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William Headley

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Interreligious Dialogue as a Peacebuilding Tool in Conflict Situations



Fr. William Headley, C.S.Sp., Ph.D., is a sociologist and counselor. Bill was the Major Superior (1979-85) of the USA-Eastern Province. He was the first President of the Africa Faith and Justice Network/USA and was instrumental in starting the Washington Office on Haiti. Bill was appointed the first Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation coordinator in the Congregation (1987-92). He established a graduate program in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies at Duquesne University (1993-2000) and has worked with Catholic Relief Services at executive level (2000-07). In 2007, Bill became the founding dean of the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego from where he gives leadership to the Catholic Peacebuilding Network's (CPN) efforts to engage the church in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa.

Precis

This work begins with what I know best, that is, interreligious peacebuilding.¹ Then, I will bring into the discussion interreligious dialogue as an aid or tool in furthering peacebuilding. Realizing that our group leans toward practitioner-scholars rather than its converse, the last segment of the paper will focus on our shared practice of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. I will conclude with some signs of hope.

Introduction

In starting a School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego, California in 2007, I spent a great deal of time making presentations about the new School. Included were remarks about why we even need an emerging new discipline of peace studies. Then, I went a step further noting that making peace is *everyone's* business. I would note on these occasions that peacebuilding is too important to leave to ministers of state, diplomats, and UN officials.

For fellow Spiritans in this forum, I argue this point more specifically by saying that there

is a special urgency for religious actors to include peacebuilding as part of their ministry. One of my stock phrases on this topic is a bit sharper and goes, “Peacebuilding is too important to leave only to those in high office who sign peace accords on mahogany tables. If that were the case, most common people in conflicted environments would not experience peace.” Yes, when it comes to making peace, we need trained peacebuilders as well as politicians and diplomats. We must go even further. Advancing peace is the task of virtually everyone regardless of his/her status in society. We saw this recently and powerfully illustrated in the awarding of Nobel prizes (October 5, 2018) to people addressing the evil of sexual assault as a weapon of war.

Nadia Murad was an ISIS State (IS) enslaved rape victim turned activist. I don’t want to get ahead of my more nuanced message about the integration of interreligious peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue. Still, Ms. Murad stands as too obvious an example of personal involvement of “ordinary people” in peacebuilding. She spoke out not only for herself but also for her Yazidi people, a religious minority persecuted by IS militants in Iraq. In 2016, Ms. Murad became the UN’s first Ambassador of Goodwill for the Survivors of Human Trafficking.

Dr. Denis Mukwege, Ms. Murad’s co-Nobel prize-winner, is not so religiously engaged. He is a gynecologist who served war rape victims in his native Democratic Republic of the Congo for decades. His actions make the point that one does not need to be a holder of high office nor a trained peacebuilder to make peace. Words attributed to him on the occasion of the award suggest that he sees peace and the prize as the work of all: he could see in “the faces of many women how they are happy to be recognized.”² Neither of these prize winners was a political leader or a UN official. Peacebuilding was part of what they did every day. In addition, peacebuilding is too important for religious actors to ignore.

Peace: Negative and Positive

What is the peacebuilding that I will be talking about? There are probably as many definitions in use as there are attendees in this forum. I propose for our working definition the one given by Dr. Ima Merdjanova, a researcher who has followed the Balkan conflicts. Dr. Merdjanova continues to follow post-conflict situations there. She speaks of peacebuilding as, “All social mechanisms a society develops in order to promote greater understanding and cooperation toward peace.”³ Thanks to the seminal work of Dr. Johan Galtung, credited by some as the founder of peace studies, we make the distinction between negative and positive peace.⁴ A concise way of thinking about negative peace is “the absence of violence or the fear of violence.”⁵ When a group or society is engaged in negative peacebuilding, it is working to curtail violence. In Yemen, for example, persons of good will who strive to end violent civil war are working toward negative peace—simply stopping the violent conflict. Having reached a state where a group or society has fairly well contained its violence, peacebuilding moves toward positive peace. In this environment, ongoing peace work remains. There is the service of laying a foundation or starting restoration in a post-conflict setting.

