already there.

When asked about their personal motivation for taking an active part in reestablishing peace and joining the IRC SL, naturally, the answers varied. But again, the dire situation the country was in was mentioned as an important factor. The greatest motivation was peace itself. “The war, the difficulties, the senseless destruction that affected almost everybody, cut across the wall.”¹⁰⁷ Most of the interviewees highlighted their responsibilities as religious leaders, to use their influence for the common good of their community, and to teach the people “that we are all God’s creation, and that we should live together in peace and unity.”¹⁰⁸ They also pointed out that a lot of humanitarian work was already being done by both churches and mosques around the country, long before the IRC SL was established, as a result of the call to peace and service inherent in both religions. Bringing people together, promoting peace, love and justice was considered a vital part of their role in society.

A strong belief in inter-faith collaboration and the desire to reach out to as many as possible was also mentioned as reasons for joining the Council. As one of my informants said; “One finger cannot pick up a kernel. You need two fingers for that.”¹⁰⁹ One religion alone would not be able to make much of a difference. Seeing as most Sierra Leoneans are either Christian or Muslim, by joining forces they would be able to cover almost the entire population, and make a greater impact on the situation. A joint effort would also be necessary to address the rebels, seeing as there were people of both faiths among them as well.

Furthermore, some of the interviewees professed a wish to show the world that religion could be a source of unity and reconciliation. Again, the importance of Sierra Leone's

¹⁰⁵ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹⁰⁶ Alhaji UNS. Jah

¹⁰⁷ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹⁰⁸ Mabel M’Bayo

¹⁰⁹ Reverend Moses Kanu

history and culture was pointed out.

In every home we have Muslims and Christians coming together. Religion was not a dividing factor; in fact, it was a unifying factor. So it evolved as part of our tradition on to this point. And when the test of time came, it found us already in readiness, to move around, and establish us.¹¹⁰

Finally, in my interview with Bishop Thomas Barnette, the Bishop quoted a Krio saying lifted up once by the current President, Ernest Bai Koroma, during a speech. In Krio it said: *Salone na wi all yun. Wi all fo wok fo mek it better*. Translated into English this means: *Sierra Leone is our home. We must all work to make it better*. He then went on, stating that the people have a collective responsibility to develop the country, and this responsibility cuts across both religious and ethnic lines. As religious leaders they ought to be an example for the rest of the people, showing that difference in religion should not stand in the way of cooperation for the benefit of the country, nor should it be a source of conflict. Both the Bible and the Qur'an lifts up peace and love as core values, and for the members of the IRCSL it was important to show this through their work. Not just profess it, but actually live it out through mutual respect and collaboration.

5.1.2. A Theological Foundation

Though it was made clear by all the participants that theology was not of major importance for the actual work of the Council, they all agreed that religious teaching did play a part as motivation and encouragement when facing difficulties. In order to avoid internal disagreements, topics regarding doctrine and tradition were largely avoided. Still, they would always open their meetings with prayer-sessions. If the Christians prayed first, the Muslims would finish, and vice versa. Furthermore, their common faith in one God was seen as both a unifying factor and a foundation for their cooperation. As Sheick Conteh said: “Our scriptures do tell us that once you are doing the work of your Creator; be sure of his constant and unflinching support.”¹¹¹ When I asked more directly about what the two religions' taught regarding peace, two things were pointed out as of main importance. For the Christians, the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, and for the Muslims, that the word Islam in one of its basic forms literally means peace.

¹¹⁰ Reverend Joseph C. Humper

¹¹¹ Sheick Conteh

In the teaching of Jesus peace, love, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation are all important elements. He was a man of peace, and he called his followers to live by his example. In the interviews three references were made to the teaching and life of Jesus. First of all, in the *Gospel of Mark* Jesus is asked which the first commandment is. He answers “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹¹² Where there is love, there is peace. If people are to co-exist, this must be articulated and taught from the pulpits around the country. Second, it was for love that Jesus gave himself on the cross for humanity. Through his death we are saved, but as we are saved we are also called to live a life of servitude. As Jesus lived and died for us, we are called to live for others, to ensure that they also can enjoy that grace and peace that we have received. Third, the concept of being *in the world, but not of it*, was mentioned. Though it is not a direct quote from the Bible, it is still a well-known concept within Christianity, based on a paragraph from the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus, in which he prays to God for his disciples. The actual words from the passage are: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”¹¹³ In this context it was interpreted as a call to take responsibility in the world we live in. All Christians, but especially the leaders, are called to tell people of the love of God, but also to address the ills of society. In Sierra Leone this meant addressing the many sources of conflict within the country that had led to the war, and the wrongs being committed by the opposing parties.

From the Muslim interviewees I did not get any direct quotations from the Qur'an. However, by referring to tradition, history and the life of Muhammed, they tried to show the interrelatedness of Islam and peace. The word *Islam* is derived from the Arabic root s-l-m, and can mean both *submission* and *peace*.¹¹⁴ The first meaning of the word refers to the voluntary submission to God that is required to be a Muslim. However, it was the second meaning of the word that was referred to during my interviews. Islam literally means peace, and hence, as a Muslim, you are not true to your faith if peace is not a part your agenda. Mariatu Mahdi pointed out that Islam teaches you to live in peace with your neighbors, irrespective of what

¹¹² Mark 12, verses 30-32 (New King James Version)

¹¹³ John 17, verses 15-16 (New King James Version)

¹¹⁴ John L. Esposito (ed.), *Oxford Islamic Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 144

fanatics may try to tell you. If you separate theology and culture, you will see that.¹¹⁵

Also, within the Muslim community you have a moral responsibility to the people around you. As one informant said, “every Muslim is a shepherd, and in the hereafter you will be held to account for the way you have acted in relation to your flock.” Furthermore, “... you should not be three days with your brother without greeting each other.”¹¹⁶ In other words, if there is a social conflict you should try to talk to each other, and solve it through dialogue. And if you cannot find a solution, you should join the weaker side to even out the balance of power.

As for inter-religious dialogue and diapaxis, it was stated that Islam will not quarrel with anyone that means to inject sanity into a nation. In fact, it urges its followers to join forces with people who share their goals and values, such as Christians, who are considered *Ahl al-Kitab*, or people of the book. In Islamic tradition there are several examples of peaceful relations and mutual respect between Christians and Muslims. Two stories were told to exemplify this. Once Muhammed was visited by a delegation of Christians, and at a point during their visit they said they would like to go and pray. When he heard this, Muhammed offered them to use his own mosque as a prayer house, stating that if they were serving God, they could seek him there. The other story is from the *Hijra*, when Muhammed and his followers were chased out of Mecca. When this happened, a group of Muslims went to Abyssinia, in today's Ethiopia, which was a Christian country. There they were welcomed by the King, and offered his protection against their persecutors. These stories teach us the importance of tolerance, and show why Islam should be open and inclusive to other religions and dialogue.

5.1.3. The inherent Peace Potential of Religion

The main point here, which was stated by all my interviewees, is that African society is a God-fearing society. Even going back to African tradition, before Islam and Christianity, there was a strong belief in a supreme deity, to which man owes his existence. As a religious leader you are seen as an intermediary between God and his creation, and as such you are shown great respect. Reverend Rogers-Wright, in his interview, gave an example, stating that if “a young man is sent to a village to serve there as a minister or priest, even an old lady will

¹¹⁵ Mariatu Mahdi

¹¹⁶ Alhaji Jah

address that priest as “sir”, as a sign of respect.”¹¹⁷ There are of course differences as to how much people depend on, or follow their priest or imam, but even those who are less inclined to live by the words of the preacher will treat religious authorities respectfully.

Furthermore, religious leaders are trusted. When people started losing faith in the politicians, they turned to their religious leaders instead. Because, in the words of one of my informants; “religious leaders do not compromise with their faith and their scriptures. They are vocal, and they do not fear, when it comes to the question of speaking the truth.”¹¹⁸ This was mentioned as an important factor for the success of the IRC SL. When trying to bring the opposing parties to the negotiation table, the fact that they had managed to win the confidence of both the government and the rebels was vital. Through their engagement during the AFRC-regime, and the fact that they remained in Freetown after the coup, they had proven their determination to stand up for the people and end the violence. And by talking to Sankoh, agreeing to meet the rebels on their own turf, and bringing food and medicine with them to the bush, they had won the trust of the RUF as well. To maintain this trust, it was extremely important that they remained politically neutral. This was also confirmed by the interviewees. The members of the Council may have had their political preferences, but officially they remained non-partisan. And for this they were highly respected.

A story that was told during my interview with Sheick Conteh serves to show that the reach of religious institutions can be a valuable asset. During the presidency of Joseph Momo, UNICEF had a vaccination program in Sierra Leone. For almost two and a half years they were working, but accomplished very little. However, after some time, one of their communication officers, a Sierra Leonean Muslim, suggested trying to cooperate with religious groups to better reach out to the people. This led to the establishment of the Christian Action Group and the Islamic Action Group, set up to reach out to the religious communities in the country. Using the networks and structures of the churches and mosques, within six to nine months they were able to reach the goal set for the program. This shows the importance of including religious institutions in any nationwide issues related to development or social change. The influence of religious institutions is mainly based on two things. First, the majority of Sierra Leoneans regularly attend either a church or a mosque. From their pulpits religious leaders can preach to the entire population. Second, the already mentioned respect for religious leaders. As explained by the Sheick:

¹¹⁷ Reverend Rogers-Wright

¹¹⁸ Sheick Conteh

You have very few Christians who do not attend Sunday service, so our pulpits, and the Friday service for the Muslims, are crucial. We talk to every sector of the nation. The doctors are ours, and the magistrates and the judges. You name them. Even the entertainers and the journalists, they are all ours. They come to the churches. They come to the mosques. So that is our own forum to sensitize the people. That is the advantage we have.¹¹⁹

The religiously tolerant culture of Sierra Leone was mentioned as important for the foundation of the Council by all the interviewees. When asked where this tolerance came from, some claimed it had always been there as part of their cultural heritage, while others referred to the fact that most people in the country, both Christians and Muslims, had gone to schools set up by Christian missionaries. In these schools, though all the teachers were Christian missionaries, there had not been any pressure for the Muslim students to convert. In fact, they had been allowed to hold their own morning devotions, and during Ramadan they were given permission to fast. And so, in these schools they had learned to know one another; to know each other's religion, and to respect each other's faith. The strength of this tolerance, having been taken for granted for a long time, was brought to the fore when the war came. During the war there had been attempts made by more radical religious groups to take advantage of the situation to build tensions between Christian and Muslims. Furthermore, there were rumors that RUF in some villages attacked only Christians, or only Muslims, trying to sow seeds of distrust and conflict. However, any attempts made at turning the Sierra Leonean civil war into a religious war were unsuccessful. This was confirmed by Alhaji Jah, saying that "we have to be thankful to God that despite of all that we lost – all the political upside-downs – religion has not been at the center of our problems. Instead it has helped to reduce tension."¹²⁰

There was some disagreement regarding whether the war changed the religious landscape in any way, but they all agreed that at the very least it had served to bring them closer together. One of my informants stated that "one of the legacies on the religious aspect the war actually left was bringing us together as religious leaders. Even though we have our different identities, our different religious persuasion, beliefs and practices, we were able to come together to address national issues."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Sheick Conteh

¹²⁰ Alhaji UNS Jah

¹²¹ Reverend Moses Khanu

Finally, it has to be said that although the majority of Christian and Muslim organizations supported the idea of inter-faith collaboration, there were some who opposed it and refused to join, or give their support to the Council. Nevertheless, in a country divided along political and ethnic lines, religion remained one of few unifying factors.

5.2. What Constitutes a Religious Approach

I will now look at what the IRCSL did following their establishment, and up until the end of the civil war. Between 1997 and 2002 the Council was involved in a wide variety of activities – ranging from advocacy and lobbying, dialogue and mediation, humanitarian intervention, and reconciliation. These five years can be separated into three different periods. First, the AFRC era, in which, though lasting less than a year, in many ways a foundation was laid for the role the IRCSL would come to play. Second, the time after the restoration of the Kabbah government until the peace talks in Lomé. Finally, the third period starts with the peace talks in Lomé and ends with the official end of the war.

In the following, I will look more closely at the three periods, what specifically the IRCSL was doing, and how their focus shifted slightly according to the context during each of them. I considered dividing these sub-chapters by themes rather than chronologically, but due to the large variety of activities the IRCSL was engaged in, I decided against it. Instead, a more thematic breakdown of the work of the Council will be included in the final analysis.

5.2.1. The AFRC Era

As mentioned, originally the idea was for the Council to just be a forum for religious dialogue and shared moral concerns, but as the AFRC came to power through a coup less than two months after its creation, and the country was thrown back into chaos, it soon came to play a more direct role in the peace process. Rather than discussing shared moral concerns the objective was now to “identify common religious commitments and principles conducive to the peace of the human community”, and to “undertake actions for peace”.¹²² In other words, the immediate goal was to put an end to the violence engulfing the country. Furthermore, in the words of Bishop Barnette, they wanted to “build into the communities a sense of love; a sense of tolerance and appreciation for the other. In order to make sure that (...) the kind of

¹²² M’Bayo (1999).

devastation that had been spread across the country does not happen again.”¹²³ Peace needed to be restored, so that there would be time and possibility to look into and address the issues that led to the war in the first place.

The IRCSL were quick to criticize the coup makers, telling them to step down and calling for a return to democracy. Representatives of the IRCSL met with Johnny Paul Koroma once. During this meeting he tried to explain to them why the AFRC had taken power, and asked why they had not told the people to recognize them. They answered by condemning the use of violence, and told him that since he had come to power through a coup against an elected government, he had to go. There was a lot of risk related to criticizing the military junta, but as Reverend Rogers-Wright explained, their status as religious leaders protected them. “Religious leaders are respected, just for being religious leaders. So we knew that to a very large extent we were safe when working in the corridors of power.”¹²⁴ At the same time as they were speaking to the AFRC, the Council was also communicating with the exiled President Kabbah in Conakry, keeping him informed about the situation in the country. All the while, they took precautions not to endanger their neutrality. Both by making it clear that they were fighting for the return of democracy, and not necessarily President Kabbah himself, and by trying not to be too harsh in their critique of the AFRC whenever something needed to be said. While in Guinea, the present Council members also held meetings with UN officials, and the British High Commissioner, building a steadily growing network to support them later in the war.

