

Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders

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This is the accepted version of the following article:

Matyók, T. (2011). Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders [Review]. *Peace & Change*, 36(2), 297-299. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0130.2010.00695.x,

which has been published in final form at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2010.00695.x>.

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Abstract:

This article is a review of the book “Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders” edited by Mark Rogers, Tom Bamat, and Julie Ideh.

Keywords: Book Review | Peacebuilding | Faith-based initiatives | Advocacy

Article:

Mark Rogers, Tom Bamat, and Julie Ideh, eds. *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*. Baltimore: Catholic Relief Services, 2008.

The book’s title, *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*, understates the significance and relevance of the intertwining goals of peace and justice presented. It is a relatively short but dense book that requires concentration and is well worth the effort. *Pursuing Just Peace* is an important read for all interested in the power of grassroots peacebuilding. This manuscript, organized around the case study format of learning, adds to the literature regarding how theory is put into practice. The authors organize their text around the observation that tensions escalate horizontally through communities and vertically through political processes. Individuals and organizations that can operate on all levels simultaneously are to be valued.

The methodologies and lessons apply to all forms of peacebuilding; they are not limited to faith-based initiatives. The editors of this work do much to address the concern expressed by some that faith-based peacebuilding initiatives focus heavily on peace at the expense of justice (clearly, a legitimate concern). They demonstrate how peace and justice inform each other, and

that one cannot exist for long without the other. The book appears to be guided by Pope Paul II's observation that if we desire peace we must work for justice. Pope Paul's comment recognizes how *positive* peace, outlined by Johan Galtung and others, should be the goal of faith-based conflict workers. The negative peace of a cease-fire should never be accepted as the end state. Peace with justice is the hallmark of many faith-based peacebuilding initiatives.

Faith-based conflict workers, viewed as having a human-centered agenda, possess a credibility that is not easily replicated in secular peacebuilding initiatives. These are accepted at each level of conflict. Through my experience as a human rights advocate, I observed first hand the high degree of credibility attributed to faith-based conflict work by seafarers, industry representatives, and governmental organizations. Faith-based peace and justice advocates can easily move within a multidimensional peacebuilding dynamic practicing conflict resolution within a multi-track diplomacy arena.

On a practical level, the authors suggest common dimensions of a faith-based peacebuilding process: grief and trauma healing, hospitality, confession/apology, justice, and forgiveness. They also propose roles that faith-based peacebuilding advocates can play: observer and witness, educator of others about the conflict situation, advocate, and conciliator and mediator. These roles help frame a unique faith-based approach to peacebuilding. The practice of peacebuilding is made real through the case studies.

A cross-section of case studies is used to communicate Track Seven, faith in action, activities outlined by Diamond and McDonald in *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace*. The three Abrahamic faiths share a recognition that just peace is achieved through "the process of restoring right relationships." *Shalom* in a Judaic-Christian sense and *salaam* from an Islamic perspective are a good place to start. The notion of re-establishing right relationships anchored in "wholeness, fulfillment, completion, unity, and wellbeing" provides conflict workers with a vision of just peace. The organizing principle of *Pursuing Just Peace* is *shalom* and *salaam*.

The authors clearly communicate through the case studies how Track Seven grassroots peacebuilding can focus on simultaneously eliminating structural and direct violence. The desire to re-establish right relationships informs each case study. Section One demonstrates how education and capacity building efforts in Rwanda, Togo, and Colombia contribute to creation of a just peace. Section Two looks at how faith-based organizations can network with "church-based and faith-based organizations...national NGOs, international NGOs, government entities and international organizations" (p. 97) to confront the trafficking of women and girls in Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Section Three uses case studies from India, Philippines, and Uganda to communicate successful ecumenical and inter-religious collaborations in pursuit of justice.

Taken as a whole, *Pursuing Just Peace* is a much-needed addition to the peace and justice debate. It is well-written and well-documented, with a depth of analysis that is persuasive. The

authors present a compelling case for employing faith-based initiatives to achieve justice in the pursuit of peace. The case studies are good examples of promotive, preventative, and preemptive activities. They also demonstrate how seeking peace and justice are simultaneous activities seeking structural and deep cultural change. *Pursuing Just Peace* does an excellent job of reminding its readers that the goal of our efforts is a more peace-centered and just global community.