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## The Integral Nature of Ethnicity and Religion during Northern Ireland's Troubles

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**ABSTRACT** Northern Ireland's Troubles conflict, like many complex conflicts through the world, has often been conceived as considerably motivated by religious differences. This paper demonstrates that religion was often integrated into an ethno-religious identity that fueled sectarian conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland during the Troubles period. Instead of being a religious-based conflict, the conflict derived from historical divides of power, land ownership, and civil and political rights in Ireland over several centuries. It relies on 12 interviews, six Protestants and six Catholics, to measure their use of religious references when referring to their religious *other*. The paper concludes that in the overwhelming majority of cases, both groups did not use religious references, supporting the hypothesis on the integrated nature of ethnicity and religion during the Troubles. It offers grounding for looking into the complex nature of sectarian and seemingly religious conflicts throughout the world, including cases in which religion acts as more of a veneer to deeply rooted identities and historical narratives.

**KEYWORDS:** Troubles (Northern Ireland), ethnicity, religion, sectarian conflict, Catholics, Protestants, attitudes toward the other

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During the Troubles period of the late 1960s through the 1990s, Northern Ireland was roiled by sectarian violence between armed Catholic and Protestant groups. This was the result of a historic intertwining of ethnicity and religion in which these two seemingly disparate elements would coalesce based on a system of wealth, land ownership, colonialization, power structure, and political and civil rights. On the whole, identity formations largely arose in which people who identified primarily as Irish were Catholics, while those who identified as Ulstermen, or British, were generally Protestants.<sup>1</sup> This sectarian identity divide reached a boiling point during Northern Ireland's Troubles period. Critical to comprehending this era of sectarian conflict is the integral nature of religion and ethnicity.

This topic is relevant and important for several reasons. Many atheists today blame religion—whether Islam, Catholicism, Evangelicalism, etc.—for complex sectarian conflicts in the world that often cannot be reduced to simple answers based of religious differences. In many sectarian conflicts, in which religion *seems* to be the primary cause because the conflict is between people who identify as members of different religious groups, religion is integral to an ethnic identity that rests on contemporary and historical power structures. If religion seems to be the primary driver of long-term sectarian conflicts, one ought to

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1. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 87–94.

look again. In Northern Ireland, this particularly proves to be true with religious differences directly related to history, cultural and religious oppression, land confiscation, civil rights, and political power.

Following the migration of Scottish and English Protestants into Ireland from the early seventeenth century after they were granted land by the English Crown, the island was divided along Catholic-Protestant lines. This divide was intrinsic to power relations in the country: by 1688, Catholic landownership was drastically reduced to only 22 percent of the land and it was not until 1829 that Catholics could become members of the Irish Parliament, though by the late nineteenth century, they still were a minority in parliament.<sup>2</sup>

Following the partition of Ireland in the early 1920s, this sense of division and lack of social and political rights for Catholics continued in Northern Ireland under British rule. In the 1960s, a Catholic civil rights movement formed amidst surging violence at the hands of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the British Army, and various Protestant “self-defense” forces, including the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and the United Defence Association (UDA). This culminated into the period of sectarian political violence known as the Troubles.<sup>3</sup> In short, as the history of Ireland proceeded, the ethnic-religious problems between Irish Catholics and Scot-Irish and Anglo-Irish Protestants caused ethnic boundaries to become strengthened.<sup>4</sup>

## DEFINITIONS

Ethnicity is a concept of complex history. It was used by the ancient Greeks and Romans to describe people who were not of Greece or Rome. Similarly, in the medieval period, it was used to describe the *other* non-Turk Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire. Without *others*, the concept of ethnicity would make little sense, as it has historically been used as a process of differentiation and subsequent identification.<sup>5</sup> This brief encapsulation of the history of ethnicity allows one to more succinctly define the term.

Generally, one is born into an ethnicity; it is therefore ascriptive in nature.<sup>6</sup> Belonging to an ethnic group is associated with being part a community based on the mythology of having a fictitious kinship.<sup>7</sup> This sense of psychological community, or imagined community, as Benedict Anderson writes, is based on historical narratives, language, and geographic locality.<sup>8</sup> In summation, ethnicity is a sense of ascriptive group identity based on kinship narratives and community identity.

