

# RELIGION AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF 2008 RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN WAR

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## Abstract

*War is "contrary to the will of God", according to a 1948 statement from the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. However, are religious communities able to prevent wars? Despite the lack of importance placed on religion, partially due to the secularisation thesis,<sup>1</sup> religions' potential for violence has become increasingly important in the social sciences since the end of the Cold War and particularly since the attacks of September 11, 2001. However, a question about the peace-making potential of religions increasingly arises in international politics and peace and conflict studies. In this contribution, the role of the Orthodox Churches in the 2008 Russian-Georgian war will be empirically examined. My findings show that the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches acted as "double players" during this military conflict whereby they could not release their peace-making potential. I argue that the churches were perceived not only as religious players with a religious peace message but also as political players that supported national claims. As a consequence, the status of religion as an intervening variable – such as assumed in the constructivist approach – is called into question.*

**Keywords:** *Russian–Georgian war, Russian Orthodox Church, Georgian Orthodox Church, peace-making potential of religions*

## Introduction

War is "contrary to the will of God", according to a 1948 statement from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam.<sup>2</sup> The declared goal of the WCC's religious communities is therefore to oppose war, or at least to refrain from promoting it. The WCC's demand is a consequence of World War II, and overcoming violence is an essential part of the official WCC programmatic structure.<sup>3</sup> But are religious communities able and willing to meet this requirement? There has been an increasing tendency by politicians as well as social scientists to view religions as

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<sup>1</sup> The secularisation thesis assumes a set of tensions between modernity and religion. In this context, the processes of the rationalisation, individualisation and differentiation of society are seen as responsible for these tensions. Proponents of this thesis include Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society. A Sociological Comment*, (London: Pelican, 1966); and Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos?* [Secularization: A Modern Myth?] (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> World Council of Churches, 1st WCC Assembly, Amsterdam 1948, <http://archives.oikoumene.org/query/Detail.aspx?D=40913> (accessed August 03, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation of the WCC, <http://www.oikoumene.org/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/overcoming-violence/international-ecumenical-peace-convocation.html> (accessed August 01, 2010); <http://www.oikoumene.org/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/youth-at-the-international.html> (accessed August 1, 2010).

a perpetual source of hatred and conflict, especially since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of identity conflicts,<sup>4</sup> in particular since the attacks on September 11, 2001.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the lack of importance placed on religion, partially due to the secularisation thesis, religions' potential for violence has become increasingly important in the social sciences. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* has essentially contributed to this point of view, as have other recent publications that contemplate the subjects of *Terror in the Name of God*,<sup>6</sup> *Religious Conflicts in World Politics*,<sup>7</sup> *Unpeaceful Religions*,<sup>8</sup> and *Religious Wars in the Age of Globalisation*.<sup>9</sup> However, in international politics and peace and conflict studies, the question about the peace-making potential of religions increasingly arises. For example, the Catholic Church in Poland and the Protestant Church in Germany placed a critical amount of importance on peaceful regime change at the end of the 1980s. Markus Weingardt's *Religion Macht Frieden* (Religion Makes Peace)<sup>10</sup> lists over 40 positive case studies to provide an eloquent testimony for the peace-building role of religion.

An empirical study of the role of the Orthodox Church in the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 is conducted below in the form of a current case study. My findings show that the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches acted as "double players" during this military conflict whereby they could not release their peace-making potential. I argue that the churches were perceived not only as religious players with a religious peace message but also as political players who supported national claims. As a consequence, the status of religion as an intervening variable, such as assumed in the constructivist approach, is called into question.

## The Return of Religion to the International System

### *Repression of Religion in the Westphalian System*

Europe has been the scene of great wars fought over denomination and religion with the Thirty Years' War, in particular, claiming a huge number of victims. In the Peace of Westphalia (1648), when the system of sovereign nation-states was also formed, warring parties agreed to leave the decision on the denominational affiliation of their dominions to individual ruling princes. The principle of *cuius regio eius religio*, agreed upon in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, introduced the

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<sup>4</sup> Identity conflicts can be seen as conflicts where "the opponents [...] assign an identity to themselves and their adversaries, each side believing the fight is between 'us' and 'them'." See Cate Malek, "Identity (Inter-Group) Conflicts", [http://crinfo.org/CK\\_Essays/ck\\_identity\\_issues.jsp](http://crinfo.org/CK_Essays/ck_identity_issues.jsp) (accessed August 01, 2010). One main characteristic of conflicts after the end of the Cold War such as the latest conflicts on the Balkans is that in place of ideological reference points ethnic and religious incentives occur. See Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), as described herein, sect. 2.2.

