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Tradition as a Peacebuilding Tool

Abstract

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The concept of tradition, rather like that of secularism, has come to mean different things to different people in a variety of contexts. This Chapter explores an understanding of tradition as that group of rules or practices which sits alongside core governing texts of groups within civil society. It identifies tradition as that which facilitates the contextualisation of civil society groups over time. It then examines how tradition could be used as a tool for engendering peaceful civil society relations. To do this it first explains the rationale for identifying plural religious traditions as important for strong civil society building, including for the protection of fundamental rights and the socio-economic well-being of a nation. Tradition is then proposed as a means of countering the exclusion of plural religious voices from the public square arising both as a result of the secular narrative manifesting itself in extreme forms of *Laïcité* and as a result of forms of theocracy and confessionalism. It does this by identifying the development of the concept of tradition, setting out dictionary definitions, definitions within the discipline of law and their interaction and links with the definitions within the three Abrahamic faiths. The overarching thesis drawing these threads together is that the various methods of forming and using tradition by intermediate institutions of civil society could inform the creation of a platform as a dialogical basis to build consensus amongst individuals, institutions of civil society and governments. The integrity and identity of each party would be maintained, since core texts would remain intact, whilst developing a means of contextualisation of civil society groups building consensus. It is proposed that this could facilitate reciprocal accommodation - by society of intermediate groups and of society by these groups. Multivalent reasoning, including religious reasoning, is suggested as the tool to facilitate dialogue in order to build this plural consensus, in particular to envisage the common good, and to inform law creation and adjudication. Tradition is put forward as a platform for dialogue to bolster the right to freedom of religion and consequently other fundamental rights, in particular in those states where a plurality of religious voices is seen as a threat rather than a richly diverse canvas upon which to paint the interactions of civic life and formulate the law that governs those interactions.