Title: RELIGIOUS HARMONY FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

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The world is faced with conflict and violence today. In fact there has been no period in history, which has not witnessed violent conflicts. It is also important to remember that root cause of conflict is often injustice with weaker sections of society and the weaker sections may be poor, may be linguistic, cultural or religious minorities or migrants from other countries. Justice and peace, it should be remembered, are inseparable. Peace can never be established by using mere rhetoric or exhortation.

Conflict resolution is an extremely challenging job. It requires not only correct understanding of the causes of conflict but also inexhaustible degree of patience. The nature of the conflict differs from case to case.

As in all religions of the world and its Holy doctrines and scriptures, the central theme and practice of peace has been repeatedly emphasized.

Religion is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life .Religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. To transform the conflicts besetting the world today, we need to uncover the conceptions of peace within our diverse religious and cultural traditions, while seeking the common ground among them. The relationship between religion and conflict is, in fact, a complex one. Religiously-motivated peace builders have played important roles in addressing many conflicts around the world.

Religion and religious sentiments have been misused in a perverse manner to reach certain selfish, self-centered goals. Political leadership entangled in power craving national politics, with a twisted vision of dictating the rest of the world, instigated further by religious fundamentalists, have led as a reaction to this state of terrorism. Thus, on the one hand, while world views and the United Nations and other smaller institutions have been consolidating their status in the globalized world, the ever increasing close proximity of nations have also been feeding the religiously motivated politicians with the concept of world domination. It is common knowledge that every religion professes peace among all religious creed and followers within any society or nation. It is also known that the basic values taught by all religions are the same, and these all strive to lay the foundation of a peaceful, prosperous

society. In fact, the commonality of basic values of life and living should have inspired common views on issues confronting mankind.

Religion is a complex phenomenon, defying definition or summary. Almost as many definitions and theories of religion exist as there are authors on the subject. In the broadest terms, three approaches are generally taken to the scholarly study of religion: the historical, the phenomenological, and the behavioral or social – scientific.

Historical

The historical approach deals, with necessity, with texts, whether these are the doctrinal, devotional, or ritual texts that stem from the religious community per se or secular documents such as statistics through which the historian attempts to reconstruct the religious life of a community. The historians may weave both types of documents together to create a rich sense of the role of religion in the life of people as a whole.

Phenomenological

The phenomenological study of religion, although often starting with the results of the historian, is directed toward discovering the nature of religion - the fundamental characteristics that lie behind its historical manifestations. The phenomenological tradition has been criticized; both by the historians and the social scientists, for losing sight of the details of particular religion in overly general comparison and speculation, but contemporary scholars are attempting to overcome these problems by dissolving the artificial boundaries between the disciplines.

Social

A clear example of this tendency may be seen in the rise of social scientific studies of religion in the last hundred years. Psychology, sociology, and especially anthropology studies have contributed great depth to the understanding of religious phenomena.

One problem usually associated with the psychological approach is the difficulty of moving from the individual's experience to the structure and experience of the religious community. This problem has been confronted by the sociological and the anthropological traditions since the last third of the 19th century.

The year 1922 is sometimes taken as marking the beginning of modern anthropology and with it the complex studies of existing cultures and their religions that have done much to illuminate contemporary thought about religion.

In a world where the status and future of religion is in so many ways uncertain, understanding of religious concepts is not likely to be reached with extreme views, whether this extremism takes the form of a dogmatic and isolationist claim to the superiority of an individual's own

faith or a vague blurring of the genuine differences among the traditions. A middle ground must be established by those who accept the need for patient dialogue to uncover and explore both the agreements and disagreements among the religions. This aims at deepening the commitment and understanding of religious groups in their own traditions while at the same time making them more open to and ready to learn from other traditions.

Religion and Modernity

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religion became mobile, separated from traditional community life. While modernity has affected the entire globe in some ways, the privatization of religion has not been a universal experience for the world's communities. The process and effects of secularization have been halting and mixed. While 78 percent of the world's states are secular, 78.3 percent of the global population adheres to one of the world's five largest religions.

In the western world, especially as understood through the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, has heavily influenced conflict resolution and international relations. As such, these academic disciplines and their practical applications have incorporated elements of secularization theory and marginalized the influence of religion in their analysis of world affairs The roots of this tendency can be traced to the development of the western understanding of religion, which is marked by different from pre-modern and some non-Western understandings.

Changes in the context of international relations and conflict resolution have been matched by changes internal to many religious traditions. Positive responses to the human rights era, globalization, and fundamentalism have included the growth of the Christian ecumenical movement, increased pursuit of interfaith dialogue, and the development of coalitions across religious, secular, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Within this current of change, some religious leaders and groups have an increased interest and capacity in conflict resolution. While this necessarily involves training in contemporary conflict resolution techniques and approaches, religious actors can also draw upon their identities as participants in a social and spiritual tradition. Interfaith now, more than ever, solution of peace on not just issues of religious differences, but as a means to solve political, cultural, ethnic, racial and socio-economic differences.