Meanwhile, in Freetown the reign of the AFRC was characterized by demonstrations, violence and civil unrest. According to my informants, the IRCSL did not officially take part in any demonstrations. Though based on my interviews there seems to have been some disagreement among the Council members regarding whether or not this should have been done, the feeling was that to take part as the IRCSL would have put their neutrality and the confidence of the AFRC at risk. Nevertheless, several of the interviewees made it clear that as individuals, quite a few of the Council members did participate in, and even lead, peaceful demonstrations against the military government, wanting to show that it is possible to make a change without using violence. “The Council led by example. ... It was that continuous engagement, and there were times when leaders of the Council actually led demonstrations;

¹²³ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹²⁴ Reverend Rogers-Wright

Peaceful demonstrations.”¹²⁵ The main focus however, was on issuing statements and press releases, condemning violence and criticizing the military junta whenever they saw them misusing their power. They also arranged inter-religious meetings at the national stadium, where religious leaders would come to talk about peace. As Mabel M’Bayo said; “We started sensitizing people on peacebuilding and the causes of violence; Jealousy, injustice, and all that. So this was our basic approach”.¹²⁶

Pursuing peace through dialogue, the Council was also present during the Conakry peace talks in October 1997. However, the agreement reached in Conakry was never implemented as the AFRC was overthrown by a superior ECOMOG force in February 1998. It was a difficult balance under the AFRC, working to keep the peace and at the same time trying to get the coup makers to see reason, give up their power, or at least stop using violence as a means to control the people. Several of the informants said that of the challenges they faced as a Council, the AFRC coup had been the most difficult. Nevertheless, they also considered the period important as it in many ways cemented their position as a player to be reckoned with in the peace process. The fact that the majority of the Council members remained in Freetown when so many others left, despite the hardships, gave them a credibility that few, if any, other actors in the peace process could match. As Mariatu Mahdi explained, “the confidence that people had in us was such that if we ran away, then all hope would be lost. That is the reason why I did not go.”¹²⁷ According to quite a few of the Council members, the mere presence of the IRCSL in Freetown helped the people endure. Following the restoration of the Kabbah administration, the IRCSL organized thanksgiving services all over the country.

5.2.2. The Road to Lomé

The restoration of the Kabbah government in 1998 did not, however, bring about the end of the war. According to Reverend Moses Khanu, this was when the Council really started working. With the AFRC gone they sat down and started working out new strategies more fitting to the changing situation on the ground. While continuing to issue press releases and statements, and trying to sensitize people on issues relevant to the conflict, they also started

¹²⁵ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹²⁶ Mabel M’Bayo

¹²⁷ Mariatu Mahdi

organizing consultation meetings with different groups on the grassroots level all over the country, looking at what could be done to put an end to the fighting. They began sending delegates out to different areas that had been affected by the war, doing pastoral visits and trying to maintain a running dialogue with both victims and perpetrators of violence. With logistical support from the WCRP, UN, and different NGOs, they were also able to put in place education and outreach programmes, and organize training workshops on human rights, peace, and reconciliation. During the invasion of Freetown in January 1999 they helped organize emergency relief programs in the parts of the city that were not under RUF's control.

By communicating with their delegates in different parts of the country, and using their vast network, the IRC SL had a very good understanding of what was going on in the country. While the government in Freetown was claiming that they had the rebels on the run, the IRC SL's regional coordinator in the north, Usman Fornah, communicated to the Council in Freetown that thousands of youth were being recruited into the ranks of the RUF every day in and around Makeni.¹²⁸ Hence, even before the January 1999 invasion of Freetown, it was clear to them that it was highly unlikely that the war would ever be decided through force. Seeing that, they used their connection with both government and rebels to highlight the importance of dialogue. In February 1999 the Council issued two statements. First, directed towards the rebels, they wrote that "the Council is alarmed at the brutality, inhumanity and barbarity unleashed by these rebels and condemns unequivocally all such heinous activities and their perpetrators, as they go against God's plan for mankind, whom he made in His own image."¹²⁹ They then appealed to the leadership of the RUF, asking them to show their sincerity and love for the nation by accepting an invitation to engage in purposeful dialogue with the government. A couple of weeks later, in another statement, they publicly endorsed President Kabbah's suggestion that a new dialogue should be based on the Abidjan Peace Accord, though it would need to be reviewed considering the changed context. They also challenged the government to talk less and listen more than what had been the case so far, in order for the people of Sierra Leone to hear what the RUF actually wants. As Mariatu Mahdi explained it, they were pushing for the two parties to the conflict to sit down and talk together, and to realize that "there has to be giving and taking in the interest of peace."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Reverend Usman Fornah

¹²⁹ IRC SL Communiqué, February 1999, as quoted by Turay, Thomas Mark, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: The Role of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone*. Available at: http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2009_10Civil%20society%20and%20peacebuilding_2000_ENG.pdf

¹³⁰ Mariatu Mahdi

Because of the role they had been playing during the reign of the AFRC – openly criticising the violence of the military junta and advocating for a peaceful return to democracy – the IRC SL were allowed to meet regularly with the President. This direct link with the national leadership was used effectively; both to criticize the government for continuing the use of military force as a means to end the war, and to advocate for peaceful negotiations; and later, to push for meetings with the then imprisoned Foday Sankoh. Some of the Council members, such as Alhaji Jah, had been part of the negotiations in Abidjan in 1996, so they were already known by Sankoh. Hence, they were sure they could get through to him. Initially, the President had been sceptical to allowing representatives of the Council to meet with Sankoh, but with the support of the UN Special Envoy to Sierra Leone, Francis Okelo, and the ECOMOG, they were able to convince him to sanction it. From what my informants told me, the meetings that followed became a turning point as it laid the foundation for further dialogue with the rebels. Members from the IRC SL kept meeting regularly with Foday Sankoh to talk to him, and try to understand his motivation for setting the country on fire. This was a necessary, but at times frustrating endeavour according to my informants. In her interview Mariatu Mahdi stated that “he was so stubborn... He had his own ideas - preconceived notions or whatever. He just thought he would rule this country. That was all. It did not matter who died.”¹³¹

The first time they met Sankoh told them that *his children in the bush* were suffering, and demanded that they were given medication and food, if he was to talk to them.¹³² It was on Sankoh’s own request (with the President’s permission), having been given the chance to communicate with his men through a radio, that a meeting was organized with the RUF. Haja Kassim, who was part of the team that went to that first meeting with the rebels, explained how they took rice and medicine with them and drove 30 kilometres out of Freetown and into the bush, where they were welcomed by the rebels. The idea was simply to meet and talk to them, and try to understand their side to the story. As Alhaji Karim said – “it was confidence building. Even the rebels had confidence in us; that we were genuine. That we were sincere.”¹³³ To gain the trust of both sides was crucial. Therefore, it was important for the Council to maintain a neutral stance. If they wanted to remain a credible mediator between the

¹³¹ Mariatu Mahdi

¹³² Mable M’Bayo

¹³³ Professor Alhaji Karim

warring factions, they could not be seen as taking this side or the other. That is why the IRCSL consciously continued to build a relationship with the RUF. Not just by talking to Sankoh and other rebel leaders regularly, but even trying to meet their needs. Bishop Barnette also spoke of the Council's visits to RUF strongholds, explaining that representatives of the Council went to the bush at least twice, not just to talk to the fighters, but to bring food and clothing as well. It was noted that the rebels kept priests and imams in their camps in the bush, and during these meetings the Council representatives also prayed with them. Hence, the rebels felt that the religious leaders truly cared for them. According to the Bishop this "was an important part of our work as to building trust and confidence with both sides of the conflict".¹³⁴ Following these meetings, my informants said they felt a slight change in the situation.

Representatives of the Council also went to Conakry and Monrovia, hoping to meet with the presidents of the two neighboring countries, Lansana Conté in Guinea, and Charles Taylor in Liberia. This they did without President Kabbah knowing, as they were afraid he would not let them go to Liberia. They informed him by phone when they had arrived in Monrovia, and initially he was furious, but they were able to explain to him the importance of remaining detached from the government as a neutral actor, and of including Charles Taylor in the peace process. In Guinea they were only granted a meeting with a group of government officials, but Charles Taylor agreed to meet them in Monrovia, along with a group of RUF members. During that meeting they asked Taylor to talk to the RUF about the release of women and children held captive in the bush, and if he was willing to come to Sierra Leone to shake hands with President Kabbah. Just as a sign of commitment to the peace process. Taylor promised to talk to the RUF about their captives, but refused to go to Sierra Leone, even if it was only to land at Lungi, and then go back, because he was sure he would be arrested by the ECOMOG if he did. He also said that he had told President Kabbah that "you do not go the bush just for the sake of going to the bush. You go there because you want power."¹³⁵ So to achieve peace, concessions had to be made by the Sierra Leone government. Not long after their return to Freetown the RUF made a token release of fifty-four abducted women and children.

¹³⁴ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹³⁵ Professor Alhaji Karim.

5.2.3. From Lomé Towards Sustainable Peace

Being one of very few – if not the only – actor in the peace process who had been able to establish a constructive relationship with both the government and the rebels, and in recognition of the role they had been playing in getting the two to start talking together, the IRCSL was invited to be present at the peace talks in Lomé. Initially, according to reverend Rogers-Wright, the Sierra Leonean government had offered to pay for them while in Togo, but the Council refused, saying it would damage their neutrality.

Before the talks officially started, the Council was asked by the RUF to help them “put their position on paper”, as explained by reverend Kanu. A team consisting of 15 members of the Council then spent two weeks with the RUF, working out the starting position of the rebels before the official talks began. This was a challenging task for the religious leaders. Before the 1996 peace talks in Abidjan, the RUF had been all but broken, whereas now they almost had the upper hand in the war. Hence, they were expecting a lot of concessions from the government. Kanu, who was present both at the internal consultation of the RUF and at the official negotiations, explained that at first they had demanded around twenty ministerial positions. So the representatives from the IRCSL “tried to persuade them to see reason. That the government in power was initially voted for, and we cannot negotiate to let them hold twenty ministerial positions on an elected government ticket.”¹³⁶ Yet, despite the challenging expectations of the RUF, it was also an important time for the present religious leaders, as they now had the chance to meet and talk with the rebel leadership – individually, and as a group – on a daily basis, for two whole weeks. Mariatu Mahdi told me how she and Almamy Petito Koroma, then co-chair of the IRCSL – used to engage Sankoh at breakfast every day.

We were in the same hotel, and we used to go early in the morning, me and Almamy Koroma, and catch him when he was going for breakfast. He speaks my own dialect you know. He is supposed to be ... of my own tribe. And so Almamy and I we used to go there and speak Temne with him. In the morning he was very alert. I remember Almamy saying to him “why don't you just think about your own children who are in the bush ..., but who, one day, will want to come back and live a normal life in Sierra Leone? Don't you think they will hold you accountable if they are not able to do that? Don't you think our own children also will hold us accountable if we are not able to get one man to succumb?”¹³⁷

Throughout those two weeks what they did was simply to interact with the rebels. Talking to

¹³⁶ Reverend Moses Kanu

¹³⁷ Mariatu Mahdi

them in their local languages, trying to make them feel normal. In the words of Professor Karim, they were “building confidence in them. . . . Letting them know the dangers, the problems that the masses suffer.”¹³⁸ All the while, they were also building personal relationships with the RUF delegates, hoping that would help them to reach through to them. It was all part of what reverend Kanu described as a subtle diplomacy, of which there was a lot during the weeks in Lomé.

During the official negotiations the IRCSL had observer status, and were given a place at the table. However, their most important role was between the meetings, behind the scenes. Reverend Rogers-Wright explained how, during the day, they “would listen and see where the negotiations were going, and then in the evening . . . , go to the rooms and discuss issues with all the participants.” Any deadlock or disagreement that they were not able to get passed during the day were worked out in those backroom discussions. Every time the negotiations broke down, the Council representatives would meet separately with the delegates from each of the two sides; either as groups, trying to work out an acceptable compromise, or simply to talk to them and try to convince them to return to the negotiating table. Until, finally, on the 7th of July, the peace treaty was signed by Kabbah and Sankoh.

Several of the Council members that I interviewed pointed out that the IRCSL, in recognition of their role in getting the warring parties to talk, the part they had played in the negotiations, as well as their position within Sierra Leone and the trust they had earned from both the government and the RUF, were named moral guarantors of the peace and given a particular responsibility to follow up its implementation. This was to my understanding not a role officially entrusted to them. Those who were named moral guarantors in the treaty were the government of Togo, the UN, ECOWAS, the OAU, and the Commonwealth of Nations. However, as they said, by the delegates present at the negotiations, and in Sierra Leone, they were considered moral guarantors of the treaty. Bishop Barnette told me that even “to this day the IRCSL, Christians and Muslims, are still regarded, in this country, as guarantors of that peace – Moral guarantors. So that is a challenge we still have . . . , to maintain the respect of people on different sides.”¹³⁹ Furthermore, the treaty states that a Council of Elders and Religious Leaders should be established to deal with any “conflicting differences of interpretation” of the articles included.¹⁴⁰ Had it actually been established, this was supposed

¹³⁸ Professor Alhaji Karim.

¹³⁹ Bishop Thomas Barnette.

¹⁴⁰ The Lomé Peace Agreement, Article VIII (1999). Available at:

to have included two members appointed by the IRCSL. Also, Bishop Joseph Humper, as President of the IRCSL, was appointed Chairman of the Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Council.

Despite at least theoretically putting an end to the war, as explained earlier, the Lomé peace agreement was initially not well received in Sierra Leone. Many felt that the government had given the RUF far too much in exchange for peace, and they were criticized for having “sold to the rebels the integrity of the country.”¹⁴¹ Hence, the Council was tasked with sensitizing the people about the necessity of the concessions made. Thousands of copies of the agreement were printed and distributed throughout the country, and regular workshops and dialogues about the implementation of the treaty and other relevant issues were organized. The image they used to explain the situation to the populace was that of a drowning man holding on to the blade of a two-edged sword in order to stay afloat. The sword might slice his hands, but at least the man will stay alive.

When it became clear that the implementation of the peace treaty was not going according to plan they were quick to engage both parties, reminding them of what they had committed themselves to. Bishop Barnette told me how they kept on meeting with both the government and the RUF; even after they transformed themselves to a political party. He explained how the Council felt that this was their responsibility.

We engaged all the different parties. Not just the government. We were very engaged with the RUF, also when they transformed themselves to a political party. ... We just felt that that was our role - to talk to both parties. And this is why we were able to maintain confidence, why nobody accused us of siding with the government or the RUF. We would talk with the RUF as Sierra Leoneans; as members of our congregations.¹⁴²

In May 2000, following the capture by RUF of several UNAMSIL peace keepers, the IRCSL issued a statement in which they called for all parties take full responsibility for ending hostilities and start building the peace. The document requested the immediate release of all captured UN personnel, and for the RUF to desist from all acts of violence and reenter the program for disarmament and demobilization as agreed to. It also called for the government

http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/sierra_leone_07071999.pdf.