In defining religion, this paper will primarily defer to Jennifer Todd’s perspective on this subject. She defines religion as a “set of institutionalized beliefs and practices oriented

2. Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics of Conflict*, 20; 38–39.

3. Martin Dillon, *God and the Gun: The Church and Irish Terrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 6–12.

4. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1985), 74.

5. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnicity* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), 19–23.

6. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 87.

7. Claire Mitchell, “The Push and Pull between Religion and Ethnicity: The Case of Loyalists in Northern Ireland,” *Ethnopolitics*, Volume 9, Number 1 (March 2010): 53–69 at 54.

8. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, England: Verso, 1983); Mitchell, “Push and Pull,” 54.

to the sacred.”<sup>9</sup> Religion is composed of ideas closely connected to supernatural powers, theology, prayer, and dogma.<sup>10</sup> Religion, beyond the form of worship and belief in the supernatural, can be used also for social and political purposes. This can include American evangelical beliefs against abortion, the Islamic State’s development of a religious-based state, and Northern Ireland Protestants’ denouncing the putatively oppressive nature of the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup>

It is the goal of this article to demonstrate the interconnected and integral nature of religion and ethnicity in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. This would offer insight into other sectarian conflicts that may seem, at first glance, to be religiously motivated but are driven by the integrated religio-ethnic factor. In the same sense that ethnicity is ascriptive in Northern Ireland, religion is also ascriptive to a certain degree.<sup>12</sup> Despite one’s religiosity or even belief in God, Northern Ireland’s Protestants and Catholics largely identify with being Catholic or Protestant. Thus, this sense of identity is integral to the “territorial sense of historic community” in a divided Northern Ireland.<sup>13</sup> When a Northern Ireland resident informs one that they are Protestant, they are informing one less of their religious beliefs but rather of their ethnic identity as an Ulstermen or a British citizen. When a Northern Ireland Catholic informs one of their religious identity, they are similarly implying that they identify as Irish, not as Anglo-Irish or Scot-Irish.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Northern Ireland’s Troubles suggests three principle notions regarding the religious and ethnic aspects of the conflict. One is that religion is an entity, by itself, that often serves to incite and drive sectarian violence. Another notion is that the dynamics between religion and ethnicity are that of a kind of wrestling match—depending on political and social opportunity and timing, one can subvert the other and vice versa. The third school is most closely aligned to this article: religion and ethnicity in Northern Ireland become inseparable in nature as they jointly adhere to divisions in social structure, history, wealth, power, and political and civil rights. Lastly, literature on the relationship between religion and ethnicity throughout the world will be discussed.

Martin Dillon’s *God and the Gun: The Church and Irish Terrorism* views religion as a chief cause of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.<sup>14</sup> Dillon’s perspective is that for both the Protestant and Catholic, the belief that God is on one’s side pushes each side into committing violent acts.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, he asserts that the British Army viewed the Catholic Church as an adversary. Hence, according to Dillon, the role that religion played in the Troubles is a principal element.

9. Jennifer Todd, “Symbolic Complexity and Political Division: The Changing Role of Religion in Northern Ireland,” *Ethnopolitics*, Volume 9, Number 1 (2010): 85–102 at 86.

10. Mitchell, “Push and Pull,” 54.

11. Tony Parker, *May the Lord in His Mercy Be Kind to Belfast* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 130.

12. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 87.