<sup>5</sup> See Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (Norwalk, Connecticut: Easton Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror im Namen Gottes. Ein Blick hinter die Kulissen des gewalttätigen Fundamentalismus* [Terror in the Name of God. A Look behind the Scenes of Violent Fundamentalism] (Freiburg: Herder, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Wilfried Röhrich, *Die Macht der Religionen: Glaubenskonflikte in der Weltpolitik* [The Power of Religions: Religious Conflicts in World Politics] (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Mathias Hildebrandt and Manfred Brocker, eds., *Unfriedliche Religionen? Das politische Gewalt- und Konfliktpotenzial von Religionen* [Unpeaceful Religions? The Political Potential of Religions for Generating Violence and Conflict] (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Hans G. Kippenberg, *Gewalt als Gottesdienst. Religionskriege im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* [Violence as Worship. Religious Wars in the Age of Globalization] (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Markus A. Weingardt, *Religion Macht Frieden. Das Friedenspotenzial von Religionen in politischen Gewaltkonflikten* [Religion Makes Peace. The Potential of Religion for Peace-making during Violent Political Conflicts] (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007).

primacy of politics over religion. With the introduction of the reason of State by means of which the ruling princes also decided on religious issues themselves, religion finally lost its significance as a basis for foreign policy. For the first time, a system of sovereign territorial states was developed in Europe. This was based on three cornerstones: (1) the balance of power as a basis for international stability; (2) institutionalisation of the international order and the development of international diplomacy; and (3) international law. Here, the international law included substantial parts of the just war theory which were also liberated from their original religious context. States were now considered the only legitimate players in the international system and replaced the cross-border authority of the Catholic Church. Religion and politics therefore had to be disentangled and religious wars overcome. Accordingly, Pope Innocent X also adamantly rejected the Peace of Westphalia, declaring it "null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane and devoid of meaning for all time".<sup>11</sup>

The separation of religion and politics and the establishment of politics as a separate, independent sphere continued to develop with the enlightenment and civil revolution, even within States. The functional differentiation of society in the 19th and 20th centuries therefore became one of the core elements of theories of the modern age and a central component of secularisation. The social function of religion became independent with regard to institutions and administration, alongside other functions, such as politics, economics, law and science. Religion in the modern age had therefore lost its role as a basis for the legitimation of the social and political order both in the international system and within the nation-state. Religion lost its importance in wars, and from then on the interests of nation-states dictated and legitimised the fighting of wars.

### ***Revitalisation of Religion after the End of the Cold War***

The discussion has now turned to a renaissance and/or revitalisation of religion. This denotes the increasing significance of religious convictions, actions and discourses in private and public life, as well as the growing role in domestic policy of religious or religion-based individuals, non-governmental groups, political parties, communities and organisations, associated with substantial implications for international policy.<sup>12</sup> In social terms, the reappraisal of the role of religion is explained by a crisis of the modern age.<sup>13</sup> In this context, Jürgen Habermas speaks of the dangers of "derailing modernisation".<sup>14</sup> He claimed that new dimensions of uncertainty and powerlessness had opened up, such as nuclear technology, gene technology or even politically unrestrained dynamics in global economy and global community, which add fuel to concerns about losing livelihoods and about the future.

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<sup>11</sup> As cited in Michael F. Feldkamp, "Breve "Zelo domus Dei" from 26th of November 1648," in *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 31 (1993), 293-305. See too Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations. The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 54-55; Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 22-26; Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (London: Pearson, 2007), 31-32 & 100-107; Claudia Baumgart-Ochse, *Religion in den Internationalen Beziehungen* [Religion in International Relations], *epd-Dokumentation*, vol. 5 (2009): 18.

<sup>12</sup> Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations. The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 26.