¹⁴¹ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁴² Bishop Thomas Barnette

and President Kabbah to “exercise their responsibility to protect and serve all citizens of Sierra Leone in their desire for peace, right to protection, and demand for effective governance”; for the UN to implement their full mandate to protect the peace; and for the international community to fulfill their commitments to Sierra Leone, the UN, NGOs, and other actors, for them to effectively get the peace process back on track.¹⁴³

When the violence finally started to die down, as part of the reconciliation process, the IRCSL organized fact finding missions. They held dialogues in which space was provided for victims of violence to talk about their experiences, and also for combatants on either side of the conflict to confess any crimes they had been part of and ask for forgiveness.¹⁴⁴ They also helped local and international NGOs providing humanitarian aid to displaced people, and put in place programmes for the reintegration of former soldiers and rebels, as well as civilians who wanted to go back to their homes when the fighting stopped. They organized cleansing ceremonies to allow communities to accept former child soldiers and young girls taken as wives by rebel soldiers, to be taken back into their families and communities, as well as some smaller symbolic programmes – such as melting empty shells into small crosses that they would hand out to various groups and former fighters as symbols of peace. Being first and foremost a religious Council, they performed memorials wherever mass graves were found. Realizing that it would be impossible to identify the people buried, the bodies were usually not exhumed from the graves. Instead they would put up a small whitewashed structure where the grave had been found, and then the locals would provide a list of names of the people killed in that area, and a plaque with the names on would be fastened to the structure. They would then perform a memorial service, and traditional leaders, along with Christian and Muslim leaders, would pray for those who had passed away. Traditional religious leaders would also come to pour libation and speak with the ancestors. This way, families would be able to say that their loved ones had been given a decent burial – which in an African context is very important.¹⁴⁵

Though the war was finally declared over in 2001, the Council has kept the focus on their role as moral guarantors of the peace, voicing their opinion on state matters if necessary, being tasked with election monitoring, and running sensitization campaigns on relevant issues such as women’s empowerment and gender based violence. Some of the Council members

¹⁴³ IRCSL, *Peace in Sierra Leone; Statement of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone* (2000).

¹⁴⁴ Sheick Conteh

¹⁴⁵ Reverend Moses Khanu

were also given prominent positions in various committees working with issues related to the war – such as Bishop Humper chairing the Truth and Reconciliation Council (TRC), and Reverend Khanu being appointed to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone – which can be seen as recognition of the Council’s role in the peace process. In the words of Mariatu Mahdi; “anything that seems to threaten peace, we’ll be there to address.”

5.3. How to Resolve Violent Conflict

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in this part I will look at how the Council worked. In the interviews we talked about how the Council members cooperated across religious lines, and how their faith and religious backgrounds affected their work. Above we briefly touched upon the religious culture and religiosity of the people of Sierra Leone. Building on that, we will now look more closely on how my informants felt the religious context affected their work, and whether or not they would consider the Sierra Leonean context conducive to a religious approach. Furthermore, I will look at what my informants considered their most important contribution to the peace process, and how, according to themselves, they were able to achieve what they did. I will also look at whether there was anything in which the Council members felt they had failed, or anything they would have done differently if given the chance.

In the following I will present their answers to these questions. Considering their answers, I have divided this part into three sub-chapters focusing on the three major themes that were highlighted; namely context, relationships, and social leadership and transformation.

5.3.1. Considering Context

As mentioned earlier, in their interviews when asked about the religious culture of Sierra Leone, all my informants highlighted the fact that “99 percent of the people belong to either the Church or the Mosque.”¹⁴⁶ Then, they all pointed to the strength of the country’s already mentioned religious tolerance. As we have seen, the importance of this tolerance should not be underestimated. To a large degree it kept the conflict from ever taking on a religious dimension despite the fact that a few times during the conflict religious leaders and institutions were targeted specifically by rebels. According to Bishop Barnette “some people

¹⁴⁶ Haja Kassim

tried to use it [religious tensions], but thankfully . . . , the nation as a whole just rejected it.”¹⁴⁷ Also, because of that tolerance it was unproblematic, even natural, for the religious leaders to come together for the sake of peace. Again, in the words of Bishop Barnette, “if the atmosphere was not very conducive, the culture was not tolerant; we would not have been able to form the IRC SL. It is the tolerance and peaceful coexistence of the various faith-based communities that have helped us.”¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the members of the IRC SL were very conscious when setting up the structure of the Council, that no one should have any reason to claim that one religion had precedence over the other. When asked about this, Alhaji Karim explained that it had been important for them to build on and strengthen the mutual respect between the two religions. Hence, as the Council was founded they made sure that all important positions were shared between a Christian representative and a Muslim. “A Christian was the President, and a Muslim was the co-President. A Christian was secretary, and a Muslim was co-secretary. . . . So you see we balance it up in such a way that no one group thinks that it is being relegated to second place.”¹⁴⁹ Similarly, whenever a meeting was called it would be opened with prayers from both religions. And when discussing issues related to the conflict and their work they would bring out both the Bible and the Qur’an, to see what both holy books have to say about them. This was done for the sake of equity, but also to ensure that, if called to come up with a public statement regarding a certain issue, they would be able to ground their statement in both religions.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, by always pairing up Christians and Muslims, whether for a workshop or seminar, sensitization meetings, or when visiting communities and even the rebel camps, the IRC SL made sure that wherever they went and whatever they did, they were able to reach the members of both religious communities.¹⁵¹

It should be noted that they never discussed religious issues within the Council. That was pointed out by several of the informants. No attempts were made to convince, or convert, *the other* about one’s own faith. Instead, they would focus on the commonalities between the two religions; the things that brought them closer together. As Bishop Barnette explained,

¹⁴⁷ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹⁴⁸ Bishop Thomas Barnette.

¹⁴⁹ Professor Alhaji Karim

¹⁵⁰ Reverend Rogers-Wright

¹⁵¹ Mabel M’Bayo

“faith in God was the common ground. Acknowledgment of that faith, acknowledgment of God as the Supreme Being, that is able to work with the members of the Council in the interest of the common good. That was the binding force”.¹⁵² So rather than pushing them apart, religion actually helped pulling them together. Though some groups were sceptic when the Council first started meeting, fearing that religious dialogue would mean having to compromise with your faith, most of the larger Christian and Muslim institutions condoned the idea, and added their name to the list of members.

While discussing with my informants about how they were able to do what they did, I asked them on what grounds, and on whose authority they started to engage themselves in the peace process. As expected, the majority pointed out that as religious leaders they had their authority from God. Reverend Rogers-Wright said it straight out.

“We had our authority from God. And we made them understand that what we were doing were not for ourselves. What we did we did because we believed in a God and we believed in peace. That was our basis, and it gave us a moral authority. And that was why the rebels were willing to listen to us. And that is why the President and the government were ready to listen to us.”¹⁵³

Others also pointed to the traditional role of religious leaders in Sierra Leone, as well as their widespread networks, putting them in a unique position when it comes to bridging the gap between the grassroots and the political leadership. Bishop Humper talked about how their authority as religious leaders made it possible for them to go straight to the political leadership and ask for a meeting. Using a triangle as an example he explained how religious leaders made up the sides of the triangle, linking the people at the bottom with the political elite at the top. Regular people do not have access to the leadership, and hence, the religious leaders must go in their place, and “transmit their feelings to the government”.¹⁵⁴ This idea was also to some extent shared by Bishop Thomas Barnette. Bishop Barnette claimed that being social critics was a completely new role for the religious leaders in the country. A role that was brought upon them by the war. According to him, religion used to be something private, which should be confined to the church or the mosque. Even now, many will criticize them when they speak up about politics. However, this changed during the war. The IRCSL

¹⁵² Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹⁵³ Reverend Rogers-Wright

¹⁵⁴ Bishop Joseph C. Humper

was very outspoken, and refused to keep quiet. Bishop Barnette was very clear about this, stating that it is their right, and part of their responsibility as religious leaders, to hold politics to the values of religion, and – because the politicians serve for and on behalf of the people – to hold the government to account for the wellbeing of the nation.

Furthermore, Professor Karim talked about the “grant of the constituencies”. In a country where almost the entire population is either Muslim or Christian, everyone, on either side of the conflict, will have at least some kind of connection with either the church or the mosque. As the professor said, “when you have a child; who actually named that child? ... Who performed the wedding? It was the Imam or the Reverend Father”.¹⁵⁵ The presence and importance of the religious leader in the everyday life of each and every Sierra Leonean gave them the credibility they needed to be heard. Building on the trust and respect invested in them by their adherents, the religious leaders claimed to “represent the moral conscience of the people.”¹⁵⁶ However, as we have seen, to maintain that position it was vital for them to stay neutral; To not be seen as speaking on behalf of one side or the other, but rather as reaching out to both. This was actually one of the strengths of religious leaders, pointed out by several of my informants. It was stated that religious leaders are known to be politically neutral. As servants of God, they are not there to promote themselves. According to Professor Karim this was recognized by the rebels, government, the international community, and the general population. “They saw it as we were not doing it to win credibility; to win favors, or to make a name for ourselves. They saw that generally we were concerned about people, and getting a peaceful life for our people.”¹⁵⁷

5.3.2. Building Relationships

As soon as they were officially established, the IRC SL started building a strong network, both to find supporters for their cause and to increase their reach, seeking to make their “presence felt in the country...., aligned to the other world bodies there”.¹⁵⁸ Mariatu Mahdi, in her interview, explained how they had “met with the President; met and discussed with other

¹⁵⁵ Professor Alhaji Karim

¹⁵⁶ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁵⁷ Professor Alhaji Karim

¹⁵⁸ Bishop Joseph C. Humper

groups; with politicians”.¹⁵⁹ This was also highlighted by Reverend Rogers-Wright, who told me that they had been having meetings in Freetown “with parliamentarians, chiefs and ... tried to meet with the powers that be”.¹⁶⁰ As mentioned, during the months when AFRC were in power the Council even tried to reach out to the junta. Reverend Rogers-Wright spoke of how they had met with Johnny Paul Koroma, hoping to persuade him to step down and make way for a return to democracy.

Furthermore, while working to establish stronger ties with state leadership, rebel leadership, and civil society in Sierra Leone, they also sought connections within the international society, hoping to find supporters and to increase their own capacity. As we have seen, while visiting President Kabbah in Guinea, they found the time to sit down with the UN, and the British High Commissioner. Several of the informants mentioned the importance of the financial and logistical support they received from – among others – the WCRP, UNDP, and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). In return, the Council was able to use their connections and networks, churches and mosques within Sierra Leone, in support of international relief efforts; which again served to strengthen the faith people seemed to have in them. People saw that, as Bishop-Emeritus Biguzzi explained, the Council “did not differentiate among people on the basis of religion, sex, tribe, or political affiliation. Help was given on the basis of need and not on the basis of creed”.¹⁶¹

As mentioned earlier, the Council, without the knowledge or approval of the Sierra Leonean government, also took the initiative to include Charles Taylor, whose connection with the RUF was well known even at that point, in the dialogue. Up until then, the Liberian warlord-turned-President had not been involved in any of the attempts to start negotiations. In addition to furthering the dialogue between the RUF and the Kabbah government, this led to the release of fifty children who had been taken hostage by the RUF not long before the Council travelled to Liberia.

It has already been explained how, when the IRC SL went to the bush to meet the rebels, they brought food and medicine with them to show that they actually cared for their well-being. However, it should be noted that those who went also took the time to listen to what the rebels had to say, to speak with them, and to pray with them. Sheick Conteh spoke of how he and a reverend Samuels, who had recently passed away, went to visit a rebel camp

¹⁵⁹ Mariatu Mahdi

¹⁶⁰ Reverend Rogers-Wright

¹⁶¹ Bishop-Emeritus George Biguzzi

outside Kabala, in the Northern Province.

We were taken to Kabala in a helicopter. ... We had communicated with the rebels, so they allowed us access. We prayed over it, and that late father and myself, we went. They sent us there in a Land Rover. They welcomed us. I think I had acquaintances there. One said he knew me. Two said I had taught them. When we had settled they brought us their chaplains and imams. They had a very good setup. Interestingly, they said they would lead the prayers – their chaplain or imam. But our main purpose was to try and reason with them. Their response was very good.¹⁶²

His story was confirmed by Reverend Khanu, who also spoke of how, the rebels had been keeping religious leaders in their camps for quite some time, to pray for them. He himself had even been threatened with abduction once – as rebel soldiers were telling him that they would take him to the bush so he could pray for them. According to him this showed “that they are looking for a more humane person, who has a better relationship with God.”¹⁶³

Another story mentioned from the visits to the bush by more than one of my informants was how Haja Kassim had been able to break the ice that first met them when they entered the rebel camp by putting herself in the position of a mother, and reaching out to the young rebel soldiers. Sheick Conteh told me how she had been shouting out; “we are your mothers, and you are oppressing us!”¹⁶⁴ Apparently this touched the rebels – many of which were young men who had been taken away from their families themselves – and they were able to start talking together. These meetings were seen as vital by several of my informants, as they considered it unlikely that they would have been able to work so closely with the RUF had they not established such a strong relationship to begin with. The extent of the rebel’s trust in the IRC SL can be seen in the fact that they invited representatives of the Council to help them prepare for the official negotiations in Lomé.

In other words, from the very beginning the IRC SL sought to build a web of relationships, reaching out to all groups and people directly or indirectly involved in the conflict. This is what ultimately brought them into position to play a crucial role in bringing the warring parties together. The Council’s approach consciously combined humanitarian intervention with dialogue, as they tried to reach out to the rebels, the government, and to civil society, meeting everyone with an open mind, rather than judgement. Bishop Barnette told me

¹⁶² Sheick Conteh

¹⁶³ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁶⁴ Sheick Conteh.

that when thinking about how they had been able to do what they did, he kept coming back to this continuous engagement of the various stakeholders in the war, to build confidence. As he explained, they would reach out and talk to them of course, but they would also do “programs in the communities To meet some needs; providing food, providing clothing. That was the main role members of the Council were playing - sometimes collectively as the IRCSL, and sometimes as individual units of the Council; Churches or mosques.”¹⁶⁵

In the aftermath of the war, the Council was also engaged in reconciliation and the restoration of broken relationships. As seen above, after Lomé they played an important role in the reintegration of displaced people, but also of former combatants. As is the case in most wars where child soldiers are used, the warring parties, when kidnapping children, will make sure that any ties to the family and village are broken. In the case of child combatants, this usually involves killing and in some instances being forced to rape family members. For girls, the stigmatization tied to being a bush-wife is usually enough – especially if they had had children in the bush. Following Lomé, when the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program (DDR) was initiated, the Council – through their district coordinators – would arrange ceremonial cleansings of young girls and boys, in order to make it possible for them to return to society. Reverend Moses Khanu described how this took place in the case of bush-wives and child soldiers.