No matter what becomes of the secularization debate, the privatization of religion has had as yet its strongest influence only in the West, which represents less than one-sixth of the world's population. Understanding the way identity and morality are formed in this context gives foundation to the concept of religious peace building. The social theory of Alasdair MacIntyre provides a useful vehicle for beginning such an exploration. Grown from Aristotelian thought, it argues the importance of community in forming, continuing, and rejecting morality and tradition.

However, the New World Order cannot be understood without accounting for the role of religion and religious organizations. During the Cold War, not much attention was paid to the phenomenon of nationalism and religion. Marxists, Liberals, nation-builders and integration

specialists treated it as a marginal variable. In the Western political systems a frontier has been drawn between man's inner life and his public actions, between religion and politics. The West is characterized by a desecularisation of politics and a depolarization of religion. Part of the Western opinion views religion as irrational and premodern; "a throw-back to the dark centuries before the Enlightenment taught the virtues of rationality and decency, and bent human energies to constructive, rather than destructive purposes".

In the Communist block, religion was officially stigmatized as the opium of the people and repressed. In theories of integration and modernization, secularization was considered a 'sine qua non' for progress. Consequently, the explosion of nationalist and ethnic conflicts was a great surprise.

Religious Peace-making

The greatest challenge to religious peace building is the ambivalence of religion. Ambivalence undermines the perception of the enterprise and enables intra-religious sabotage of its progress. The challenges of religious violence notwithstanding, however, there are many points of criticism within the developing processes of religious peace building.

While addressing the 5th Annual Lecture of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, at the University of Maryland in 1999, Former Lebanese president Amine Gemayel offered his vision of a world that could overcome conflict. He spoke of the imminent need for a "synthesis of religious tenets" as "an essential prerequisite for conflict resolution on a global scale. He suggested that "the time has come for the creation of a new universal forum that draws together thinkers, philosophers, theologians, poets, and artists from several backgrounds and nations, great and small." And he concluded these ideas by suggesting that "through a consultative process, a widespread agreement can be achieved and controversy avoided."

Several factors endow religions and religious organizations with a great and under-utilized potential for constructive conflict management.

First, more than two thirds of the world population belongs to a religion. In 1992, 29.2% of the religious constituency was Christian; 17.9% Muslim; 13% Hindu; 5.7% Buddhist/Shintoist; 0.7% Confucianism/Taoist. Together, all these religious organizations have a huge infrastructure with a communication network reaching to all corners of the world.

Second, religious organizations have the capacity to mobilize people and to cultivate attitudes of forgiveness, conciliation. They can also prevent dehumanization. They have the capacity to motivate and mobilize people for a more peaceful world. Religious and humanitarian values are one of the main roots of voluntarism in all countries: doing something for someone else without expecting to be paid for .When a need is seen, they want to do something about it. They are a force to be reckoned with.

Third, religious organizations can rely on a set of power sources to influence the peace process. Raven and Rubin (1983) developed a useful taxonomy for understanding the different bases of power. It asserts that six different sources of power exist for influencing another's behavior: reward, coercion, expertise, legitimacy, reference, and information.

Reward power is used when the influencer offers some positive benefits in exchange for compliance.

To mediate, religious organizations can rely on several sources of power. Religious leaders could refer to their 'spiritual power' and speak in the name of God.

Fourth, religious organizations could also use hard sources of power. Some religious organizations have reward power, not only in terms of promising economic aid, but, for example, by granting personal audiences. Usage could also be made of coercive power by mobilizing people to protest certain policies. Integrative power , or power of 'love' is based on such relationships as respect, affection, love, community and identity.

Fifth, there is a growing need for non-governmental peace services. Non-governmental actors can fulfill tasks for which traditional diplomacy is not well equipped. They would provide information not readily available to traditional diplomats; they could create an environment in which parties could meet without committing themselves. They could monitor the conflict dynamics, involve the people at all levels, and assess the legitimacy of peace proposals and agreements.

Sixth, most can make use of their transnational organization to provide peace services.
 Finally, there is the fact that religious organizations are in the field and could fulfill several of the above peace services.

However, several weaknesses limit the impact of religious organizations in building a world safe from conflict. Several religious organizations are still perpetrators of different kinds of violence.
Also inhibiting religious peace-making efforts is the fact that, religious organizations tend to be reactive players. They seem to respond better to humanitarian relief efforts after a conflict has escalated than to potential violence. Another weakness is the lack of effective cooperation between religious organizations. Most of the peace making or peace-building efforts are uncoordinated. Finally, there is a need for more professional expertise in conflict analysis and management.

Islam and Conflict Resolution

Islam has taught very pragmatic and durable ways of conflict resolution from the very beginning. The theme of the Sura Yusuf represents a process of conflict resolution between the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and the Qureysh who conspired to kill the prophet forcing him to emigrate from Makkah to Al –Madina.