13. Todd, “Symbolic Complexity,” 86.

14. Dillon, *God and the Gun*.

15. Dillon, *God and the Gun*, 2–3.

The belief that God is on one's side reflects the perspective taken by O'Malley and Walsh; to these scholars, religion is a separate entity from ethnicity in which God can be invoked in support of one's cause.<sup>16</sup> However, O'Malley and Walsh are far more skeptical about the dominance of religion in Northern Ireland's sectarian conflict, contending that it is an instrument used within an ethnic conflict rather than a principal cause of the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Scholar Claire Mitchell has two articles analyzing the relationship between ethnicity and religion in Northern Ireland: "The Push and Pull between Religion and Ethnicity: The Case of Loyalists in Northern Ireland" (referred to as "Push and Pull") and "Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland" (referred to as "Ethnic Marker"). "Push and Pull" contends that the interrelationship of religion and ethnicity is one that continuously changes shape, depending on timing and opportunity. For instance, sometimes religion can reinforce ethnicity, as it did with the call to arms of the Loyalist militant group Tara in the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Other times, tension between religion and ethnicity can cause terrorists to reevaluate their use of violence, as happened to Loyalist paramilitary leader Billy Wright in 1997.<sup>19</sup>

"Ethnic Marker" uses a constructivist perspective to demonstrate how religion impacted the Troubles, communal identity, and Northern Irish politics. It argues that religion is more than simply a Catholic or Protestant label to represent one's ethnicity, but it encompasses a realm of religious traditions that impacts culture, values, and social life.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Mitchell asserts that since Northern Ireland has one of the highest rates of religiosity in Europe, religion is a separate entity from ethnicity in its impact on politics and societal division.<sup>21</sup>

Mitchell, who maintains that religion impacts the sectarian nature of Northern Ireland as a separate entity than ethnicity, cannot help but note examples in which religion and ethnic identity are integral: loyalist women from a Protestant section of Belfast known as Shankill Road attended a church service on a day that they would later protest at Drumcree, Northern Ireland, but they did not know the words to the religious hymns. Another Loyalist paramilitary man shed tears when presented with the Bible by a Protestant minister, though he was "unlikely to read it."<sup>22</sup> In each case, they are Protestant but not religious. Through their opposition to Northern Ireland's Catholics (who identify as ethnic Irish), their integrated religio-ethnic identity strengthens and becomes more cohesive.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to the view held in "Ethnic Marker," being Catholic and Protestant are to a great degree integral to ethnicity and, in fact, act as de facto ethnic markers of identification and differentiation in Northern Ireland.

16. Eoin O'Malley and Dawn Walsh, "Religion and democratization in Northern Ireland: Is religion actually ethnicity in disguise?" *Democratization*, Volume 20, Number 5 (2013): 939-958.

17. O'Malley and Walsh, "Religion and democratization," 954.

18. Mitchell, "Push and Pull," 58.

19. Mitchell, "Push and Pull," 61.

20. Claire Mitchell, Claire, "Behind The Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland," *Sociology of Religion*, Volume 66, Issue 1 (Spring 2005): 3-21 at 6.

21. Mitchell, "Ethnic Marker," 18-19.

22. Mitchell, "Push and Pull," 58.

23. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 74.

While Jennifer Todd does not go so far as to contend that religion and ethnicity in Northern Ireland's sectarian conflict are integral, she does place religion, ethnicity, and nationality coexisting in "symbolic complexity" within the political division of Northern Ireland.<sup>24</sup> She maintains that values derived from religion create ethnic and political identity within the country.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, while the ethnic-religious relationship is not integral, they are closely connected to the extent that one constructs the other.

Paschalis Kitromilides writes about the dynamism between religion and ethno-nationalism in the Balkan Peninsula, which, in a sense, is similar to Ireland during the nineteenth century in that they were both ruled by foreign, imperial powers.<sup>26</sup> The regional Orthodox Christian churches in the Balkans were reluctant to embrace the ethno-national movements in the region; however, when national independence became a forgone conclusion, national Orthodox churches broke away from the Patriarchate of Constantinople forming their own churches.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that after ethno-nationalism began to increase as a sociopolitical movement, religion would follow, adapting to a new socio-political reality. In this case, religion and ethnicity are not integral but have a similar "push and pull" dynamic outlined by Claire Mitchell.<sup>28</sup>