... when the disarmament came, their parents would not necessarily accept them. In one or two districts they were even killing them. Former combatants who went back were killed. So we had to intervene. And those who had children, nobody would want to have anything to do with them. So the community elders, the women, would bring all of these girls together in a house, secluded for one or two days. They do traditional counseling, and then they take them to the creek and rub chalk on them, and seclude them from the community for two or three days. Then they take them to the creek and wash them, and it is believed that they remove the stigma from them. There was a very strong stigma against them; that they were bush-wives. And so, after this process some of them will have a whole night's traditional dance, drumming and what have you. Then they will put on new clothes and be brought out to the public. And that was the time when young men who wanted to marry in the villages would come and try to marry them, and some of their parents would fully accept them.¹⁶⁶

Likewise, if the girls had children that were born in the bush, they would baptize them, or – if

¹⁶⁵ Bishop Tomas Barnette

¹⁶⁶ Reverend Moses Khanu

the family was Muslim – perform a naming ceremony. The child would be given a proper name before being returned to the family. In the case of boys, the men’s secret societies – the Poro – would take care of the counselling that formed part of their cleansing. As was the case with girls, the boys would “also be brought to the creek and cleansed before going back to be presented to the community as good young men who were exposed to armed conflict.”¹⁶⁷ Reverend Khanu stated that the importance of programs like these for the successful reintegration of children and youth who had been with the rebels during the war, should not be underestimated.

5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality

When asked about what was the most important contribution of the IRC SL to the Sierra Leonean peace process, the answers would vary. Nevertheless, one way or the other, almost everyone mentioned the Council’s role in bringing the two warring factions together and initiating dialogue. How they achieved that is a more complicated question. Above, we looked at the importance of relationships. In the interviews, several other factors were mentioned as important as well.

First of all, the authority and credibility of religious leaders in general, which have already been pointed out several times, was considered vital. As was their position and role in society. Even before the war, according to Bishop Barnette, “religious leaders they were already ... involved in their communities to maintain peace, to maintain harmony, and intercultural relationships.”¹⁶⁸ Looking back at the last sub-chapter, we saw that a specific goal for the IRC SL was to build a sense of tolerance and appreciation between people and communities; to build a culture of peace. In many ways that process started with the Council itself coming together. Though all informants maintained that there existed a religious tolerance in the country long before the war and the creation of the IRC SL, there had not been any significant cooperation across religious lines. As we have seen, the war brought the religious leaders together in an attempt to address common concerns. And, as explained by Bishop Humper, it is “as a result of our coming together as religious leaders that there is a broader perception relating to the kinds of religious practices in the country.”¹⁶⁹ Furthermore,

¹⁶⁷ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁶⁸ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹⁶⁹ Bishop Joseph C. Humper

in the words of Bishop Barnette “people appreciated that tolerance, and tried to use it as an example into the political, secular field. Because people started asking - ‘*if we can live as Muslims and Christians peacefully, why can’t we live as brothers and sisters peacefully in a secular world as well?*’”¹⁷⁰ That tolerance was brought to the fore and became a valuable tool in the peacebuilding process.

However, that alone would not have been enough. The Council worked hard to maintain their neutral status, and made deliberate efforts to reach out to the rebel soldiers and sobels. Reverend Moses Khanu explained that “our approach was not the condemning type: We condemn you because you are a rebel! You must have a reason why you took up arms against the government.”¹⁷¹ So rather than simply condemning the rebels for their violence and brutality, the Council – acting as religious leaders – sought to first understand why the rebels were acting as they were. Separating between *sin* and *sinner*, they would meet the rebels with respect and allow them to voice their concerns, while at the same time condemning their actions and encouraging them to lay down their weapons. As reverend Khanu stated, “that [violence] is not the right approach. ... The right approach is to sit down and talk; to put your points on paper.” Likewise, though they were more open to criticizing the ruling party, they would not go too far in pointing at bad governance from the government side, despite the fact that they were very much aware of the reasons for the war. In her interview, Mariatu Mahdi explained that “the inequality in society; the advantages, the disadvantages; we were not insensitive to all of those. We knew. ... This situation would not have come if those with authority had managed the economy, the governance, properly.”¹⁷² Nevertheless, she felt that sometimes the Council had been too hard on the politicians, and that maybe they could have achieved more had they tried to encourage them rather than criticize. It was a difficult balance to maintain, but all informants agreed that this was vital in order to win and maintain the confidence of both sides.

A few of my informants also highlighted the Councils role in the distribution of emergency relief, their international network and the logistical and financial support they received through it, and especially sensitization about peace. Reverend Moses Khanu talked about the prophetic role of religious leaders in conflict situations. Their responsibility “is not just to tell the people about the love of God, but also to warn them about the dangers; to tell

¹⁷⁰ Bishop Thomas Barnette

¹⁷¹ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁷² Haja Mariatu Mahdi

them to live in peaceful coexistence, and have love for one another.”¹⁷³ Sheick Conteh pointed out that “the sensitization, or education, ... trying to remind those involved what their Creator stated in the scriptures they believe in ... played a very prominent role in softening the minds of those people.”¹⁷⁴ To him, that was their most important contribution. Alhaji Jah also spoke of how they had to “fight a war ... from our respective pulpits.” Throughout the war churches and mosques were actively used to preach about peace and reconciliation, to teach people conflict resolution techniques, to sensitize them on the dangers of the war, and facilitating dialogue in communities. Mabel M’Bayo mentioned how they would run series of workshops in which they looked at what the Bible and Quran say about justice, peace, reconciliation, et cetera, thereby grounding everything they did in the teachings of the two holy books.

Toward the end of each interview I asked what the informant thought others could learn from their own experiences during the war. Several of them mentioned that context was too important for it to be possible to simply replicate what they did in another situation or place. Without the religiously tolerant culture of Sierra Leone to build on, it was considered unlikely that the Council would have been able to have such an impact. Reverend Khanu, though conscious of the importance of context, suggested that “if some of those ideas can be modified, can be looked into and adapted within a context, I think that is something that can be very helpful to other situations.”¹⁷⁵ According to Khanu more research needed to be done on the approaches of the IRC SL, looking at how they organized themselves, how they worked, what was effective, and why. When we understand this, we can start to think creatively about how best to adapt and use similar approaches in other contexts.

Reverend Rogers-Wright stated that the country’s religious tolerance could be considered “one of our best exports.”¹⁷⁶ Haja Kassim also explained how they would say that we all need “to accept each other as creations of God/Allah. We are all equal in the eyes of Allah, so we must treat each other equally and try to be at peace.”¹⁷⁷ The importance of interdependence and relationships was again highlighted by several. Sheick Conteh pointed out that we are called to be each other’s keeper, and stated that “you cannot realize the

¹⁷³ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁷⁴ Sheick Conteh

¹⁷⁵ Reverend Moses Khanu

¹⁷⁶ Reverend Rogers-Wright

¹⁷⁷ Haja Kassim

benefits of God's gifts if you do not realize the importance of your existence, and the importance of your fellows' existence.”¹⁷⁸ Professor Karim also said that “you have to build that mutual confidence, mutual trust in each other. The Muslim should see the Christian as a brother; the Christian should see the Buddhist as a brother. It is only then we will be able to work together.”¹⁷⁹ When it comes to this confidence building, according to the professor, religious actors come in first place. Still, even they have to work for it. Bishop Humper explained that in order gain and maintain the confidence and trust of the people, you have to live as you preach. If your actions do not match your words, you will quickly lose any credibility you might have had. Hence, the Bishop explained, “you cannot use this as an opportunity to enrich yourselves. You must divide yourself from your own being and become a complete personality that is standing to work for and on behalf of the people.”¹⁸⁰

Finally, Mabel M’Bayo talked about empowering and using existing structures and networks. As we have seen, through their churches and mosques, the IRC SL could reach almost the entire population with their message, and could benefit from having local people on the ground who knew the people and their situation because they had suffered through the war alongside them. Also, as Bishop Humper explained, peace is not something you attain once, and then have. Peace is a process that needs to be maintained. It requires continuous cycles of healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. The local church or mosque is better situated than most to keep moving these cycles forward, and has the capacity, the authority, and the language to speak about them with credibility.

¹⁷⁸ Sheick Conteh

¹⁷⁹ Professor Alhaji Karim

¹⁸⁰ Bishop Joseph C. Humper

6. A Religious Approach to Peace

Using both the theory and empirical data presented above, I will now look at the two questions raised in the introduction to this thesis: Why and how was the IRCSL able to achieve what they did in the Sierra Leonean peace process, and; what, if anything, can peacebuilders elsewhere learn from the experiences and work of the IRCSL, in order to replicate it in other conflict settings?

6.1. Context, Conviction and Confidence

In this part of the analysis, I intend to look closer at the achievements of the IRCSL in light of existing theory about religion and peacebuilding, and by that try to explain why and how these religious leaders were able to make headway in the peace process.

Regarding the question of “why”, considering the data from my case study mainly two things stand out; the importance of context, and the centrality of relationship and trust. Looking strictly at context, in the case of Sierra Leone, I want to highlight the importance of religiosity and tolerance. By tolerance I mean the acceptance and respect for those of different faiths, as well as the willingness to treat everyone – no matter which side of the war they belonged to, or what they had said or done – equally. When talking about religiosity, I am going to separate between the religiosity of religious leaders and the religiosity of religious adherents – both of which, for different reasons, should be considered important for religious peacebuilding.

As for the question of “how”, there can be no doubt that the IRCSL’s deliberate relationship building with all relevant stakeholders was vital to their efforts. Without the confidence of both sides of the war, as well as that of the general population, it is unlikely that they would have been able to make much of an impact.

6.1.1. A Tradition for Tolerance

In western society today religiosity and tolerance are two words few would put together. Nevertheless, religious tolerance was perhaps the one thing that stood out the most in the interviews presented above. The unique religiously tolerant culture of Sierra Leone was considered vital not only to the success of the IRCSL, but to the creation of the Council itself. As seen above, the founding of an inter-religious council was presented as a natural continuation and formalization of the dialogue and diapraxis that already existed. Though

explaining the origin of Sierra Leone's religiously tolerant culture would be valuable for an improved understanding of the impact of the IRCSL on the peace process, the question is big enough to deserve a thesis of its own. What can be deduced from existing theory and the interviews presented above, however, is that since interpretation of doctrine is shaped by the culture and context of the interpreter, the religious tolerance of Sierra Leone helped the country's religious leaders overcome the potentially divisive claim for exclusivity made by orthodox Christianity and Islam, and work together towards a common good.¹⁸¹

Looking back, this might support Galtung's arguments on the peace potential of hard and soft religion. Galtung stated that whether a religion can positively contribute to peace is dependent on its willingness to renounce any exclusivist, universalistic understanding of itself, as these – according to him – are not peace productive.¹⁸² I do not disagree with Galtung's statement about the potential for conflict being greater in a religion that claims to be universally true and encourages proselytization. I do, however, disagree with his conclusion that these cannot be peace productive.

During the interviews all informants were asked about why they joined the Council, and what reasons they had for coming together as Christians and Muslims. Only one gave answers that could be interpreted as a somewhat syncretistic understanding of religion – stating that with the exception of some theological differences, the three Abrahamic religions are more or less the same. All others, when asked about personal and theological reasons for joining the IRCSL, referred to the dire situation the country was in, the role and responsibility of religious leaders, and the call to peace they found in the teaching of their own respective religion. Apart from that, the Council members explained the Sierra Leonean tolerance by pointing to the history of peaceful cohabitation in the country, intermarriages, as well as how most people – Christians and Muslims alike – had all been raised and educated together, in missionary schools. In these schools they had all been allowed to live out their faiths side by side, and hence, they had learned to know, respect and accept each other. Further reasons given for coming together for a unified approach to peace were mainly practical. Several pointed to the need for both the church and the mosque to reach the entire population. It quite simply wouldn't have been possible to have the same impact if not both religions had been represented.¹⁸³

Furthermore, the organization of the IRCSL – having one Muslim and one Christian

¹⁸¹ See 2.1.2 Religious Militancy and the Importance of Leadership, p. 13-14, and; 5.3.1. Considering Context, p.65-67.

¹⁸² See 2.1.3. The Internal Strengths of Religion, p. 14-15.

¹⁸³ See 5.1.1. Personal and Organizational Motivation, p. 48-50

for every position of leadership – does not point towards a non-exclusive understanding of the two religions. Neither does the fact that several specifically mentioned that there was no preaching, or attempts at converting other council members to their own religion. Rather, this shows that, because the two religions are mutually exclusive, it was important to take measures to make sure that nobody would feel that one religion was given precedence over the other, and to avoid confrontation. This was vital for the work of the Council, but it was also important, as explained by Bishop Barnette above, to show people that difference of religion should not be a source of conflict.¹⁸⁴

Considering what is said above about the Sierra Leonean tolerance, as well as the reasons given by my informants for cooperating across religious lines, I believe that what made the IRCSL possible was not a lack of belief in the claims to universal truth present in both religions among the people and organizations joining the Council, but rather a true tolerance based on an understanding and acceptance of the right of the other to believe and practice as he or she chooses; a focus on texts and teaching within each religion that supports that right, and – as was said in the interviews – that calls adherents to a life of peace and service; knowledge and understanding of the *other* stemming from a history of peaceful cohabitation and mingling, and; the realization that cooperation was a necessity, and not really a choice.

From this follows that building tolerance and mutual understanding – or what Galtung refers to as cultures of peace – within and between religions is crucial if religious institutions are to contribute positively to establishing and maintaining peace.¹⁸⁵ Whether referred to as *formation for peace*, *inculcation of peace-enhancing principles*, or *religious vocation for peace*, this was also highlighted as vital to religious peacebuilding by Appleby, Hertog, and Lederach. Appleby stated that the realization of religions' internal pluralism is the first step towards tolerance. Seeing and accepting the internal pluralism of one's own faith can lead to an increased humbleness and openness towards people who think and believe differently, and hence to an increased tolerance. According to Appleby this realization is rooted in an understanding of religious teaching and practice as being first and foremost human responses to the experience of the holy, and not a direct revelation of God's will.¹⁸⁶ Though I might agree with Appleby about the uncertainty of religious interpretation and that humility and openness towards different minded people might lead to tolerance, if – as I interpret it –

¹⁸⁴ See 5.3.1. Considering Context, p. 66, and; 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 72-73.