<sup>13</sup> See, among others, Martin Riesebrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen Fundamentalismus und der 'Kampf der Kulturen'* [The Return of Religions. Fundamentalism and the "Clash of Civilizations"] (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000), 35-57; Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Habermas, „Vorpolitische Grundlagen des demokratischen Rechtsstaates?“ [Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?], in *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion* [The Dialectics of Secularization. On Reason and Religion], Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (Freiburg, Basel & Wien: Herder, 2005), 26.

In the area of international politics, the renaissance of religion is closely associated with the change in the international system and the decline of statehood. Two moments characterise this development: (1) globalisation with the increasing emergence of international, transnational and private players, and (2) the end of the Cold War with the abolition of rigid, bipolar structures and the eruption of previously concealed ethnic and identity conflicts.<sup>15</sup> One expression of this change is the emergence of so-called new wars.<sup>16</sup> While modern warfare was traced to the nation-state and resulted in an internal pacification of the State, the new wars are essentially characterized by the emergence of private non-governmental players. Wars between regular armies are being replaced by a variety of violent players, who primarily target the civilian population.<sup>17</sup> The State is thereby losing its monopoly when it comes to fighting wars. The interests of the State no longer constitute the primary reference frameworks, thereby freeing the way to a cultural restructuring of war. Many of these new wars follow the logic of an "ethnicization" of social relationships, and in many cases this is equivalent to "religicization".<sup>18</sup> Mark Duffield speaks of a "neo-medieval situation" in this context.<sup>19</sup>

Religion and religious identities are increasingly gaining significance. In this, their capacity to mobilise people is frequently utilised. Violent players and protagonists of the new wars may exploit this religious impetus in order to reach their goals or mobilise members of their respective religious group, especially if economic and political sources are no longer sufficient. In particular, the group's sense of belonging is addressed here, the claim of truth made by religion enters their consciousness, and a distinction is made between good and evil, as well as between an in-group and an out-group.<sup>20</sup>

## Religion in Current Conflict Theories

How do conflict theories assess the influence of religion in violent conflicts? To what extent is there a differentiated view on religion? Three positions can be distinguished within the social science literature: primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism, each with its own specific praxeological recommendations.<sup>21</sup> The primordialists include, in particular, representatives such as Samuel P. Huntington who regard religions as independent forces in international politics and thereby as a cause of conflict and an independent variable in violent conflicts.<sup>22</sup> With the end of the

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<sup>15</sup> See Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (London: Pearson, 2007), 117.

<sup>16</sup> See Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege [The New Wars]* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Heinrich Schäfer, "The Janus Face of Religion: On the Religious Factor in 'New Wars'," *NUMEN*, vol. 51:4 (2004): 414. According to Schäfer, the most important distinction between new and classically modern wars is that in "new wars" ethnic and religious identities play a major role in mobilising the conflict parties.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001). Against the background of new wars, Duffield reveals a neo-medieval situation in which fragmented sovereignties confront a weakened or absent central authority. Consequently, religious actors are potentially able to exert a great deal of influence over people.

<sup>20</sup> Heinrich Schäfer, "The Janus Face of Religion: On the Religious Factor in 'New Wars'," *NUMEN*, vol. 51:4 (2004): 407-431.

<sup>21</sup> This chapter refers to Volker Rittberger and Andreas Hasenclever's "*Religionen in Konflikten – Religiöser Glaube als Quelle von Gewalt und Frieden*" [Religions in Conflicts: Religious Faith as a Source of Violence and Peace], in *Politisches Denken: Jahrbuch 2000 [Political Thinking: Yearbook 2000]* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 35-60; see further Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 50; Markus A. Weingardt, *Religion Macht Frieden. Das Friedenspotenzial von Religionen in politischen Gewaltkonflikten [Religion Makes Peace. The Potential of Religion for Peace-making during Violent Political Conflicts]* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 23-28.