While considerably unlike Ireland and Northern Ireland in many respects, Jean-Pierre Lehmann points to the very close relationship between ethnicity and religion in Japan. Lehmann describes the relationship between the Japanese people and the Shinto religion as "inextricable," reminding the reader that Japan is the only country in which Shintoism is practiced. Furthermore, Lehmann contends that the Shinto religion may have contributed to the development of a Japanese national consciousness, though he maintains that a religious nationalism was not prevalent in modern Japanese history.<sup>29</sup> In the sense that Lehmann views religion and ethnicity in Japan as "inextricable," it supports this article's thesis; however, as Japan faced little-to-no sectarian division in the modern era, as did Ireland and Northern Ireland, the support goes only so far.<sup>30</sup>

Scholar John Armstrong writes about the interwoven "ethnoreligious identity" of Jews and Armenians throughout history. Jewish and Armenian "ethnoreligious identity" derives from origin myths, occupational roles, diasporic identity, and subjugation to other peoples. The term "ethnoreligious" certainly implies an interchangeable dynamic between ethnicity and religion in these peoples. Yet, while diasporic identity may weigh heavily on people of Irish descent in foreign countries, for obvious reasons it is not prevalent in Ireland or Northern Ireland. Therefore, while the integral nature of religion and identity in Armstrong's perspective is an observable phenomenon, it does not occur in the similar situation of Northern Ireland.<sup>31</sup> Thus, this article will attempt to close the gap on research in "ethnoreligious identity" in divided societies and conflict regions by examining Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

24. Todd, "Symbolic Complexity," 85.

25. Todd, "Symbolic Complexity," 85.

26. Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, 202–208.

27. Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, 202–208.

28. Mitchell, "Push and Pull."

29. Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, 118–119.

30. Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, 119.

31. Hutchinson and Smith, *Ethnicity*, 122–123.

## METHODOLOGY

The article's *hypothesis* used to study the integral nature of religion and ethnicity during Northern Ireland's troubles is the following: Catholics and Protestants are less likely to use religious references than non-religious references when discussing one another. To test this hypothesis, a mixed qualitative and quantitative content analysis was performed on the early 1990s narrative interviews conducted on Belfast residents within the 1993 book *May the Lord in His Mercy Be Kind to Belfast* by Tony Parker.

Twelve interviews were semi-randomly selected from Parker's book. Their selection was dependent on a couple of factors. First, the interview contained one or more reference(s) of "Catholic" in Protestant interviews and "Protestant" in Catholic interviews. Second, the interview was not conducted with either Catholic or Protestant religious figures, as they would be more likely than not to use religious references in discussing the sectarian "other," thereby creating biased results.

The dependent variables of the hypothesis are non-religious and religious references. Indicators for religious references are any words denoting or related to *sacred*, including *prayer, theology, dogma, clergy, pope, and church*. Indicators for non-religious references are words that do not fall into the religious category, including *school, intermarriage, neighborhoods, discrimination, and identity*. The independent variables are the attitudes of Catholics and Protestants in Belfast.

More specifically, the analysis was carried out using the following qualitative methodology: each time a Protestant mentions the word *Catholic* or a Catholic the word *Protestant*, the unit of measurement, the sentence, was qualitatively analyzed and, only if necessary, the sentences around it were as well. If, for example, a Protestant mentions the word *Catholic* in the context of "religious differences," one religious reference was noted. If a Catholic mentions the word *Protestant* and refers to their schooling, this was categorized as a non-religious reference. The religious and non-religious references were quantitatively tallied and then the religious references were divided into the combined religious and non-religious references to demonstrate the total percentage of religious references.

## METHODOLOGY: RATIONALE AND PROBLEMS

The methodology of interview content analysis was chosen for many reasons. Interviews with Belfast residents were selected because Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland and saw much of the sectarian violence throughout the Troubles. Also, the Troubles was a conflict in which all members of Protestant and Catholic communities were drawn into, whether they chose to be or not. Additionally, the members who divided societies, which gave rise to militias and armed groups that protected perceived community interests, were also drivers of the conflict to varying degrees. Therefore, measuring their attitudes toward their ethno-religious "other" is a good way to understand religious, ethnic, and social attitudes during the conflict.