¹⁸⁵ A brief definition of Galtung's Cultures of Peace is given in the introduction to chapter 2. Analytical Framework and literature review, p. 6

¹⁸⁶ See 2.1. Religious Militancy and the Importance of Leadership, p. 12.

Appleby here argues that one has to be open to the possibility of being wrong in order to be tolerant, then, nevertheless, I disagree. As I see it, true tolerance is not about accepting the possibility of others being right, but rather respecting and accepting their right to disagree.

During the interviews, one of my informants talked about the importance of separating culture and theology.¹⁸⁷ This can be said to indicate an understanding of religious teaching as partly a human construct. However, the very same statement also seems to imply that there is a true form of religion, untainted by culture, which can be found if one is able to look past the influence of the local context. In addition to that, several informants made it clear that they considered ecumenical cooperation and interreligious dialogue important. And that, instead of focusing on what separated them, they sought to lift up the commonalities between the different congregations and religions.¹⁸⁸ This at least shows an acceptance of pluralism, though apart from the one example above there is no indication of whether that acceptance is based on an understanding of organized religion as manmade, or an openness towards the beliefs of the other council members. Rather, what was apparent in the interviews was the various religious leaders' choice to focus on the peace-enhancing principles of their respective religions, and their attempt to *form* their followers in these. We have seen that the pulpits of both churches and mosques throughout Sierra Leone were actively used to preach about and promote peace and reconciliation. In addition, the IRCSL ran several peace conferences and workshops in which they gathered relevant people from different layers of society to discuss peace, as well as what the teachings of the two religions have to say about war and violence. National prayer meetings for peace were also held on a few occasions.¹⁸⁹ This kind of formation for peace was an important part of the Council's strategy – as stated above by Bishop Thomas Barnette – to build into the communities a sense of love, tolerance and appreciation for the other.¹⁹⁰

6.1.2. The Importance of Religion

In Sierra Leone, the war never took on a religious guise. However, as was made perfectly clear by all my informants – African society is a God fearing society, and Sierra Leone is in no way an exception to that rule. The story told by Sheick Conteh about UNICEF's vaccination program serves as a good example of the importance of religion in Sierra Leone;

¹⁸⁷ See 5.1.2. A Theological Foundation, p. 51-52.

¹⁸⁸ See 5.3.1. Considering Context, p. 66-67

¹⁸⁹ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 74.

¹⁹⁰ See 5.2.1. The AFRC Era, p. 55.

Conteh's point being – no matter what you want to achieve, you will not get very far without involving religious institutions.¹⁹¹ The religiosity of the Sierra Leonean people puts religious institutions and leaders in a very prominent position. As explained above, religious leaders are trusted, and, as men and women of God, they are to be respected. In the Sierra Leonean context, the word of the religious leader has greater authority than that of most others. When asked where that authority came from, the first answer given in the interviews was quite simply God. Some pointed to the role of religious leaders in society giving them a moral authority, though this would of course also be rooted in the authority of God. Others again pointed to the grant of their constituencies – meaning that as Christian and Muslim leaders, they can be said to represent the moral conscience of the entire population.¹⁹²

This authority was important for the work of the Council for two reasons. First, it gave them access to key people in the conflict, from the very elite of the population; the state apparatus – including Johnny Paul Koroma, and President Kabbah, and; all the way down to the grassroots. It also helped them in their communication with Sankoh and the RUF. Second, it gave significant weight to their words. When speaking out or issuing public statements, people would listen. Furthermore, when criticizing the state leadership, or condemning the violence of the RUF, their authority as religious leaders, combined with the legitimacy they earned through the way they approached the conflict and how they treated people at either side the same, seems to have been vital.

It was argued above by Mabel M'Bayo that the credibility of religious leaders comes from the fact that they are more often than not local people themselves. They live in and among their communities, and know the people and their situation because they have suffered through the war alongside them. Bishop Barnette also explained how religious leaders were already occupied in maintaining peace and solidarity on a family and community level long before the war, while Professor Karim mentioned the presence and importance of the religious leader in the everyday life of each and every Sierra Leonean as vital. As I see it, this confirms what Sampson says about the respect for religious leaders and institutions being grounded in their presence and contact with all levels of society, the fact that they are from the people as well as for them, and often have a reputation for integrity and service through charity and relief work.¹⁹³ Furthermore, from their respective pulpits the priest and the imam cover the entire country, and reach people at all levels of society. This is why the Christian and Islamic

¹⁹¹ See 5.1.3. The inherent Peace Potential of Religion, p. 53.

¹⁹² See 5.3.1. Considering Context, p. 67-68.

¹⁹³ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 72, and; 2.1.1. Secular Shortcomings, Historical Engagement, and Presence, p. 11.

action groups were able to make a difference in the case of the vaccination program. Religious institutions already have a presence and network through which they can reach the entire population, and they have the credibility and authority to move the hearts and minds of their adherents.

Back in chapter two it was also stated by Sampson that the potential of religious peacebuilding is strongest in a context characterized by strong religion and a weak state.¹⁹⁴ Her argument is that in a context where the state has lost its legitimacy and politicians are generally considered corrupt and untrustworthy, due to reasons explained above, religious leaders might be the only authorities left with any credibility.¹⁹⁵ This could, at least to some extent, be said to be the case in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leonean state before and during the war could most certainly be defined as weak, with virtually no legitimacy, less credibility, and no capacity to maintain control in large parts of the country – as shown by the early successes of the RUF – following the rule of Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momo. Meanwhile, looking at what has been said about religion and religiosity in Sierra Leone in the light of Sampson's definition of strong religion it is quite evident that the country's religious institutions for the most part fit the bill.

This is to some extent also the case with Appleby's understanding of strong and weak religion. According to Appleby, whether a religious institution should be considered weak or strong depends on the one side; on the sturdiness of the institution, the knowledge and understanding of doctrine among practitioners, and their experience in the practice of its devotional, ritual and spiritual traditions, and on the other; whether it supports or inhibits religion's capacity to build tolerant, pluralistic cultures. In other words, a religious institution can be seen as weak or strong either normatively, or in terms of religious literacy.¹⁹⁶ Explaining his definitions Appleby admits that, because violent religious movements are often found to be strong in terms of religious literacy, he has to make a normative choice when defining strong and weak religion like this. Though I personally agree with that choice, I believe a normative separation between *good* and *bad* religion – though necessary for practitioners and religious peacebuilders – if used in academia, can make it easier to dismiss violent extremist movements as non-religious or only faulty religion, and hence, make it easier to not take its religiosity seriously. Such a definition would not do us any favors in terms of understanding violent religion. Furthermore, this separation steals focus from what I

¹⁹⁴ See 2.1.1. Secular Shortcomings, Historical Engagement, and Presence, p. 11.

¹⁹⁵ See 2.3.2. The Importance of Strong Religion, p. 27.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 27-28.

believe Appleby is seeking to highlight, namely that religion can be a very powerful force for social and societal transformation. Therefore, rather than defining violent religion as weak, I find it more useful to define strong religion based on religious literacy, size of the institution, authority and credibility in society, network, et cetera. Then, only when discussing the potential of religious actors to contribute in peacebuilding, does the necessity of a normative choice become relevant.

Going back to Sierra Leone, one of the main reasons given by my informants for getting engaged in peacebuilding was – as cited above – the call to peace and service inherent in both religions. Looking at what was said about the theology of peacebuilding by both the Christian and Muslim informants there is a clear focus on texts and teaching that highlights human value, the sanctity of life, love, compassion, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. Again, any examples of religious conflict and violence were simply brushed aside as misinterpretation, or false religion negatively influenced by culture.¹⁹⁷ This allowed the members of the IRCSL to put differences aside and focus on the commonalities between the two religions, for the sake of the common good. The same attitude and focus was also preached and promoted in all the churches and mosques of the member organizations, in an attempt to form their respective adherents in the Council's theology of peace.¹⁹⁸

Though based on my data, I am not able to say much about the knowledge and understanding of teaching and practice of the average Christian and Muslim in Sierra Leone, it is clear that they do have great faith in for their religious leaders. This, along with the sheer number of religious adherents, again shows the strength of the religious institutions of Sierra Leone. As I argue above, considering this, what is vital for the peace potential of a religious institution might not be primarily the religious literacy of the faithful – though that might of course be a strength – but rather, the willingness and ability of religious leaders to focus on those parts of scripture and tradition that support peace rather than violence, to defend that focus theologically, and successfully pass on to their followers an understanding of active non-violence as a religious norm.¹⁹⁹

When asked if the civil war changed the religious context, or the relationship between Christians and Muslims somehow, most informants stated that it brought Christian and Muslim leaders closer together. There had always been mutual tolerance and respect between Christians and Muslims in Sierra Leone, but not until the war did any official cooperation

¹⁹⁷ See 5.1.2. A Theological Foundation, p. 50-52.

¹⁹⁸ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 74.

¹⁹⁹ See 2.3.2. The Importance of Strong Religion, p. 28.

exist. Several of them also pointed to the dire situation the country was in when asked why they got engaged in peacebuilding in the first place. Facing the violence and the suffering brought about by the war, these people found in their religion an obligation to use their position as religious leaders for the good of all. When dealing with specific issues, the Council would look at both the Bible and the Qur'an, and look for ways to address the current situation that were grounded in the teaching of their holy books.²⁰⁰

The war also brought changes to the roles and responsibilities of religious leaders. We have seen how the Council stood up to the AFRC, issued public statements, and criticized the government when they thought it was necessary. Before, religion used to be something private that belonged only in the church or the mosque. However, because of the public role of the Council during the war, according to Bishop Barnette it was now considered a part of their responsibilities as religious leaders, to hold political leaders to the values of religion. Considering the above, it can be argued that the civil war actually broadened the perspective of the country's religious institutions, forcing them to consider the well-being of the entire population, rather than focusing only on their respective adherents. This is also in line with what Appleby writes about the importance of strong religious and cultural institutions that are willing and able to look at their teaching and tradition in new and creative ways when facing violent conflict.²⁰¹

Finally, another reason for engaging themselves in peacebuilding given in the interviews was the role and responsibility of religious leaders. Several of my informants spoke about how they, as religious leaders, had to step up to the challenge presented by the war; to be a voice of prophecy, and to teach people that as God's creation we are all equal in value, and need to learn to live together in peace. They were very much aware of their position in society, and the faith that people put in them. According to Mariatu Mahdi this was actually one of the main reasons she remained in Freetown during the AFRC's reign.²⁰² There was a feeling that people relied on them for hope, and that if they had left, all would be lost. It was my impression that the same sensation was behind the Council's decision to visit the RUF in the bush. Though the personal risk was great, they had to go if they were to get anywhere with the dialogue. The only security they had to lean on was – as was said above by Sheick Conteh – that when you are doing the work of your Creator, you can be sure of his

²⁰⁰ See 5.1.1. Personal and Organizational Motivation, p. 49-50.

²⁰¹ See 5.3.1. Considering Context, p. 67-68, and 2.3.1. Three Modes of Religious Peacebuilding, p. 24-25.

²⁰² See 5.2.1. The AFRC Era, p. 57.

constant support.²⁰³ In this, we see signs of the religious militant described earlier by Appleby. As was mentioned above, this conviction and engagement – when guided by a focus on the peace-enhancing principles of religion; combined with the often nationwide, or even international, networks of religious institutions, and; empowered by the natural authority that follows religious leadership – makes religious leaders powerful agents for positive change.

6.1.3. It's All about Relationships

Along with the importance of context, the deliberate building of relationships done by the Council was what stood out the most in the interviews. As was explained by Bishop Barnette, long before the war began, religious leaders all across the country were already involved in their communities to maintain peace, harmony, and relationships.²⁰⁴ In the case of conflicts arising within a family or a community, the priest or the imam would help solve them. The resolution of conflict and restoration of relationships was already a natural part of their responsibility, and hence, when the war came they simply continued doing this on a larger scale. In the following, I will focus on the part of the IRC SL's work that was about building relationships with government and rebels as well as civil society; the restoration of broken relationships, and; the creation of new ones. I will look at this in the light of Lederach's moral imagination. In chapter 2.3 we saw John Paul Lederach claim that peacebuilding is all about relationships. Introducing what he has termed the moral imagination, Lederach argues that there are four themes without which peacebuilding will never be effective. These are the centrality of relationships; the necessity of a paradoxical curiosity; the ability to provide space for the creative act, and; the willingness to risk. The realization of these together serves to open up for the moral imagination to work as it lays the foundation for an understanding of how we are all connected, and how our actions affect each other; opens up for acceptance of the other; creates meeting points and the space needed for creative action, and; pushes for that vital first step towards restored relationships.²⁰⁵

The moral imagination helps you to see what is currently not there; to envision a shared, peaceful future. It sees all people as part of the same web of relationships, and helps you recognize how your actions affect not just people close to you, but also *the other*. It is not something that is specifically meant for religious peacebuilders. According to Lederach these are the bare necessities of all peacebuilding. Nevertheless, I do believe, and will – through the

²⁰³ See 5.1.2. A Theological Foundation, p. 50.

²⁰⁴ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 72.

²⁰⁵ See 2.3.3. The BOIDS of Peacebuilding, p. 29-31.

example of the IRCSL - try to show in the following, that religious actors are well suited to meet the requirements needed for all four themes.

In his interview, it was stated by reverend Khanu that as religious leaders they needed to come up with a prophetic word to face the situation. It was not enough to just tell people about the love of God. They should also warn them about the dangers of hate and violence, and urge them to live in peaceful coexistence and love each other. As we have seen, the vision of the IRCSL was, according to Bishop Barnette, to build into the communities a sense of love; a sense of tolerance and appreciation for the other, to make sure that (...) the kind of devastation that had been spread across the country would not happen again. In other words, they wanted to build a culture of peace and tolerance in the entire country, to ensure a peaceful future for all Sierra Leoneans. Bishop Barnette also explained that, for the country to be able to get back up on its feet, it was necessary for all people to take part. Quoting President Koroma, he even made it clear that it should be considered a common responsibility of all people living in Sierra Leone, to come together to make it a better place.²⁰⁶ Though not directly painting a picture of the years to come, these statements at least hint at the possibility of a shared future. Furthermore, they do show a clear understanding of the importance of bringing people together to overcome their differences, and to create a sense of unity that cuts across whatever lines are currently dividing the country in order to reach that future. Hence, mending broken relationships, and establishing new ones where none had previously existed became an integral part of the work of the Council.

In this, their being religious leaders clearly worked to their advantage. First, the fact that they themselves had chosen to come together as Christians and Muslims served as an example to the rest of the country, and the Council would also use that fact to point to the religious tolerance that already existed. If people could come together despite their religious differences, then they should be able to learn to accept whatever other differences existed as well. Second, as has been mentioned several times before, their network of churches and mosques served as natural meeting points all across the country. Through those the IRCSL could reach the entire population in a way that no one else could. Finally, their position in society, their role as religious leaders, and their specific skill set and language, allowed them to talk about forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and even justice, with a much higher credibility than other actors in the peace process.