Here is a definition of positive peace. It is when the “attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies” are operative.⁶ It is important to note that positive peace does not demand the cessation of all conflict. Conflict can itself be positive if managed well. Conflict can lead to new ideas and fresh ways of doing things, and can ultimately help identify new leaders who take a community in a new direction because they question the status quo. The UN’s “Global Goals for sustainable Development,”⁷ if implemented in a given society, might be considered an ideal expression of positive peace. The Institute for Economics and Peace, a research institute, has done something similar in work on identifying eight pillars that undergird a peaceful community. The eight pillars are:

1. Well-functioning government;
2. Sound business environment;
3. Equitable distribution of resources;
4. Acceptance of the rights of others;
5. Good relations with neighbors;
6. Free flow of information;
7. High levels of human capital;
8. Low levels of corruption.⁸

Where are the Peacebuilders? Lederach’s Triangle

A famed American Mennonite peacebuilder, Dr. John Paul Lederach, uses a humble visual to answer this question.⁹ The aid is a simple triangle (see illustration). From it, he builds a model of those in a given society who use peacebuilding mechanisms. Lederach divides a hypothetical society or group horizontally into various levels or strata of leadership—top, middle, and grassroots. As one moves up the triangle vertically from the base, the number of persons decreases from large numbers at the base or grassroots to relative few toward the top of the triangle. Based on years of field experience in violent conflicts across the globe, Lederach observes that there are parallel strata of peacebuilders. The same persons in a given leadership strata can serve as a peace promoter.

Neither here in the discussion of the triangle nor in the references to the two Nobel Peace prize winners is it suggested that the top leadership is either most important nor unimportant in a peacebuilding initiative. Engagement in the peace effort is conditioned by the individual acting in a given situation. Leaders in the top strata of the triangle have a wide view, a big picture of the social context. They are, however, often far removed from local concrete happenings in the daily lives of the majority. People in the base of society are more inclined to add a nuanced understanding of their immediate context. They, in turn, often lack the wider view of what is going on in the group or society “written large.”

According to Merdjanova,¹⁰ the most effective peacebuilding happens when the leadership in various groups cross all the boundaries of their strata and work collaboratively with

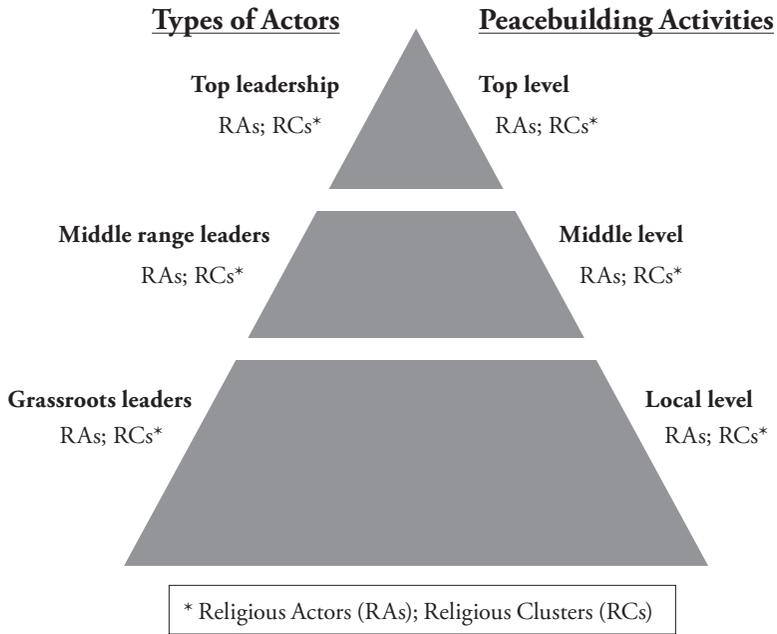


Illustration A: Lederach’s Triangle

WHERE ARE THE PEACEBUILDERS?

leaders of other strata. Leadership in the middle strata is often positioned so as to be able to play a brokering role between top and grassroots leadership. I cannot resist making an important and often overlooked application here. Many of you are likely members of a minor religious tradition in a country. I would think that this is particularly true in Asia. Should there be two larger faiths struggling with one another, or, should a major religion be feuding with the government? Because of their minority status, Catholics can sometimes serve a helpful mediating role. Catholics in such situations “do not have a dog in the fight.” On such occasions, an individual or a small group can oscillate between leadership strata.

Lederach mentions in lectures the example of a respected bishop in a small African country, where he can have coffee in the morning with the country’s president and, that same day, an afternoon confirmation in a small distant village; such privileged encounters might provide grassroots and top leadership perspectives on a given issue during the same day. Archbishop John Odama, from the Acholi region in Uganda, and his Acholi Religious Leaders’ group seem to play this role. He reports that religious leaders are able to communicate with the military, militants in hiding, and fellow bishops in the Uganda Bishops’ Conference.

Dr. Merdjanova adds a further refinement to the Lederach Triangle, which will be particularly helpful as we reflect more specifically on the role of religious actors.¹¹ She notes that the various strata can contain internal groups with a common (religious) orientation toward a conflict situation. These clusters can be composed of youth, a gender grouping, ethnic ties, individual religious actors (RAs) or religious clusters (RC) of such actors. This last grouping,

of course, is of major interest in our treatment of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. Depending on the standing in a community and potential for collaboration, the religious groupings can be a powerful force for peacebuilding. In this, we find the critical grounding for interreligious dialogue.