When one generally discusses Muslims, Catholics, Hindus, Protestants—or any person who adheres to a specific religion—they are discussing people who are religious and are, arguably, more likely than not to discuss some aspects of their beliefs. For Muslims,

perhaps it is fasting during Ramadan; for Catholics, it may be confessions to a priest; and for Protestants, it could be their understanding of the Bible. However, when ethnicity and religion are intertwined in a way in which their meanings are integral, they will be less likely to refer to one another with religious references.

A problem that the methodology poses is that studying the religious and non-religious references of Protestants and Catholics in Belfast does not confirm nor deny the article's hypothesis. One could argue that a Catholic using the word *Protestant* in non-religious terms does not necessarily prove that ethnicity and religion are interchangeable. However, this problem can be superseded when we understand that members of religious groups are generally referred to within a religious context.

Another problem posed by the study's methodology is that perhaps Belfast residents are not representative of the entire Northern Ireland population. Residents of Derry (or Londonderry) or rural areas may significantly differ from Belfast residents. As this author did not find interviews of the entire Northern Ireland population during his research, the interviews of Belfast residents will have to suffice due to practicality concerns and time constraints.

## DATA

The initial data derived from the study can be seen in Table 1.1. It confirms the hypothesis that when referring to their sectarian "other" (Catholics referring to Protestants and Protestants to Catholics), they were less likely to use religious than non-religious references.

Overall, among both Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, religious references were used only 21.5 percent of the time out of a total of 65 references. When Protestants referred to Catholics, they used religious references 27.1 percent of the time. Meanwhile, when Catholics referred to Protestants, religious references were used only 6.7 percent of the time. This data could mean that Protestants take issue more with the Catholic religion, and that the sectarian conflict is thereby more of a religious issue for Protestants than for Catholics. On the other hand, Catholics' minimal references to the Protestant religion could suggest that they view the conflict through a more historical lens of natives versus settlers, which heavily weighs on their ethnic identity as Irish. However, the data does not fully confirm each of these directions that the research seems to point; thus, more research on this subject would be welcome.

Because the information of the content analysis provided information on the sex, age, and occupation or student status, the data was broken down into demographic categories as seen in Table 2.1 below.

As can be seen in Table 2.1, the demographic group most likely to use religious references when referring to their sectarian "other" were Protestant males. Yet, when using the word *Catholic*, Protestant males still used it only in a religious context 30.8 percent of the time. Meanwhile, the demographic entity least likely to use religious references were Catholic males, as they did not refer to Protestants in a religious context at all.

Interestingly, the youth of Belfast were less likely than adults to use religious references when speaking of the religious "other." This could mean that, like many places throughout

TABLE 1.1. Catholics' and Protestants' religious and non-religious references when speaking of one another

Religion	Non-religious references	Religious references	Total	Percentage of religious references
Total	51	14	65	21.5
Protestants	35	13	48	27.1
Catholics	14	1	15	6.7

TABLE 2.1. Demographic breakdown of religious and non-religious references

Demographic	Non-religious references	Religious references	Total	Percentage of religious references
Youth	14	3	17	17.6
Protestant youth	11	2	13	15.4
Catholic youth	3	1	4	25
Female	21	6	27	22.2
Male	30	8	38	21.1
Protestant female	17	5	22	22.7
Protestant male	18	8	26	30.8
Catholic male	11	0	11	0
Catholic female	4	1	5	20

the world, the youth are less religious-minded. It could also suggest that by not being guided by religion in how they see the “other,” they are more open to peace. As peace has largely remained in Northern Ireland in the nearly twenty years since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, perhaps the youth attitudes of the early 1990s were a key component to maintaining longer-term peace.

Among men and women, the referencing of the sectarian “other” in religious terms is roughly equal, with women doing so 22.2 percent and men 21.1 percent of the time. However, as previously mentioned, Catholic men mentioned the word “Protestant” in a religious context zero percent of the time. The overall similarity between men and women of Belfast, with the exception of Catholic males, may be attributed to their possible equal levels of religiosity.