We have seen what Katrien Hertog writes about the soft aspects of peacebuilding, and

²⁰⁶ See 5.2.1. The AFRC Era, p. 55-56, and; 5.1.1. Personal and Organizational Motivation, p. 50.

how she considers religious actors particularly suited to deal with these.²⁰⁷ In the case of the IRCSL, this became most obvious in their dealings with the RUF and their contributions during the reconciliation process. One example is what they did to reintegrate former child soldiers and bush wives when communities and families were unwilling to take them back. Using local religious cleansing and transition rites to allow the young ones to ‘shed’ their past and return as new men and women, made it possible for them to return to society and be reunited with their families.²⁰⁸ This could not have been achieved – at least not in the same manner – by secular actors, as it not only requires profound knowledge of local culture and beliefs, but also the knowledge and authority to legitimately lead the youth through the rituals required. Another story from the interviews which shows the potential of Lederach’s moral imagination is Haja Kassim’s meeting with the young rebel soldiers in the bush.²⁰⁹ Kassim’s outburst was not a planned attempt to reach out to the rebels. Rather, it was a spontaneous reaction to the tension that arose as they arrived at the RUF camp, mixed with pent up frustration from the hopelessness of the situation the country was in. Nevertheless, it defused the situation completely, and created space for positive conversations.

Looking further at the interviews, it was stated by Haja Kassim that as religious leaders they needed to tell people that we all have to accept each other as God’s creations.²¹⁰ By naming all people – whether victims or perpetrators of violence; no matter which side of the war they belonged to – God’s creations, the IRCSL sought to wipe out the dichotomy of us and them that naturally follows a conflict situation. Above I described Lederach’s paradoxical curiosity as the ability to simultaneously see the truth as acted out and as experienced, and accept both as part of the whole. Requiring a sincere openness and respect for human experience and interpretation of reality, it seeks to understand and accept the suffering of the enemy, and hence, opens up for a greater understanding of the other as equal to oneself; thereby breaking the hold of the social polarization that sustains the cycle of violence.²¹¹ As I see it, the Council’s neutrality; their refusal to see, or at least show that they saw, even rebel soldiers and leaders as less valuable, or less worthy of love and respect, and; their willingness to at least try to understand the conflict from the rebels’ point of view, are signs of a paradoxical curiosity within the religious leaders.

In the interviews it was made very clear that both their neutrality and the way they met

²⁰⁷ See 2.1.3. The Internal Strengths of Religion, p. 16.

²⁰⁸ See 5.3.2. Building Relationships, p. 71-72.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

²¹⁰ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 74.

²¹¹ See 2.3.3. The BOIDS of Peacebuilding, p. 30.

the rebels had been incredibly important for the relationship they managed to establish with the RUF. The neutrality was for the main part rooted in the realization that any signs of the Council taking sides would severely limit their potential influence in the peace process. Still, though some amount of pragmatism might have been involved in this as well, when they met and dealt with the rebels they did it first and foremost as religious leaders. It was explained during the interviews that every time they went to the bush they would always send both a Christian and a Muslim, and both would pray with the rebels. Furthermore, Moses Khanu explained that they would never meet them with outright condemnation. Rather, they would try to understand them, talk to them, and ask for their point of view on the situation. Then, of course, they would also try to reason with them, and let them know that they had to stop the violence, and try to solve their issues through peaceful means. The fact that they brought medicine and food when they went to meet the rebels in the bush also served to show that they genuinely cared about their needs.²¹² This was important for establishing trust with the rebels.

The confidence that both rebels and the government, and the people for that matter, had in the IRC SL made it possible for them to serve as a link between the warring factions when working to establish a dialogue, thereby becoming the meeting point between the not-like-minded and not-like-situated. As can be seen in the story of Haja Kassim's visit to the RUF camp, the fact finding missions conducted by the Council as part of the reconciliation process, the role played by the Council prior to, and during, Lomé, the trust people had in their religious leaders – which was only strengthened by the integrity won through their efforts during the war – and the way they met people as individuals worthy of love and respect, also made it possible for them to create a safe enough environment for both victims and perpetrators of violence to open up and speak freely, and for either party during the negotiations in Lomé to see reason and return to the table whenever they were close to giving up because of disagreements.

Above, Lederach spoke about the importance of providing space for the creative act to unfold. Here, space is understood in an abstract sense, as an environment in which change that would otherwise be impossible can be achieved.²¹³ Based on my findings, it seems like this ability to create a space where change seems possible through mere presence comes naturally to religious leaders, and is closely tied to their unique role in society. This is supported by Appleby. Claiming that the provision of good offices is a natural ability for religious leaders

²¹² See 5.3.2. Building Relationships, p. 69, and; 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 73.

²¹³ See 2.3.3. The BOIDS of Peacebuilding, p. 30-31.

due to their credibility and the trust invested in them, he states that as long as they are able to remain neutral in the conflict, the particular skill set religious leaders often depend on for their work also helps them provide the necessary space and expertise needed for both unofficial and official negotiations.²¹⁴ In the case of the IRCSL they did of course benefit from the already established authority and integrity of religious leaders in the country, but without the consistent efforts made to build confidence with all stakeholders in the war and not be seen to take sides in the conflict, they would not have been able to retain the necessary credibility for long. It was this safe space created by the trust confided in them by all parties to the conflict – and especially the RUF – that allowed them to establish a dialogue in the first place, and to push for solutions behind the scenes in Lomé, whenever the negotiations stopped.

Finally, at the end of the previous sub chapter I spoke about how the conviction and dedication to their faith made the Council members risk their own safety, even their lives, in their struggle to end the war. Above Appleby defined both violent extremists and religious peacemakers as militants because of their willingness to go to extreme lengths in obedience to their faith.²¹⁵ Considering the above, the IRCSL could most certainly be considered religious militants. The strength of the engagement, and the conviction of the IRCSL representatives that they had to do whatever it took to make a difference, was grounded in their faith in God and the call to love and to serve that they found within the teaching and tradition of their religion. Though the strength of the dedication religion conviction can create can lead to violence, it also gives religious actors the courage and will to take risks when needed to move a peace process forward.

As I see it, the IRCSL's contribution to the Sierra Leonean peace process can be seen as a practical example of Lederach's moral imagination, consisting of a continuous cycle of confidence building, dialogue and active listening, followed by appropriate action. Their work was fueled by a paradoxical curiosity that allowed them to see the people behind the violence, and kept them from passing judgement or choosing sides, no matter what their personal feelings might have been. Everything they did was focused on strengthening the Council's relationship with all stakeholders – the government, AFRC and RUF, and civil society – and, having done that; use the trust invested in them to bring people together on various levels of society, and create space in which reconciliation and healing was possible.

²¹⁴ See 2.2.2. Conflict Resolution, p. 21-22.

²¹⁵ See 2.1.2. Religious Militancy and the Importance of Leadership, p. 12-13, and; 6.1.2 The Importance of Religion, p. 83-84.

6.2. Learning from Experience

Having looked at why and how religious actors can be involved in peacebuilding above, in the following I intend to look closer at what the IRC SL did throughout the peace process, and discuss what, if anything, religious peacebuilders elsewhere can learn from their experiences, and potentially replicate in other conflict settings. Again, I will analyze existing theory in the light of my data and discuss the potential of various roles and approaches to peace relevant to religious actors, and based on that, try to suggest some lessons learned for the religious peacebuilder.

6.2.1. Roles and Responsibilities

In chapter 2.2 we looked at the various roles religious actors can play in the three different stages of conflict transformation – conflict management, conflict resolution, and structural reform. Here, I will go back to my informants' accounts of the work of the Council during the war, to identify which roles and responsibilities it took upon itself in Sierra Leone, and what other religious actors can learn from that.

What we found above was that there is not one specific role within any one of the three mentioned stages, but rather, a multitude of roles that could be played in either one, or throughout all of the three stages. All of which could be said to be based on roles religious actors were already playing. The same could be said about the work of the IRC SL. Most notable was of course the role they played in getting the RUF and the government to start talking together. However, without everything else they did it might be argued that they would not have been able to initiate that dialogue. Rather than one specific role, the multifaceted approach taken by the Council helped putting them in a position where they became a natural link between the warring parties. As I see it, there are three groups of roles – all of them well known within religious tradition, and seen as part of the responsibility of religious leaders – that to a large extent encompasses all activities and roles played by the IRC SL during the war. These are the prophet, the conciliator, and the teacher.

Above Appleby and Little writes about the herald, whose role it is to identify and warn about widening rifts in society before they turn violent.²¹⁶ Their argument is that the prophetic dimension of religion makes religious actors particularly sensitive to social discrimination, political oppression, and injustice. This, along with their knowledge of, access to, and continuous contact with all levels in society, makes them ideal heralds. As it is described by

²¹⁶ See 2.2.1. Conflict Management, p. 18

Appleby and Little though, this was not a role the Council had until after the war. Still, the very same characteristics also make religious actors ideal advocates, including all three versions mentioned above – advocate, activist and truth-teller/social critic.²¹⁷ As the AFRC took control of Freetown, the IRCSL immediately criticized the coup-makers, making it clear that they needed to step down and allow the country to return to democracy. Furthermore, throughout the war the Council kept issuing statements condemning the use of violence by both government and rebels, encouraging them to lay down their weapons and start talking together.

According to Sampson's definitions of advocates, activists, and truth-tellers, the first two usually supports a specific side in a conflict, while the truth-teller, refusing to take sides, will raise their voice against any injustice or wrongful act committed, no matter who is behind it. Though referring to it as social criticism, not truth-telling, this is how my informants portrayed themselves. It was vitally important for them to maintain a good working relationship with both government and rebels, as well as civil society. Hence, they could not be seen to be supporting one side over the other. But neither could they remain silent whenever the violence and brutality of the war hurt innocent civilians. As religious leaders, people were looking to them to stand up against what was taking place, and, as explained by Mariatu Mahdi, if they failed in this people would lose hope, and the Council would have lost all credibility. Considering the importance of maintaining a neutral stance then, they took care to not just lash out against either government or rebels, but against the use of violence and the level of brutality used by both sides – in religious terms, separating between sin and sinner; condemning one, while loving the other. Still, as explained in the interviews, there were times when members of the Council did participate, and even lead, demonstrations against the AFRC – playing the part of the activist. When that happened, however, it was made clear that they did this as individuals. The IRCSL could not be seen to participate officially, as that would severely damage their neutrality. It was also made clear in my interviews that there had been disagreement within the Council related to this.²¹⁸

As we have seen, in his interview, Reverend Khanu defined the prophetic role of religious leaders as something more than just telling people about the love of God. They should also warn about potential dangers to society, tell people to live together peacefully, and love each other.²¹⁹ Though brief, I would argue that this simple definition sums up everything

²¹⁷ See 2.2.1. Conflict Management, p. 18-19.

²¹⁸ See 5.2.1. The AFRC Era, p. 56-57.

²¹⁹ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 73-74.

done by the heralds, as well as all three versions of the advocate. The direct effect of the official statements and public outcries made by the Council on the warring parties' willingness to use force as a means to an end is hard to measure, but at the very least it gave them visibility at the beginning of their work, increased their credibility, and helped them become recognized as a player to be reckoned with in the peace process. Furthermore, even if the Council never officially participated in demonstrations or activism during the AFRC era, it might also be argued that the presence of religious leaders at some of these to some degree protected the demonstrators from the military junta, as well as strengthened whatever message they were trying to send.

The importance of relationships has been highlighted several times throughout this thesis. Above, Professor Karim explained how you have to make people see *the other* as a brother in order to get people to start working together.²²⁰ Bringing people together like this is the role of the conciliator. Both Sampson and Hertog talks about how reconciliation – the restoration of broken relationships – builds on originally religious concepts, such as acceptance of personal responsibility, confession, repentance, forgiveness, mercy, and compassion.²²¹ This might serve as an explanation and, to some extent, confirmation of Professor Karim's statement about religious leaders being *in first place* when it comes to confidence building, or relationship building. This role is important in official dealings between conflicting parties, as well as on an interpersonal level – trying to restore peace and good relations in communities. In the case of the IRCSL, the direct involvement of the Council was more visible in the establishment of a dialogue between the government, the RUF, and the AFRC. Several different roles were important as part of that work.

The role of the deacon, tending to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the people, though not mentioned in any of the cited literature above, was considered an important part of the Council's attempt to build relationships with all stakeholders in the war. The handing out of food and medicine to the rebels was mentioned as vital to the establishment of the relationship between the IRCSL and the RUF, as well as to their dialogue with Sankoh – as it was initially done on his request. The fact that the Council members were willing to meet with the rebels in the bush; talking and praying with them, as well as providing food, clothes and medicine, showed the rebels that, as religious leaders, they actually cared about their well-being.²²² Similarly, their role in the organization of emergency

²²⁰ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 74-75.

²²¹ See 2.1.3. The Internal Strengths of Religion, p. 16-17.

²²² See 5.2.2. The Road to Lomé, p. 56-57.

relief programs and the conducting of pastoral visits to areas affected by the war, served to strengthen their position in the peace process, and their integrity as peacebuilders.

During the negotiations in Lomé, IRC SL representatives were present as observers. Because of the work they had done helping to establish a dialogue, and the relationship they had with the RUF, having been invited by the rebel group to help them put their position on paper before meeting the government, they were given a seat at the negotiations. Both to provide moral credibility to the process and to help the parties move forward when stuck at an impasse. Though they were only present as observers in the official negotiations, the IRC SL ended up playing an important part in helping the two parties reach an agreement. As was explained by Reverend Rogers-Wright, whatever issues came up that were not solved at the negotiation table, the Council representatives present would try to sort out in personal conversations and *corridor talks*, either during breaks, or after the talks had finished for the day.²²³ According to my informants, having established personal relationships with many of the rebel leaders present during the two weeks they spent together prior to the official peace talks, the importance of the religious leaders' efforts in moving the dialogue forward behind the scenes should not be underestimated.

Looking at the work of the Council during the peace talks in light of what is said in chapter two by Bartoli, several points can be made. Bartoli explains that it is vital to a peace process that the conflict is seen and read properly. In other words, it needs to be understood correctly. Religious leaders, as a result of their training and particular role in society, often have intimate knowledge of local language and culture, access to firsthand information, political expertise, and a long-term vision for society – which gives them a strong basis for understanding the mechanisms behind outbreaks of violence.²²⁴ The IRC SL, being able to lean on a network of churches and mosques stretching through the entire country, and religious leaders who had lived through the war on the ground with their constituencies, knew more about what had been, and still was, taking place in Sierra Leone than most others.