<sup>22</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); see further Bassam Tibi, *Krieg der Zivilisationen. Politik und Religion zwischen Vernunft und*

Cold War, alliances were allegedly no longer developed primarily on the basis of political, ideological or economic interests, but along cultural and religious conflict lines, which according to Huntington may result in a culture clash – a "clash of civilisations". In order to repel the threat of war between civilisations, the classical instruments of power politics used during the Cold War (e.g. a balance of power) may be considered. This type of intimidation would increase the cost of violent rebellions. Military supremacy should therefore particularly restrict the political capacity to act and counterbalance the willingness to make sacrifices. An example is the US anti-terror policy of the Bush administration.<sup>23</sup>

This is opposed to the group of instrumentalists, to which Dieter Senghaas is attributed.<sup>24</sup> In their view, religions only represent a genuine cause of conflict in a very rare number of cases. Rather, they allege, there is a spurious correlation between religion and violent conflict. Religion is consciously being exploited by elites for political purposes as a consequence of economic and social crises. In praxeological terms, instrumentalists rely primarily on development and democratisation with the goal of an equal distribution of life opportunities. This is intended to weaken the willingness to mobilise and support violent strategies. In empirical terms, this position may be based on two findings. First, that no block-formation processes can be identified along religiously or culturally defined lines of conflict. Many wars would therefore be fought in relatively homogeneous areas as far as culture and religion are concerned. Secondly, there would be a series of inter-civilizational alliances.<sup>25</sup>

A third perspective on the role of religion in violent conflicts is generated by constructivism.<sup>26</sup> Under this approach, the players involved are incorporated into inter-subjective structures. Ideas, standards, values, ideologies, as well as nationalism, ethnicity and religion would thus largely characterise the self-perception and external image of those involved. Based on the constructivist version, the way in which opposing parties perceive each other makes a significant difference in the progress of a conflict. In this context, religion is assigned a completely independent role. It allegedly determines the identity and behaviour of the players involved and thereby assumes the role of an intervening variable. Representatives of this line of thought rely, in praxeological terms, on dialogue, enlightenment and conviction in order to facilitate cooperation by means of increased mutual trust.<sup>27</sup>

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*Fundamentalismus* [War of Civilizations. Politics and Religion between Reason and Fundamentalism] (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> See Volker Rittberger and Andreas Hasenclever, "Religionen in Konflikten – Religiöser Glaube als Quelle von Gewalt und Frieden" [Religions in Conflicts: Religious Faith as a Source of Violence and Peace], in *Politisches Denken: Jahrbuch 2000* [Political Thinking: Yearbook 2000] (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 36-37 and 50-51.

<sup>24</sup> Dieter Senghaas, "Die Wirklichkeiten der Kulturkämpfe [The Realities of the Cultural Clashes]", *Leviathan*, vol. 23:1 (1995): 197-212; Dieter Senghaas, "Schluß mit der Fundamentalismus-Debatte! Plädoyer für eine Reorientierung des interkulturellen Dialogs" [Enough of the Debate about Fundamentalism! A Plea for Reorientation of Intercultural Dialogue], *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, vol. 40:2 (1995): 180-191; Dieter Senghaas, *Zivilisierung wider Willen: der Konflikt der Kulturen mit sich selbst* [Reluctant Civilization: The conflict cultures have with themselves] (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> See Volker Rittberger and Andreas Hasenclever, "Religionen in Konflikten – Religiöser Glaube als Quelle von Gewalt und Frieden" [Religions in Conflicts: Religious Faith as a Source of Violence and Peace], in *Politisches Denken: Jahrbuch 2000* [Political Thinking: Yearbook 2000] (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 36-39 & 49-50.

<sup>26</sup> See among others Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflicts in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security*, vol. 23:1 (1998): 171-200.

<sup>27</sup> See Volker Rittberger and Andreas Hasenclever, "Religionen in Konflikten – Religiöser Glaube als Quelle von Gewalt und Frieden" [Religions in Conflicts: Religious Faith as a Source of Violence and Peace], in *Politisches Denken: Jahrbuch 2000* [Political Thinking: Yearbook 2000] (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 39-40 & 51-56.

One thing that all three theoretical approaches have in common is the recognition of the relevance of religion to life and conflict. In their empirical forms, they differ analytically in respect to their assumptions on the escalating and deescalating effect of religion. While both primordialists and instrumentalists focus on the violence factor, the constructivist approach creates an opportunity to examine religion in part from the viewpoint of its peace-making potential.

The constructivist approach is used because this study focuses on the peace-making potential of the Orthodox Churches during the Russian–Georgian war. In particular, the perceptions of the religious actions during this war will be investigated. In this context, the assumed status of religion as an intervening variable will be analysed.