Here is an example. During research of South Africa's apartheid, I watched the working of an interfaith leadership group. Seemingly, there were frequent interchanges with various government offices and these religious leaders. On occasion, a given religious leader had a falling-out with a particular government official because of something he, she, or their church members had said or done. To conduct the religious leaders' business, another member of their religious leadership group, who was in good graces with the official, would do the interchange on behalf of the group. This South African example leads one to think that such mediation role plays are reserved to top religious leaders. I might be able to persuade you otherwise with another example.

I was training lower middle class lay Mexicans in peacebuilding skills. A particularly horrendous summer of public executions had just occurred in their city. As we talked about this in class, I had a sense that class participants, when they talked about members of local killer gangs, spoke of gang members as though they were complete strangers, visitors, if you will, from another planet. Feeling that we established a good level of trust in the class, I talked about this dissonance that I was feeling between them and gang members. I asked if this were really so. Did not one of the participants know a gang member? If so, were they not missing opportunities to enter dialogue? After a long silence, a hand was hesitantly and self-consciously

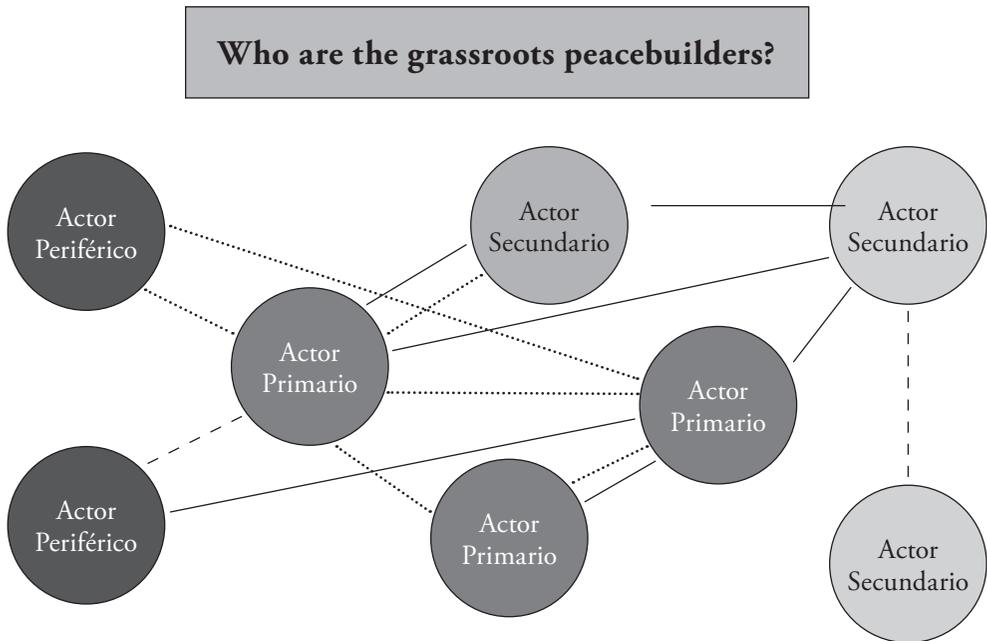


Illustration B: Mexican Relationships

raised. Then, another. Before long, half the class acknowledged knowing one or more gang member.

The basic lesson that Lederach and Merdjanova teach us is that a society moves more efficiently and effectively toward peace if there is collaboration between and within a society's/group's social levels.

Religious Actors as Peacebuilders

In this section, I want to move up from the previous generic discussion of everyday peacebuilders to the more specific role of the religious actors as peacebuilders. You will obviously and rightly see yourselves as Spiritan missionaries in this role, but the appellation “religious actor” is broader and embraces others, both Catholics and those of other religious traditions.

RELIGION REVISITED

I start at a seemingly basic question: What is religion? Fearing that I might offend you with the simplicity of the topic, let me rush to explain. Some of the religious traditions we interact with may not be self-identified as religions. Buddhism is sometimes called a philosophy. A Hindu specialist in our program claims that Hinduism-as-a-religion is a colonial imposition. Are traditional religions, in fact, religions at all? An educated review at a commonly used listing of religious components could help identify entry points for dialogue. On the contrary, the same list might offer clues as to where not to go in dialogue for fear of offending. Examples, again, help.

The book that I am about to examine is an unusual personal statement of dialogue with another faith: *Without Buddha I Could not Be a Christian*. The title of the book tells it all.¹² Paul Knitter, the author, is a lifelong Catholic, former missionary priest, and now a prominent theologian. He took fundamental faith questions he had from Catholicism and found dialogical entry points with Buddhism. Knitter found a way to shuttle between the two faiths with major theological questions. His book traces this personal dialogue. On this most personal level, he is seemingly a practicing Buddhist who still holds to a range of Christian beliefs.

