

## RESENSIES/ REVIEWS

SHORE, Megan. 2009. *Religion and conflict resolution: Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Basingstoke: Ashgate. 211pp. 2009 ISBN 978-0-7546-6759-9 (hardcover)  
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“Religion and conflict resolution,” as field of study, may be viewed as a relatively new area of specialization in contemporary international studies and more specifically in political studies. This may be attributed to the fact that religion has made a dramatic comeback into the public arena after decades of marginalization, and that it has gradually played a positive role in developmental affairs internationally. In the light of these developments, Megan Shore – who is a staff at the University of Western Ontario in Canada – decidedly paid attention to this area by giving particular attention to the way Christianity influenced the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the general outcomes in this post-conflict nation-state.

In Shore’s somewhat short introduction (p. 1-5), she – as a Christian academic – recorded her deep interest regarding the interplay between religion and politics and she en passant mentioned her intimate familiarity with the conflicts that had taken place in Guatemala and Northern Ireland. From her first-hand experience and insights into the mentioned post-conflict communities, she firmly believed in the potential that religion possesses in playing a positive role in resolving political conflicts. Armed with this experience, Shore embarked upon her doctoral project under the joint supervision of Kevin Ward (Leeds University) and Nigal Biggar (Oxford University) that focused on the ambiguous position that Christianity held in relation to South Africa’s TRC process and which she revised and transformed into this book. During the time when Shore pursued her research, she admitted having benefitted from Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson’s *The missing dimension of statecraft* (1994) and Scott Appleby’s *The ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, violence and reconciliation* (2000) that have demonstrated religion’s critical role as “the missing link” in international affairs. Since Shore examined religion’s role as a tool of “conflict resolution” within the South African context, she hypothesized that Christianity had a pivotal influence on the post-conflict reconstruction phase of the South African nation.

Shore, who divided her book into two parts, slotted in the first part two chapters that helped in “Setting the context of the study”. She essentially outlined the “Religious conflict resolution and (used) the case of the South

African TRC” (pp. 9-34) as a significant example in Chapter 2. Herein Shore placed the TRC in a broad context of “religious conflict resolution;” an approach that she considered as a possible alternative to prevailing practice of “international conflict resolution” – the established tradition. She explained what was understood by this tradition before discussing the relationship that existed between religion and conflict resolution. Using Scott Appleby and others as a guide, she argued in favour of religion being taken seriously since it has a stake in resolving communal conflicts and holds a strong position within civil society. After charting out a theoretical frame, she reflected upon the place that the South African TRC holds within the larger context of Truth Commissions. Although we do not have any major problems with this theoretical account, we note the absence of a critical review of the sizeable amount of literature that zoomed in on the relationship between Christianity and the TRC in this particular chapter. If Shore consulted all of the extant literature on the topic then her argument for a religious conflict resolution within the South African context might have been reasonably beefed up.

With this theoretical chapter as a background, Shore discussed the ambiguous relationship that existed between “Apartheid and Christianity” (pp. 35-55) in Chapter 3. Shore discoursed how Christianity was employed by the Apartheid regime to justify its prejudiced policies and how it was used by the anti-apartheid organizations to bring this discriminatory system down. Since Christianity showed its resilience to fight the Apartheid regime and possessed the necessary organizational capacity, Shore argued that these characteristics inevitably assisted devoted Christian leaders such as Rev Dr. Desmond Tutu and Dr. Alex Boraine – when they were eventually appointed as Chair and Deputy Chair of South Africa’s TRC – to play key roles in leading and guiding the TRC process. Despite the brevity of this chapter, Shore identified those players who used Christian theology to support Apartheid as a political system and those Christian voices that employed the anti-apartheid platforms and rhetoric to counter it.

When Shore went about “Evaluating the role of Christianity played in the TRC” in Part Two, she critically assessed “The role of Christianity in the implementation of the TRC” in Chapter 4 (pp. 59-74). In it she recognized and pointed out some of the TRC Christian figures before she commented on the “Christian ritual” that was seen to have been associated with it; and in the final part of this chapter she interrogated the controversy surrounding Christianity’s part in the TRC. It would perhaps have been insightful if Shore had expanded upon the central position that each of the mentioned Christian actors played in the running of the TRC. Besides Tutu and Boraine, the one intriguing figure who has generally not been looked at was Dr. Charles Villa-Vicencio, who is the former University of Cape

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Town theology professor that went on to establish the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town soon after the TRC's closure. As far as we know, not many articles have scrutinized Villa-Vicencio's status as the official Director of Research at the TRC and the indirect influence he has had in infusing the TRC process with a Christian ethos and how his inputs might have had on the emergence and development of a "religious conflict resolution". A discussion on these Christian personalities in relation to the general thrust of Shore's proposed "religious conflict resolution" would have enriched our understanding of the post-TRC process. Notwithstanding these remarks, Shore's evaluation of Christianity and its relationship with and responsibility in the TRC opened the path for a specific focus on and discussion of "Truth and Truth-Telling" in Chapter 5 (pp.75-106), "Reconciliation" in Chapter 6 (pp. 107-140) and "Justice" in Chapter 7 (pp. 141-172).

Apart from having relied upon the TRC's Final Report for a working definition of "truth" in Chapter 5, Shore showed how Christianity assisted in the "truth-telling" process and the contradictory nature of this term as it unfolded at the TRC; and she also established to what extent the respective HRV and AC hearings manufactured two different versions of "truth." When she analyzed "reconciliation" as a critical concept and as "an attempt to restore moral order" (p. 139) in Chapter 6, she concluded that it complemented "truth and truth-telling". Since the TRC stressed that its objective was to promote and not achieve reconciliation, Shore highlighted the different factors that problematized this concept and argued for the acceptance of two specific streams of reconciliation, namely "a moral-religious stream" and "a legal-political stream". In spite of her own proposed streams, she turned to Tristan Anne Borer's two models (i.e. inter-personal and national unity models) as viable ones that were operational throughout the TRC.

Shore's chapter on "Justice" effectively responded to the four criticisms that were made against the TRC process; one of which was against Christianity. She came to the defence of Christianity, which was accused of having impeded the seeking of justice at the TRC, by stating that it was unfairly targeted since it was in the vanguard of dismantling Apartheid. She concurred that even though retributive justice might not have been met at the TRC, its general acceptance of restorative justice was a reasonable compromise and that the basic requirements of justice were met. Shore basically ended off by commenting on two issues in her concluding chapter (pp. 173-180); the first was a summary of the relationship that existed between "Christianity and the TRC" and the second was underscoring the "Lessons for religious conflict resolution."

Apart from the concerns that we raised with certain aspects of the book, we found Shore's book to have been a valuable and an interesting contribution to what may be described as a relatively new and challenging field of inquiry. The book will be informative not only to international relations and political science specialists but to those in the field of religious studies.

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