## Requirements for the Release of Religious Peace-Making Potential

With regard to the release of such religious peace-making potential,<sup>28</sup> various levels of its influence must be distinguished. Research usually includes approaches on the micro- and meso-level (i.e. approaches that focus on the religious players and/or the internal character of the religious community). For example, Markus Weingardt examines common characteristics of religion-based players on the micro-level. In order to allow for the development of religious peace-making potential, the players would have to combine attributes such as expertise, credibility, connectivity and confidence.<sup>29</sup> According to Weingardt, religious players have a good knowledge of the conflict due to their nearness (expertise). Generally, they are impartial, unselfish and can arbitrate between different societal and hostile groups (credibility). Religious players have not only a regional nearness to the conflict but also an emotional nearness to the population (connectivity). Finally, they embody confidence concerning their moral and ethical competence. Andreas Hasenclever and Alexander De Juan have conducted studies on the meso-level and defined features of anti-violent religious communities, such as religious enlightenment, structural tolerance, potential for autonomy, and openness within the religious community.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, research often neglects the macro-level where the peace ethics positions of religious communities play an essential role as a benchmark for evaluating action and political action in particular. The specific peace ethics and thereby questions on the ethical legitimacy of military force rarely tend to be handled within the context of the peace-making and violence potential of religions. Yet it is precisely this perspective that provides an overview of the principles for methods used by religious communities to adopt positions with regard to issues of war and peace and in positioning themselves on social and political concepts of order irrespective of the specific individual case. Given that the peace ethics principles of religious communities have a much wider scope than the specific and current actions of players involved in religion, they may also serve to raise awareness of religious peace-making potential. Based on religious writings and doctrines, the existing concepts in current social discourse are of central importance. An examination shall be conducted of the religious doctrines and concepts referred to by religious communities and their members in current conflicts and wars, as well as the extent to which these doctrines and concepts contain an ethical legitimacy of military force. The discussion will show which peaceful strategies they have at their disposal.

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<sup>28</sup> This article focuses on the peace-making potential of religious communities. In general, religions can be extremely ambivalent. They can be considered both as accelerants and as trouble-shooters and peacemakers.

<sup>29</sup> Markus A. Weingardt, *Religion Macht Frieden. Das Friedenspotenzial von Religionen in politischen Gewaltkonflikten* [Religion Makes Peace. The Potential of Religion for Peace-making during Violent Political Conflicts] (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 394-404.

<sup>30</sup> Andreas Hasenclever and Alexander De Juan, "Religionen in Konflikten – eine Herausforderung für die Friedenspolitik [Religions in Conflicts: A Challenge for the Peace Policy]," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 6 (2007): 10-16.

## The Orthodox Churches in the 2008 Russian-Georgian War: An Empirical Analysis

In order to illustrate the factors discussed above, the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 is used as a case study. The military conflict between Georgia and Russia, which ended with the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia, clearly worsened the political situation in Georgia. The unresolved conflicts surrounding the two separatist provinces prove not only to be a significant obstacle to development in Georgia but also resonate beyond the region. The Russian-Georgian war is considered an example where both political sides allowed the conflict to escalate, but at the same time both religious communities advocated peace and an end to the war.

### *The Position of the Churches in Russia and Georgia*

There is separation between Church and State in both countries. Traditionally, however, closer relations exist between Church and State in Orthodox Christianity, as expressed in the term *Symphonia*. *Symphonia* means "harmony" of Church and State; both realities are different manifestations of one and the same truth, but both institutions are independent and equally important.<sup>31</sup> State and Church therefore have their own autonomy and they cooperate with each other in certain cases. Cooperation is also regarded as necessary in some respects. This relationship is legally expressed in the accentuated position of the Orthodox Church as opposed to other religious communities, such as through the 1997 Russian Religion Law or the 2001 Concordat between the Georgian State and the Georgian Orthodox Church.