Meanwhile, as has been mentioned several times already, their continuous presence at all levels of society ensures that religious institutions – when conflict erupts – often find themselves in close contact with people from both sides of a conflict, from the grassroots level and all the way up to the very elite. Religious leaders who have been able to establish themselves as people of integrity, and are genuinely trusted by the people around them, can be vital in the back-and-forth process needed to get two opposing parties to sit down and talk

²²³ See 5.2.3. From Lomé Towards Sustainable Peace, p. 62.

²²⁴ See 2.2.2. Conflict Resolution, p. 21.

together. Through their contact with Sankoh, their visits to RUF camps in the bush, and their meeting with Charles Taylor in Monrovia, the IRCSL had personal knowledge of, and experience with the rebels and their understanding of the war. Hence, they were able to see the conflict as experienced and interpreted by either side. Furthermore, because of the time spent with the rebels, talking to them, praying with them, and providing food, clothes and medicine; they were able to reach through to them during the negotiations as well, in a way that others were not.

In the interviews it was also stated that the Council was considered a moral guarantor of the treaty in Sierra Leone. The concessions made to the RUF were not well received by the public, and it was hoped that the presence and acceptance of the religious leaders at the negotiations that led to these would help people accept it as a necessary evil. It was also considered part of their task to hold both government and rebels to account for what they had promised in the agreement.²²⁵ This supports what Appleby and Little write about how religious actors have served as observers during official negotiations and mediation as well as afterwards, to ensure that the parties live up to their side of agreements made.²²⁶

However, a lot was also done in local communities, and even at times in individual cases, to help both victims and perpetrators of violence move forward. Looking at what the IRCSL helped organize in the aftermath of the war, there were specific activities that only religious leaders could do. Perhaps the most important of these were the mass burials performed, the ritual cleansing of young men and women who had been with the rebels in the bush, and the name giving ceremonies for babies born of the so-called bush-wives. Through religious rituals, religious leaders gave peace to the families of war victims, and made it possible for youths and babies to return to society and be reconciled with their families.²²⁷

Finally, Bishop Barnette, when speaking about the vision of the Council, stated that they sought to build into the communities a sense of love, tolerance, and appreciation for the other. This is in line with what Hertog writes about religious actors and the inculcation of peace-enhancing principles. According to Katrien Hertog, the ability to reinforce the inculcation of peace-enhancing principles and values with religious ethics, rituals and disciplines, is among the greatest attributes of the religious peacebuilder.²²⁸ This is where the role of the teacher – or educator, as described in chapter 2 – comes in. By forming their adherents in the peace-enhancing values of their respective religion, they can help build a

²²⁵ See 5.2.3. From Lomé Towards Sustainable Peace, p. 62.

²²⁶ See 2.2.1. Conflict Management, p. 19.

²²⁷ See 5.3.2. Building Relationships, p. 71-72.

²²⁸ See 2.2.1. Conflict Management, p. 20.

foundation for social transformation and reconciliation – a culture of peace, if you will – needed to restore a society torn apart by conflict.

Though the actual impact of the Council’s work in this regard is not within the limits of this thesis to measure, it was considered an integral part of their work by all my informants. Both before and after Lomé, the IRCSL organized public meetings, dialogues and workshops focusing on peace, conflict resolution, and the war. They also actively used the churches and mosques to talk about what Christianity and Islam teaches about peace, human value, the sanctity of life; and how both religions promote peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.²²⁹ The religious institutions were natural meeting points in the communities, and were used accordingly whenever needed.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the combination of all activities the Council was involved in throughout the war put them in a position from which they were able to establish a dialogue between government and rebels. As I see it, broadly speaking, everything they did can be put into three categories connected with the three aforementioned roles. Namely, the social and moral criticism of the prophet, the restoration of relationships and building of confidence done by the conciliator, and the attempts at establishing cultures of peace by the teacher. Peacebuilding in itself was new to most of the members and member institutions of the IRCSL, but the roles and activities they were involved in throughout the war were based on roles they already knew. Though it was admitted by Bishop Barnette that social criticism was not something that the religious institutions had been involved in earlier, the prophetic role of the religious leader was referred to several times in the interviews. As was the importance of bringing people together, and teaching them to love each other and live in peace. Furthermore, as we have seen, when talking about the foundation of Council, it was mentioned by more than one of my informants that it only represented a formalization and scaling up of the work that was already being done by religious leaders all over the country.

From this follows that if religious actors are to engage themselves in peacebuilding, they should focus on involving themselves in processes where they can make use of the experience and abilities they already have, as well as their widespread presence, networks, relationships with all levels of society, authority and credibility. As Mabel M’Bayo stated, they have to make use what is already there.

²²⁹ See 5.2.2. The Road to Lomé, p. 58, and; 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 73-74.

6.2.2. A Catalyst for Change

As mentioned, towards the end of every interview I asked two very specific questions. Namely, what each of my informants considered the IRCSL's most important contribution to the peace process, and; what they thought other religious peacebuilders could learn from their own experiences. As seen above, the most common answer to the first question was getting the rebels and the government to start talking together. Realizing that the war was not likely to be solved through military means, the Council was able to use the position they gained during the AFRC era to reach out to the warring parties in order to get them started talking – but also to put pressure on them by issuing public statements, in which they criticized the use of violence as a means to an end, the brutality of the rebels, and the government's lack of willingness to listen to the people and the rebels.

As for the second question, when asked about what others could learn from their experiences, the importance of context was the first thing everyone pointed out. In chapter 2 I wrote about Appleby's three modes of religious peacebuilding – the Crisis Mobilization mode, Saturation mode, and External Intervention mode. According to Appleby, the Saturation mode is the one that holds the greatest potential. However, as the context on which the Saturation mode depends is so rare, the External Intervention mode is the more common approach.²³⁰ In Sierra Leone, it seems like all it took to get things started was the WCRP initiative to gather religious leaders for a common cause. Following the AFRC's coup, the entire focus of the Council was turned towards ending hostilities and a return to normalcy. The Sierra Leonean tolerance – the religiosity of the people, and the position and role of religious leaders – became a strength and support in everything they did, and helped them establish the trust needed to bring the warring parties together. Realizing that such a context is not commonplace, reverend Khanu suggested that more research needed to be done concerning that. If one can fully understand how the context affected both the situation and the work of the Council, then it might be possible to think creatively about adapting the approach used in Sierra Leone to other contexts as well.²³¹

Though the context was undoubtedly working for them, they still had to be conscious about how they worked, and how they approached the various stakeholders in the war. Above, we discussed the importance of the Council's neutrality, and how they worked to maintain that. Admittedly, their willingness to meet the rebels with love and respect was partly based

²³⁰ See 2.3.1. Three Modes of Religious Peacebuilding., p. 26-27.

²³¹ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 74.

on an understanding of this being a necessity for dialogue. Still, looking at what was said in the interviews, there seemed to be a sincere openness towards the plight of the RUF; a willingness to see their side and seek to understand their actions, and their cause. In his interview Moses Khanu argued that normal people would not go to war without reason, and stated that this would also be true in relation to the RUF. There had to be a reason why they took up arms against the government, and in order to move forward they would have to identify those reasons and address them. As Sierra Leoneans, all religious leaders were aware of how the country had been mismanaged by its political leaders for decades, so it was not necessarily a very difficult task to understand some of the frustration behind the revolt. Nevertheless, as stated by reverend Khanu, the Council was adamant about violence not being an acceptable solution. Rather, they would constantly point out that people needed to accept and respect each other. First of all, as Haja Kassim said, because we are all equal in the eyes of God, and need to treat each other accordingly. Second, because in the end, our own happiness is tied to that of our neighbors. Sheick Conteh pointed out that we are all called to be each other's keepers, and argued that we will never fully experience the gifts of God if we do not realize the importance of our fellows' existence – as well as our own.²³²

According to Reverend Rogers-Wright, the tolerance shown among religious groups in Sierra Leone could, in itself, be a valuable example for others. This was more than a willingness to come together across religious lines to work for the common good. Among the Council members it was based on an acceptance of the other's right to believe as he or she chooses, and a respect for their value as human beings created by God – regardless of their faith. In his interview, Professor Karim stated that in order to bring people together like this, you have to build a mutual trust. You have to make people see the other as their brother or sister. This kind of confidence building, he argues, is one of the greatest strengths of religious leaders.²³³

In 2.2.3 Appleby was talking about how religious actors in recent history have – for various reasons – stepped forth in times of need, to assume leadership of social reconstruction following the end of violent conflict. It could be an act of repentance for any role they may have played in the conflict; a consequence of having been intimately involved in the attempt to end the violence from the start, or; simply because they are called upon by others.²³⁴ In Sierra Leone the IRC SL was given positions of leadership and responsibility in the process

²³² See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 73-75.

²³³ Ibid., p. 75.

²³⁴ See 2.2.3. Structural Reform, p. 22-23.

following the peace treaty because of the ability and willingness to lead that they had already shown throughout the last years of the war. The religious leaders saw it as part of their responsibility to use their influence for the common good, and to bring people together in peace and unity.²³⁵ However, that you are willing to assume leadership does not necessarily mean that you should. Appleby and Little argue that for a peace process to lead to true reconciliation, it has to be led by someone whose moral authority demands the respect of everyone involved.²³⁶ All informants pointed out the importance of the confidence put in them – especially by the rebels and the general population. Without it, it is unlikely that the Council would have been able to bring the warring parties together in the first place. Hence, the IRC SL’s experiences seem to confirm Appleby’s statement in this regard. Credibility, however, is earned – not freely given. Hence, as was explained by Bishop Humper, even as religious leaders they had to let their words be followed by action. If you don’t live as you preach, you quickly lose whatever credibility you have. It was mentioned several times in the interviews that their willingness to speak up on behalf of the people during the reign of the AFRC cemented their position as a player to be reckoned with in the peace process, and served to strengthen their credibility in the eyes of the general population.²³⁷

Considering the above, several points can be made. As reverend Khanu suggested, more research needs to be done specifically on the effect of context on a peace process. However, this should not only focus on the Sierra Leonean context and how it influenced the work of the Council, but also on how context influences theological interpretation, in order to better counter violent religion and support the development of theologies of peace. Religious leaders then need to consciously develop theologies of peace and start forming their adherents in these, as part of a process of building cultures of peace within their institutions. Building cultures of peace within religious institutions can help create a context capable of giving birth to the Saturation mode if being faced by violent conflict.

Still, though of course highly valuable, a favorable context is not, in itself, sufficient to guarantee that religious actors will have a positive impact. As stated above, the Council had to be conscious about how they worked, and how they approached the various stakeholders. The Sierra Leonean context provided a valuable foundation, but the people’s confidence in religious leaders, their authority and credibility, had to be maintained. As was the case with their relationship with both government and rebels. From this follows that it is important that

²³⁵ See 5.1.1. Personal and Organizational Motivation, p. 48-49.

²³⁶ See 2.2.3. Structural Reform, p. 22-23.

²³⁷ See 5.2.1. The AFRC Era, p. 57.

religious leaders are seen to live as they preach. The example of the tolerance and mutual respect shown towards each other by Christian and Muslim leaders in the IRCSL, strengthened their integrity, and hence their credibility. As did their involvement in humanitarian interventions, and their willingness to provide food and medicine even to rebel soldiers.

Furthermore, it is crucial that religious leaders are seen to be working for a better future for all stakeholders in a conflict. Considering what was said in the interviews, it is clear that the neutrality of the Council, the deliberate confidence building with all stakeholders, and the openness with which they met both sides was seen as vital to their achievements. My informants spoke a lot about the importance of being seen as neutral, while at the same time having to criticize when criticism was due.²³⁸ Hence, we are not talking of neutrality in the sense of remaining passive, but rather as being objective – as being seen to meet and treat everyone involved equally, and to hold them to the same moral standards. In the case of the IRCSL, it was only after having established a relationship of trust with the rebels – to the point where they were believed when they claimed that they also wanted what was best for them, and that they were not running errands for the government – that they were also able to reach through to them with critique and demands. This shows the importance of building relationships, but also of taking all parties to a conflict seriously, and meeting everyone with openness and respect. It would have been easy to reject the RUF and AFRC as rabble who only sought to spread chaos and fear. Nevertheless, as stated above, there seemed to be sincerity in the Council's efforts to understand the RUF, and the reasons and ideals for which they claimed to be fighting.

Another important lesson, according to Mabel M'Bayo, was that in order to reach as many as possible with any intervention in a conflict situation, you need to use the structures and networks that are already present.²³⁹ Through their churches and mosques, the IRCSL had immediate access to the entire population of Sierra Leone. Also, as religious leaders they already had the respect and trust of the people, as well as a profound understanding of local culture and rites. The use of traditional cleansing rituals to return and reintegrate former child soldiers and bush wives to their villages is a text-book example of how local religious or cultural traditions can be valuable tools in a peace process. Their network and position in society, and their knowledge and understanding of the culture and situation on the ground, made it possible for the Council to make an instant impact on the conflict.

²³⁸ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 73.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Finally, as Bishop Humper stated, peace is not something you achieve, and then have.²⁴⁰ Peace is a process that requires continuous cycles of healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. While external forces pull out when the peace treaty is in place and the immediate conflict seems under control, the church and the mosque remain. As has been mentioned, the local church or mosque is well situated to keep moving these cycles forward, and they have the capacity, the authority, the knowledge and expertise to do so.

²⁴⁰ See 5.3.3. Credibility and Neutrality, p. 75.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis the goal has been to look further at the potential of religious actors in peacebuilding, by analyzing the work of the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone during and after the civil war that tore the country apart in the 1990s. In the introduction I proposed that religious actors can contribute positively to a peacebuilding process. Above, I have tried to test that proposition. This was done by seeking answers to the questions of why, what, and how religious actors can contribute in peacebuilding in existing theory, and in the experiences of the IRCSL, and then, based on what I found, answering the two following questions:

1. *Why and how were the IRCSL able to achieve what they did in Sierra Leone – and did their religious foundation make a difference or not?*
2. *What, if anything, can religious peacebuilders elsewhere learn from their experiences?*

In the following I will provide a summary of my findings relating to the two questions above, and based on that, present my final conclusion regarding the initial proposition. Finally, considering what I have found in this thesis, I will give some recommendations for further research.