However, in the end, the Quresh had to humble themselves before Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), just as the brothers of the Prophet Yusuf (Peace Be upon Him) humbly requested him "Show mercy to us for Allah rewards richly those who show mercy. And Prophet Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him) generously forgave them though he had complete power to inflict his vengeance upon them.

The same story of mercy was repeated when, after the conquest of Makkah, the defeated Quresh stood meekly before the prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), who had full power to inflict his vengeance upon them for each and every cruelty committed by them. But instead, he forgave them very generously saying the same answer Prophet Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him)gave to his brothers- "Today no penalty shall be inflicted upon you: you are forgiven".

Sura Al-Hujurat provided guidance towards attitudes that Muslim should adopt in cases where groups of Muslims have conflict with each other. Muslims are exhorted to safeguard against the evils that corrupt collective life and spoil mutual relationships such as mocking each other, calling names, creating suspicions, spying into other people's affairs. All of these evils are declared as forbidden and unlawful. In addition, national and racial discriminations that cause universal corruption in the world are also condemned in Islam.

The history of early Islamic period shows the practical benefit of peace by signing the treaty of Hudaibiya that neutralized the Quraish in any conflict between the Muslims and the Jews.

It is clear if political leadership refrains from using religion for power striving goals, or restrains religious fundamentalists from influencing their visions and policies, world would have a better opportunity to converge in resolving the dangerous challenges facing the twenty-first century world. But in the time of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) the period was blessed with a secular environment as ordained by Almighty Allah in the Holy Book. During the time his lifetime of governance, followers of all religions-Christians, Jews and Muslims lived in peace and harmony in the vast Islamic Empire established under his leadership. Similarly, in today's globalize world, if the common values shared by all religions are practiced and applied in an uninhabited manner in meeting world crises, worldviews would invariably be consensual and unanimous in text and fervor in resolving them. Religious organizations have a major impact on inter-communal and international conflicts. During the Cold War, religious as well as ethnic and nationalist conflicts were relatively neglected in the study of international relations and peace research. After the implosion of the communist block, the escalation of nationalist violence was a surprise. Some expect an escalation of religious conflicts as well. Despite an increase in the attention to the religious dimension of conflicts, it remains an under-researched field.

The world cannot survive without a new global ethic, and religions play a major role, as parties in violent conflicts, and as active peace-makers and peace-builders. Hans Küngs' thesis that there cannot be world peace without religious peace is right. Representing two thirds of the world population, religions have a major responsibility in creating a constructive conflict

culture. They will have to end conflicts fueled by religion and organize themselves to provide more effective peace services.

Conclusion

In an evolving globalize world, there has been emerging new and common challenges facing the whole of mankind, some of dire consequences. The importance and need of cogent and cohesive world views in the face of devastating crisis was felt never before than in the last century. The two world wars and the sacrifice of millions of lives expedited the process of the need of converging world views in the face of disasters. The First World War led to the League of Nations that failed when the then world opinion surrendered to the whims of great powers. It was the Second World War driven by unbridled ambition and greed that culminated with worldwide demand for the United Nations, thus created in 1947.

The primary objective of the United Nations was to establish and maintain international peace and security. The mode to ensure such a universal state was to use the forum for exchanging views and formulating common positions on issues threatening destabilization of any region of the world. This time around, the international institution, a need of the time, became an instant and sustained success. Aside containing, dissolving, or even intervening in the event of confrontational crises threatening sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, the institution began spanning its wings to encompass areas of economic, social, and humanitarian concerns. The expansion in newer areas came about through discussions, deliberations, negotiations, basically through exchange of diversity of national views and their convergence into universal consensus agreements on issues adversely affecting humanity at large. Thus, common strategies have been evolved with cooperation of all member states to face and avert challenges and dangers arising from time to time.

As the twenty first century appeared with its own unique brand of problems portending danger of far sinister and greater magnitude to mankind. The world is now facing the various issues like global warming and climatic change, degradation of environment and ecological balance, growing shortage of fresh water, human rights violations and the increasing acts of local and global terrorism, among a few others. Though some are directly or indirectly related to the constant drive and exploitation of natural resources for meeting the various demands of humanity, there are others emanating from policies and acts of gross injustice, suppression of freedom, and different forms of repression. A particular type of terrorism deriving from politico-religious based suppression and hard discrimination has appeared with vicious vengeance in the last decade. There is none to blame but ourselves for this terrorism malaise.

Religions have all been inherently secular as their founders have found their enlightenment from the same source. Religions have appeared at different times in human history to bring peace and sanity among wayward people stooping to the irrational life of base instincts and paganism. Religions have always taught followers of all faith to have forbearance and tolerance of one another and to live a life of peace with each other. Religions have never instigated imposition of one faith over other by force and oppressive designs. It is true human

history is replete with events where rulers in connivance with fundamentalist priests have imposed their religions on other religious sects forcing conversions. These successes have been far outweighed by failures as such forceful acts have never been part, practice or philosophy of any religion. Surely, secularism lies as the core philosophy of all religions. If religions and their secular philosophies were allowed freedom to preach as in their books, there would not be any distinction between religious and secular worldviews.

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