A high value is also placed on the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Church in each society. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union the Orthodox Churches experienced an enormous upturn in support. Many churches were reopened, congregations re-formed and many people publicly professed their Orthodox faith. In the meantime, around 71 per cent of the population in Russia<sup>32</sup> and around 84 per cent of the population in Georgia<sup>33</sup> refer to themselves as Orthodox. According to the fifth wave of the World Values Survey carried out from 2005 to 2007, as many as 74 per cent of the Russian and 97 per cent of the Georgian populations see themselves as religious persons.<sup>34</sup> Both churches are held in high public esteem.<sup>35</sup> Sixty-eight per cent of the Russian and 94 per cent of the Georgian respondents have a lot of confidence in the church.<sup>36</sup> This confidence also includes the religious elites. Thus, the census in Georgia also reveals a high popularity rating for the

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<sup>31</sup> See, among others, Thomas Bremer, *Kreuz und Kreml: Kleine Geschichte der orthodoxen Kirche in Russland* [Cross and Kremlin: A Short History of the Orthodox Church in Russia] (Freiburg: Herder, 2007); Jelena W. Beljakowa, "Der Begriff "symphonia" in der russischen Geschichte" [The Term "Symphonia" in Russian History], *Ost-West. Europäische Perspektiven*, vol. 1 (2010): 16-22; Jennifer Wasmuth, "Politisches und soziales Engagement der orthodoxen Kirche in Russland" [Political and Social Engagement of the Orthodox Church in Russia], *Ost-West. Europäische Perspektiven*, vol. 1 (2010): 23-31.

<sup>32</sup> See the Public Opinion Foundation's poll carried out from the 19th to 20th of April 2008, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dominant/dam08116/d081623> (accessed January 2, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> See *Der Fischer Weltalmanach 2010. Zahlen – Daten – Fakten* [Fischer World Almanac 2010. Figures, Data & Facts] (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> See World Values Survey, *5th Wave* (data for Russia from 2006 and for Georgia from 2008), <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org> (accessed July 04, 2010). Nevertheless, according to the same survey, there is a difference in religious practice. This is especially the case in Russia. For example, only 13 per cent of the Russian and 39 per cent of the Georgian populations attend religious services at least once a month. By contrast, 64 per cent of the Russian and 29 per cent of the Georgian populations attend religious services only once a year, less often or never.

<sup>35</sup> Interview of the author with Rudolf Prokschi, Vice-President of Pro Oriente Vienna, from the 7th of July 2009.

<sup>36</sup> See World Values Survey, *5th Wave* (data for Russia from 2006 and for Georgia from 2008), <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org> (accessed July 04, 2010).

Georgian Patriarch Ilia II. Ninety-seven per cent of respondents assess his social activity as positive.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, 47 per cent of the Russian and 85 per cent of the Georgian populations agree that it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs were in public office.<sup>38</sup> In the light of this situation, the prerequisite of releasing religious peace-making potential, according to Weingardt (2007), is definitely present.

### ***The Role of Religious Players in the Russian-Georgian War***

How did the religious players (i.e. the religious elites), in particular the two Patriarchs Alexei II on the Russian side and Ilia II on the Georgian side, act during the conflict and how did they influence it? To what extent can we refer to a peace-building effect here in the sense of the ability to de-escalate violence and use peace-promoting initiatives?

Throughout the duration of the military conflict, both churches called for peace, for an end to violence and for a peaceful resolution to the problems. Both Church dignitaries addressed the population in prayers and sermons, but also called on their governments to settle the conflict by peaceful means. Both patriarchs emphasized the dramatic nature of the military confrontation in which people of the same Orthodox faith fought one another. These efforts culminated in a joint call from both Church dignitaries to support a ceasefire and negotiations between the opposing parties. They also appealed for respect for the peoples involved.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, both Churches provided humanitarian assistance. Patriarch Alexei II arranged for a circular to be sent to all bishops in the Russian Orthodox Church with regard to the organisation of humanitarian aid for South Ossetia. In parallel, the Georgian Patriarch conducted relief operations for refugees from South Ossetia. Moreover, by virtue of the mediation of the Russian Orthodox Church, a humanitarian corridor was also set up between Georgia and South Ossetia in order to evacuate the dead and injured.

The potential for autonomy of the Churches, as demanded by Hasenclever (2000), is revealed in the actions of the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Church. Not only did this include the call for policy makers to resolve problems by peaceful means. The Russian Orthodox Church also adhered to the position to recognize the unity of the autocephalous canonical area of the Georgian Orthodox Church, thereby recognizing the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as officially belonging to the sphere of influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church – a clear demarcation from the policy of the Russian State.