## DISCUSSION

As Catholics and Protestants of Belfast were far more likely to use non-religious than religious references when referring to one another, the thesis that religion and ethnicity are integral in Northern Ireland’s Troubles period is supported. The data points to the fact that in Northern Ireland the history of settler versus native, wealth versus less wealth, landownership versus land confiscation, political and civil rights versus

oppression are all intrinsically based on an inseparable ethno-religious identity that developed and became ossified throughout Ireland's history. While religiosity is high in Northern Ireland compared with other regions of Western Europe, it was not a main cause of the Troubles.<sup>32</sup>

However, while the predominance of Catholics and Protestants using non-religious references when referring to one another supports the thesis that religion and ethnicity were integral within Northern Ireland's Troubles period, it does not prove the hypothesis categorically. As the hypothesis is an abstract concept based on evidence from the conflict and Irish history, there is no absolute way to prove it. For example, the following instance may seemingly call into question the paper's thesis: UDV militiaman Kenny McClinton's religious invocation to support his violence and beheadings during the Troubles may seem to yield the conclusion that religion, in itself, was a critical factor in the conflict.<sup>33</sup> Surely his actions garnered news headlines from his belief that his violent acts were blessed by God. Yet these and other news-grabbing headlines during the Troubles that focus on religious differences obfuscate the underlying ethno-religious divide based on history and power that sits at the conflict's roots.

Further research on ethno-religious identity in Northern Ireland and other seemingly religious based conflicts, including Palestine, Burma, and Iraq, is crucial to understanding the underlying causes of conflicts. Once underlying causes are detected, actual solutions to conflicts can be devised, based on historical understandings, and mutual trust can be rebuilt. International policy toward sectarian conflicts would similarly be in a stronger position to resolve conflicts with a greater understanding of their integrated historical ethno-religious nature. Perhaps equally important is public opinion, which often acts as a driver to international policy toward sectarian conflicts. Should the public understand that conflicts are often fueled by more than simple religious radicalism, they would likely have greater willingness in allowing their policymakers to offer what is often difficult and painstaking mediation to conflict. Not merely would the public have a greater understanding but also greater patience for their policymakers in working toward conflict resolution. For instance, when a radical Protestant kills a Catholic, it is not necessarily because he is a Catholic but more likely because he is an ethnic *Irish* Catholic, whose religio-ethnic identity is intertwined, and poses a threat to Protestants' social and political position of relative power in Northern Ireland. The public's comprehension of such complexity would give their representatives more negotiation leeway in international conflict mediation, making a peaceful outcome more likely.

Additionally, scholars seeking to understand how peace in Northern Ireland came about—beyond political agreements and the Good Friday Accords—could look to the attitudes of Protestants and Catholics toward one another during the 2000s and in the 2010s. Additionally, as the youth attitudes in this study were less focused on religion, research could study whether youth attitudes were crucial in allowing for a more open perspective that helped consolidate peace in the decades that followed.

32. O'Malley and Walsh, "Religion and democratization," 954.

33. Dillon, *God and the Gun*, 19–25.

## CONCLUSION

This article showed that religion and ethnicity were of an integral nature in Northern Ireland during the Troubles period. It relied upon a qualitative analysis of interviews of twelve Belfast residents in the early 1990s (six Catholics and six Protestants) that was then transposed into quantitative data and further analyzed. The hypothesis was confirmed that Catholics and Protestants are less likely to use religious references when referring to one another, supporting the thesis of the integrality of religion and ethnicity during the Troubles.

The implications for this article are global in nature. Religion principally has meaning in personal and group identity, prayer, dogma, culture, theology, and many other sectors. It can also be a driver of conflict. Yet, when trying to understand conflict, religion is often integrated or simply utilized to further socio-political ends. In Northern Ireland's case, the religious factor was an integral ethnic-religious identity, while in other regions there are likely other factors at work compounded with religion. Conflicts—Boko Haram in Nigeria or even ISIS—thought to be driven by primarily religious radicalism are conceived in a far different way than those driven by historical grievances, identity, and ethnicity. Should one get beyond the veil of religion, the complex nature of conflicts can be revealed. Through the comprehension of conflicts' complexity, policymakers, the public, and international organizations can begin to more adequately address conflicts and offer a more substantive approach to peacebuilding. ■