7.1. Findings on the first Research Question

#1: *The Sierra Leonean context was vital to the success of the IRCSL.*

There can be little doubt that the historical and cultural context in Sierra Leone was important for the development of the Council, and the impact of their interventions. First, because the religiously tolerant culture of Sierra Leone made interreligious dialogue and diapraxis not only possible; it made it seem natural. Second, because of the position and role of religious leaders in Sierra Leone. It was pointed out by several of my informants that the establishment of an interreligious council could be considered a natural development of what was already taking place in and among churches and mosques across the nation. There was a tradition for religious tolerance that allowed Christian and Muslim leaders to work together for the sake of the greater good. A tolerance that – at least among those members of the Council that I managed to meet and talk to – seemed based on mutual respect and acceptance, and grounded in the teaching of their respective faith traditions.

Above, I discussed the idea of strong and weak religion, whether the potential of

religious peacebuilding was stronger in a society characterized by a weak state and strong religion, and how that theory fits with what took place in Sierra Leone. As stated earlier, though, based on my data, it is impossible to say anything about the religious literacy of the average Christian and Muslim in the country, I do believe that Sierra Leone – at least as it was before and during the war – can be described as a weak state with strong religious institutions. It seems quite clear that the lack of faith in the political leaders of the country, coupled with the confidence Sierra Leoneans have in their religious leaders, helped pave the way for a religious intervention. The religiosity of the Sierra Leonean people puts religious leaders in a very prominent position, compared to other civil society groups. Due to their role in society and the nature of their work, they have both the credibility and the authority to be powerful agents of change within their communities. Their specific skill set and language allows them to talk about forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and justice, not only with more credibility than secular actors, but also with a better understanding of what these terms entail, and how they are understood by people on the ground, directly affected by the conflict.

Furthermore, their particular position and role in society helped the IRC SL members get access to both political and rebel leadership, as well as civil society. And through their networks of churches and mosques they could reach the entire population of Sierra Leone with a common message of peace.

#2: The Council's deliberate building of relationships with all relevant stakeholders – especially the RUF – along with their neutrality throughout the entire conflict, was fundamental in their work.

Again – it's all about relationships. As mentioned above, from the very beginning the Council was consciously building relationships with not only government, rebels, and civil society; but also regional leadership and the international community – each group sought out for different reasons, but also as part of an effort to include all the necessary stakeholders in the process. As we have seen, it was the IRC SL that first brought Charles Taylor into the peace process. By refusing to pass judgement on men when criticizing actions, always seeking to meet others first and foremost as human beings, valuable, and deserving of respect and understanding – no matter what their personal feelings were – the Council members were able to build on the credibility already bestowed upon them as religious leaders in a way that allowed them to not only talk to everyone involved in the conflict, but to reach through to them in a way that others could not.

Looking at the interviews it is quite clear that their neutrality, the deliberate confidence building with all stakeholders, and the openness with which they met both sides, were part of a thought-through strategy. Considering the brutality and violence of the Sierra Leonean war, it was not an easy thing not to judge the perpetrators too harshly. It was, however, necessary. If they had failed to win the trust of the RUF they would not have gotten to work so closely with them before, and during, the negotiations in Lomé, and their impact would most certainly have been reduced significantly.

Above, speaking about the work of the IRC SL as a practical example of Lederach's moral imagination, I described their contribution to the peace process as *a continuous cycle of confidence building, dialogue and active listening, followed by appropriate action*. This was a strategy built on the view of all people as children of God, and hence, part of the same flock, equal of value and worthy of love and understanding, and; based on what religious leaders were already doing on the ground all over the country – maintaining peace, harmony, and restoring broken relationships.

#3: *Religious conviction, and a deliberate choice to focus on the peace-enhancing values of their respective religions in the face of violent conflict, was the foundation of everything the Council did.*

In the interviews it was mentioned how the Council members – as religious leaders – had no choice, but to act when the war broke out. Several of them spoke about the call to peace and service inherent in both Cristian and Islamic teaching, and about the responsibility of religious leaders to teach people that we are all of equal value to God, and should treat each other accordingly. Others spoke of the trust that people had in them as men and women of God, and the responsibility that trust placed on them. Their faith in God, and the people's faith in them, called them to act; but it also gave them courage to do what had to be done, even when it meant risking their own lives.

When talking about the theology of peacebuilding, both Christians and Muslims would point to texts and teaching that speak about the sanctity of human life, love, compassion, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, etc. Any attempt to use religion to defend violence was rejected as false religion by both Christians and Muslims. As explained above, this common focus helped keeping them together throughout the war. Every statement made, and every activity or meeting organized, would be grounded in the teaching of both the Qur'an and the Bible, and implicate both Christians and Muslims alike. This was done both to reinforce their

message with the authority of their holy scriptures, and to make sure they reached as many people as possible.

Considering all of the above, there can be no doubt that the religious background of the IRC SL was of vital importance – as motivation and ideological foundation for the Council members, and as a medium for reaching out and being heard by the Sierra Leonean people.

7.2. Findings on the second Research Question

#4: *Religious actors need to focus on building cultures of peace within their respective institutions.*

This means that leaders of religious institutions need to focus on two things. First, they need to start developing theologies of peace, and; second, they need to start forming their adherents in the peace-enhancing principles of their teaching and tradition – to the point where it becomes a way of life. Above we established that the Sierra Leonean context was vital to the achievements of the IRC SL. Though such a context is not common, I believe that it can be created, as Galtung said, by building cultures of peace.

As mentioned above, there was a clear focus, both among Christians and Muslims in the Council, on the peace-related values of their respective religions. This focus was then passed on to their followers through workshops, sermons and conferences in churches and mosques across the country. It is hard, if at all possible, to measure the immediate impact of this *formation for peace* on the Sierra Leonean peace process; but in this case, that is beside the point. The objective is not an immediate change in behavior among religious adherents, but rather, in the longer term, to facilitate a cultural change from within religious institutions, towards a culture of tolerance and respect, similar to that which characterized both the IRC SL and Sierra Leone.

Hence, repeating myself, what is vital for the peace potential of religious actors, is the willingness and ability of religious leaders to focus on those parts of scripture and tradition that support peace rather than violence, to defend that focus theologically, and successfully pass on to their followers an understanding of active non-violence as a religious norm.

#5: *Relationships of trust are vital. Objectivity and credibility is vital for the establishment of relationships of trust, and has to be maintained.*

Though a supportive context can be created, religious actors still have to carefully consider how they approach a conflict, as well as the parties involved. Above, I explained how the deliberate building of relationships with all relevant stakeholders was crucial for the achievements of the Council. In order to reach through to all stakeholders, trust have to be established first. To do this, it is vital that both sides of the conflict are met with equal respect and openness. A peace builder has to be seen as objective, and; they have to be believed.

In other words, to sum up the lesson learned, relationships of trust are vital, and religious actors have to consciously build relationships with all relevant parties. To build and maintain relationships of trust, religious actors have to be seen as working towards a common good, as meeting and treating all various parties to a conflict equally, and holding everyone to the same moral standards – including themselves. We have seen Appleby and Little argue that a successful peace process has to be led by someone whose moral authority demands the respect of everyone involved. Integrity affects credibility and moral authority, and hence, religious actors – perhaps even more so than secular actors – have to be seen to live as they preach.

#6: Religious actors should build on their own characteristics and strengths, and “use what is there.”

In order to become effective peacebuilders, religious actors need to be made aware of their potential, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, in order to build on the former, and address the latter. Answering my question about what others could learn from the experiences of the IRCSL, Mabel M’Bayo simply stated that religious actors need to use the structures and networks that already exist. One the greatest strengths of religious peacebuilders is the combination of access to all levels of society, and continuous presence on the ground, among the people. As Bartoli argues, this allows them to see and read conflicts properly, as they themselves have experienced the situation on the ground. This presence also means that religious leaders often have profound knowledge of local culture, which, as was the case with the cleansing rituals of former child soldiers and bush-wives, and burial rituals on locations of mass graves in Sierra Leone, can be of great use.

Furthermore, as Bishop Humper pointed out, the establishment of a sustainable peace is a slow continuous process. While other actors pull out of conflict areas once violence ceases, the church and the mosque still remains.

Finally, when dealing with violent conflict, religious leaders should build on

experiences from their everyday lives. Several of my informants talked about how the work of the Council was based on what religious leaders were already doing in their communities across the country. Above, I pointed out three roles I believe encompasses everything the Council was involved in in Sierra Leone, as well as the various roles suggested in the theoretical framework. All of which are already familiar to religious leaders. Namely, the prophet, the conciliator, and the teacher. The prophet speaks up against injustice, calls to repentance and conversion, and points out the way towards a shared, peaceful future; the conciliator brings people together, mediates, and facilitates reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships, and; the teacher works to establish cultures of peace. Hence, religious leaders already have the skill set and experience needed for this kind of work.

7.3. Summary and Final Conclusion

Looking at my answers to the two questions above, there can be little doubt that religious actors can contribute positively in peacebuilding. However, their potential is dependent on several factors – such as the context of the conflict; the strength of religious institutions, and; the willingness and ability of religious leaders to focus on, and promote, the peace-enhancing principles of their religion.

In cases where the context is supportive, and religious institutions have a strong standing – as was the case in Sierra Leone – I would argue that religious actors are ideal peacebuilders. As has been pointed out several times throughout this thesis, their nationwide networks, social standing, credibility and authority, continuous presence on all levels of society, and often profound knowledge and understanding of local culture – as well as of what has, and is taking place on the ground – puts them in a unique position to facilitate social and societal transformation. Furthermore, so much of what religious leaders are already doing is relevant in a peace process. As prophets, conciliators, and teachers, religious leaders already have the knowledge, skills, and experience, to address structural, direct, and cultural injustice. And, as we have seen, there are those who are not only willing to take upon themselves such a responsibility, but finds in their faith and tradition a calling and an obligation to do so.

Considering this, religious leaders should – even in times of peace – focus on building cultures of peace within their respective institutions, and actively seek out and build relationships with the society around them – including other religious institutions, civil society, and government institutions. Thereby positioning themselves both theologically and

socially to capitalize on their strengths, to address any threat of violent conflict, if and when it occurs.

7.4. Recommendations for further Research

As is often the case with research in general, in addition to the answers found and presented, this thesis also raises new questions. Following my final conclusions, I believe that further research needs to be done on two particular areas of interest.

First, we need to better understand the effect of context on a peace process. Not only how it affects attempted interventions, as reverend Khanu suggested, but also how it influences theological interpretation, in order to better counter violent religion and support the development of theologies of peace. Due to what Appleby presented as the ambivalence of the sacred, it is important that we understand what it is that leads one man down a path of violence, and another towards love and self-sacrifice.

Second, I believe it would be valuable to look further at the roles of the prophet, the conciliator, and the teacher in religious tradition and practice, and how these roles can be developed further to increase their potential impact in a peace process. It seems clear to me, as mentioned above, that part of the strength of religious peacebuilders is the familiarity with which they can play several roles deemed important in a peace process. Nevertheless, I also believe that there is still room for improvement. As Gopin stated, religions need to evolve prosocial models of constructive conflict. These should be based on a greater consciousness and understanding of what they already do, and how that can be used in peacebuilding.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide:

Why:

1. What is your original organization/congregation?
2. What was your organization/congregation's reason for joining the Council?
3. What was your personal motivation for joining the Council?
4. What was the theological basis for peacebuilding?
5. What was your motivation for cooperating across religious lines?
6. Was there any religious motivation, Muslim or Christian, for creating the Council, or was it mainly out of need, or necessity?

What:

7. What was your goal when it was first decided to create the IRCSL?
8. What was the role of the IRCSL during the AFRC-era?
9. Do you think the fact that many members of the Council stayed in Freetown during the AFRC-era, criticizing the junta and organizing protests, was important to what you achieved later, especially leading up to the Lomé negotiations?
10. What did you achieve by staying, and how did it affect your work following the restoration of the Kabbah government?
11. What became the role of the IRCSL after Lomé?
12. Considering the continuation of the conflict after the Lomé agreement, is there anything the IRCSL could have done to help stabilize the situation and bring about the final end of hostilities?
13. What do you consider the most important contribution of the IRCSL in the final years of the civil war?
14. In retrospect, is there anything you believe the Council should have done differently?
15. What do you consider the main successes and failures of the Council?

How:

16. Was there any difficulties in the cooperation due to the different religious backgrounds of the members of the Council?
 1. How did you manage to cooperate?
 2. Was the different religious background of the members something that had to be put aside in order to focus on the case alone, or did you see faith in God as a common ground on which you could base your work?
17. Was the participation of religious leaders important to the peace process?
 1. If yes, why? What could you, as religious authorities, achieve that others could not?
18. Was there ever a risk of the conflict taking on a religious dimension?
19. How would you describe the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Sierra Leone? And how does Christians and Muslims relate to traditional religions and beliefs?
 1. Has the war in any way changed the religious landscape?
 2. Has the war in any way affected the relationship between the different religious groups?
20. The religious culture of Sierra Leone is often considered very tolerant. Can the success of interreligious cooperation in Sierra Leone in anyway be contributed to this tolerance?
 1. If so, what does it mean for the IRCSL's potential as an example for inter-religious cooperation in other conflicts?
21. African traditional religions still have a strong standing in Sierra Leone, yet representatives of the traditional beliefs were not included in the IRC. Why were they left out?
 1. Was it a conscious decision from the Christian and Muslim members?
 2. Do you believe their participation would have made a difference?
22. Do you believe the experiences of the IRCSL in any way can contribute to the theories of religious peacebuilding?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Former and Current Members of the IRCSL

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

Information Sheet

I am a Master student at MF Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo, currently writing my Master thesis on religious peacebuilding, with a focus on the work of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRC SL) during the Sierra Leone civil war. I will look at how they cooperated across religious lines, their role in the peace process, and their particular contribution as religious leaders. The goal is to find out if religion can play a constructive part in peacebuilding, and whether or not the participation of religious leaders in a peace process is necessary or important.

I will interview former and current members of the IRC SL about their work during the civil war. The interviews will be recorded using a dictaphone, then transcribed and interpreted by me for my Master thesis. The Master thesis will be written in English and it will be publicly available. I will not use any personal information or quotes from the interviews in my thesis without asking for a written consent from the interviewee.

Participation in this project is absolutely voluntary. All participants can withdraw from the project at any time before August 2015. To do so all they have to do is send me an email at lkredse@gmail.com. If this is done, all data collected from them will be deleted.

All the data collected will be stored on a password protected personal computer.

Any questions you may have about the project, feel free to contact me.

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Certificate of Consent

Participant

I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily accept the use of any information given in this interview, unless I specifically ask for certain information to be presented anonymously. I realize that this may include personal information, such as my name and religious affiliation, and I am aware of my right to withdraw from the project at any point before August 2015.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Day/month/year

Researcher

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the consequences of taking part in the interviews. I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Name: Lars Kristian Redse

Sign: _____

Date: _____

Day/month/year