On the other hand, the Churches consciously relied on an internal and inter-religious dialogue in the conflict. For example, the Moscow Patriarch asked the World Council of Churches (WCC) to send

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<sup>37</sup> See the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation's poll about "*Religion und Politik in Georgien. Eine Umfrage unter der Stadtbevölkerung*" [Religion and Politics in Georgia. A Survey of the Urban Population] carried out in June 2008, <http://www.kas.de/kaukasus> (accessed January 25, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> See World Values Survey, *4th Wave* (data for Russia from 1999) and *5th Wave* (data for Georgia from 2008), <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org> (accessed July 04, 2010). Tim Müller states that lower degrees of modernization and higher levels of income inequality increase individual religiosity and the preferences for a stronger connection of religion and politics. According to the Human Development Index, Russia belongs to the group of countries with high human development (0.817), whereas Georgia belongs to the group of countries with medium human development (0.778). See Tim Müller, "Religiosity and Attitudes towards the Involvement of Religious Leaders in Politics: A Multilevel-Analysis of 55 Societies", *World Values Research*, vol. 1 (2009): 1-29; Human Development Report 2009, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> (accessed July 04, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Statement from August 15, 2008, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/gry/?act=news&div=26037> (accessed January 28, 2010).



an ecumenical delegation to the conflict zone. In this context, numerous discussions were held with leading clergy, local archbishops and representatives of other Churches in Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia. Finally, the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Church each dispatched one "Church ambassador" to the other country in order to resurrect frozen diplomatic relations between the two countries.

These efforts seem to suggest that religion played a positive and peace-building role. External assessments, on the other hand, provide a different picture. As the President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace/Europe, Hans Ucko explains, "I don't think the churches were much involved either as trouble-shooters or peacemakers. [...] Apart from statements I don't think that there were any religiously inspired initiatives to end the conflict."<sup>40</sup>

What is the explanation for such a view? Why were the peace messages of the churches not perceived as peace-making activities? Another factor here is that only the specific conduct of the religious players was taken into consideration without incorporating this conduct into the social and regulatory concepts of the religious communities. In concrete terms, it can be shown that the religious players have an impressive awareness of peace and peaceful conflict resolution, but, at the same time, they left no doubt about the injustice of the opposing party. Thus, in the view of the Russian Orthodox Church, the only solution to be found would be in granting autonomy to South Ossetia.<sup>41</sup> In this context, the former Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and current Patriarch, Cyril stated in a sermon, "We bow our heads before the fallen Russian soldiers. Russia is confronted with the risk of war and with the new risk of a new wave of defamation against our fatherland."<sup>42</sup> The Georgian Orthodox Church also placed the main cause of the war with the opposing party. Thus, Patriarch Ilia explicitly spoke out against the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In a letter to the General Secretary of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon, the Patriarch stated that autonomy of the two provinces was a product of the Soviet regime and should not be used for the purpose of separatism.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Peace Ethics Positions of the Orthodox Churches in the Russian-Georgian War***

From a peace ethics perspective, the positions of the religious players in the Russian-Georgian war allow for two opposing lines of argument. On the one hand, the comments "in the light of the injustice experienced" could be perceived as a religious call to resolve the conflict solely by peaceful means. This point of view would comply with the specific conduct of the players. However, the absence of any attempt to provide conflict resolution proved counterproductive, and the calls for peace were bound to go unheeded in the end.

On the other hand, the injustices could be construed as a legitimisation of military force, pursuant to a just war. Just cause (an essential criterion in relation to this doctrine) may include the restoration and preservation of territorial order on the Georgian side. On the Russian side it may include the restoration of justice in the face of Georgian aggression against South Ossetia. This view would comply with the 2000 document *The Basis of the Social Concept* produced by the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>44</sup> Chapter VIII of this document is devoted to the subject of "War and Peace". A clear

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Hans Ucko, President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace/Europe, on June 7, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Archbishop Mark, Russian Orthodox Church in Germany, on June 18, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Statement on August 11, 2008, <http://interfax-religion.ru/gry/?act=news&div=25978> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> See letter of Ilia II, Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, on June 12, 2009; interview with Archpriest Tamaz Lomidze, Georgian Orthodox Church in Germany, on September 15, 2009; statement on August 26, 2008, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/gry/?act=news&div=26178> (accessed January 28, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Russian Orthodox Church, *The Basis of the Social Concept* (Moscow, 2000).

rejection of the war is issued here: "War is evil. Just as the evil in man in general, war is caused by the sinful abuse of the God-given freedom."<sup>45</sup> However, the referred to criteria of the just war theory, dating back to Augustine also states, "While recognising war as evil, the Church does not prohibit her children from participating in hostilities if at stake is the security of their neighbours and the restoration of trampled justice. Then war is considered to be a necessary though undesirable means."<sup>46</sup> A parallel reference can also be found in the Georgian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Ilia also points out that "peace is not possible without justice".<sup>47</sup> The problem resulting from this point of view was already addressed by the late scholastic philosopher Francisco de Vitoria with his question, "Can a war be just on both sides?"<sup>48</sup>

The peace ethics positions of the two Orthodox Churches thereby produce a variety of interpretative options which make the role of religion seem ambivalent. The importance of peaceful conflict resolution remains vague in the face of dilemmas resulting from the criteria for the just war, and the constant adjustment thereof to current political concepts of social order. Thus, the criterion of *iusta causa* has assumed various forms in the course of History: from Plato's call to fight the barbarians to Augustine's and Thomas Aquinas' calls to avenge the violation of a system created by God; and from Vitoria's idea of the right to self-defence and the obligation to defend your fellow man to the protection of human rights in contemporary debate.

## Conclusion

What are the conclusions that can now be drawn in light of this ambivalence towards the theoretical assumption of religion as an intervening variable in wars and conflicts? It has been shown that a Christian-based peace ethic combines two viewpoints as described in the social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church. The document states that, "Bringing to people the good news of reconciliation (Rom, 10:15), but being in 'this world' lying in evil (1 Jn. 5:19) and filled with violence, Christians involuntarily come to face the vital need to take part in various battles."<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, the Christian message forms the basis for peace ethics positions with the commandment on peacefulness and loving thy neighbour. A religiously motivated ethic is characterised by the requirement for ethical action and is defined by the divine gift and the prospect of the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, actions in the here and now (i.e. in the worldly kingdom) are focused on world social and political orders and on the goal of peace on Earth. Against this background, the theologian Helmut Thielicke sees an eschatological challenge to Christian acts. He states, "It is an impossible enterprise inasmuch as it lies under the disruptive fire of the coming world. Yet it is also a necessary enterprise inasmuch as we live in that field of tension between the two aeons and must find a *modus Vivendi*."<sup>50</sup>

So much for the theoretical findings. From a political science perspective, this means that on their path to eschatological peace, Christian churches always take "worldly concepts" of order into account. This is typical for religions focused on the changing of the secular world towards their religious dogma. In contrast, Hinduism and Buddhism accept the world as it is and concentrate on

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., section VIII.1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., section VIII.2.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Archpriest Tamaz Lomidze, Georgian Orthodox Church in Germany, on September 15, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis Recenter Inventis Et De Jure Belli Hispanoru In Barbaros* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1952 [1532]), 147.

<sup>49</sup> Russian Orthodox Church, *The Basis of the Social Concept* (Moscow, 2000), section VIII.2.

<sup>50</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Theologische Ethik, Vol. 1: Prinzipienlehre. Dogmatische, philosophische und kontrovers theologische Grundlegung* [Theological Ethics, vol. 1: Foundations. Doctrinal, Philosophical and Controversial Theological Foundation] (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958), 75.

the individual soul and the individual convergence towards the dogma.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the Christian religion always sees itself as being integrated in the real world. This interwoven nature, with its political and frequently national aspects, makes it difficult for all parties involved to disentangle religious and worldly motives and to isolate the religious factor even when viewed from an external perspective. As a consequence, the peace-making potential inherent in religion is often not enforced in the specific conflict event. The current challenge consists in avoiding the role of religious players as "double players". In this context, it would be useful to focus intensively on transnational and international religious councils and associations. A strengthening of such global organisations could be an answer to current worldwide developments such as the decline of nation-states, as well as a way to avoid the double role of religious players, especially in times of globalisation.

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<sup>51</sup> See Michael Minkenberg, "*Staat und Kirche in westlichen Demokratien*" [Church and State in Western Democracies], in *Politik und Religion* [Politics and Religion], ed. Michael Minkenberg and Ulrich Willems (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003), 116.