Peter Phan, a well-known Vietnamese-American Catholic theologian, suggests a far more cautious path for Westerners engaging Asians interreligiously. He advises them—mostly North Americans and Europeans—to adopt a mindset in dialogue that emphasizes hope, service of the poor, and universal harmony. He suggests that such an adaptation is not easy for the Westerner seeking interreligious dialogue.¹³ Thomas Merton—an American Cistercian monk, author and peace activist—spent much of the last year of his life with monastic monks in Asia. He attended their meetings, visited their monasteries and had serious faith discussions with them. Merton built a good rapport with his hosts. Perhaps, the practice of silence as a Cistercian was an advantage: He knew how to listen and when to keep his mouth shut.¹⁴

Here is William Alston's list of religious elements as highlighted in *God's Century*:

- A belief in a *supernatural being*;
- *Prayer or communication* with that or those beings;
- *Transcendent realities*, including heaven, nirvana, etc.;
- Distinction between *sacred and profane*; ritual acts and sacred objects;
- *A view that explains the world as a whole and humanity's proper relations to it*;
- A *code* in line with the worldview;
- *A temporal community bound by its adherence to these elements.*¹⁵

Alston is quick to acknowledge that not every religion incorporates each of these elements. According to the author, most religions address most, if not all, of these elements.

GLOBAL RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Religion: Past

As a native born in and presently resident in North America, I live in an environment often characterized as secularist. Our young adults increasingly tend toward having no institutionally-supported faith (Nones). Or they declare themselves as spiritual but not religious (SBNR). Paradoxically, in the United States the majority of Americans report that religion is important to them. No developed country can claim this.¹⁶ In summary, it is fair to say that America is a religious country. Stepping back to take a broader view, religion worldwide has in the last forty to fifty years made an impressive comeback.¹⁷ Vatican II was a major factor in this religious upswing. Many major religions experienced similar, if lesser, renewal.¹⁸ Emblematic of this change are snippets from the writings of America's foremost religious sociologist, Peter Berger. In the early 1960s, at the zenith of secularism's chokehold on the world's educated class, Berger wrote, ". . . by the 21st century, believers are to be found in small sects huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture."¹⁹ When religious resurgence was in full flight, forty to sixty years later, the same Peter Berger wrote,

The assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was and, in some places, more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature historians and social scientists labeled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken.²⁰

Religion: Present

Let us take a summary look at religion as we find it today, as reported by a prominent research center. Eight out of ten people worldwide identify with a religious group. To be more precise, 5.8 billion people or eighty-four percent are religiously affiliated.

This was the distribution of religions in 2010:

- Christians: 2.2 billion or 32%;
- Muslims: 1.6 billion or 23%;
- Buddhists: 500 million or 7%;
- Hindus: 1 billion or 15%;
- Jews: 14 million or 0.2%;
- Traditional or folk religions: 400 million or 6%;
- Others: Bahai, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. 58 million or 1%;
- No religious affiliation, e.g., atheists, agnostics, NONEs, SBNRs: 1.1 billion or 16%.²¹

If the religiously non-affiliated were a denomination, they would be the third largest in the world. The non-affiliated group is growing, but its growth is somewhat frozen. Unlike Muslims and Christians, they are not reproducing offspring significantly. As a category, the non-affiliated face somewhat of a dead end. Demographics play a key role in this. Lots of attention is given to non-affiliated in the developed west, yet three-quarters live in Asia-Pacific.

Where are the Muslims located?

- Asia/Pacific: 62%;
- Middle East and Northern Africa: 20%;
- Sub Saharan Africa: 16%.

Christians are the most dispersed of major religious groups.²²

Religion: Future

It could be argued that the robust nature of religion today is a passing phase. The argument would go, "In a few years, the trend will reverse itself." Religion could again lose its resilience and cease being of interest to world populations. This, of course, is all possible. One way of checking trends is to look ahead. The Pew Research Institute did this. In brief, here are its findings from a period stretching from 2010-2050. World religions are changing largely due to fertility rates. Here are some of the paraphrased highlights:

- In 2050, Christians will still be the largest religious group, though Muslims will be growing faster;
- The number of non-affiliates will decrease except in certain Western countries, such as France and the United States;
- Buddhist numbers will remain about the same;
- By 2050, ten percent of religious peoples in Europe will be Muslim;
- India will be majority Hindu, but, also, the largest Muslim country;

- American Christians will be down from three-quarters in 2010 (seventy-eight percent) to roughly two-thirds (sixty-six percent) in 2050. Muslims, not Jews, will be the largest non-Christian group;
- Four out of every ten Christians will be in sub-Saharan Africa.²³

Religious Actors at Work

In discussing the strata on Lederach's triangle, I noted that clusters of persons within a given social strata or across various strata can have a common identity. I noted, also, the obvious fact that religion can be such an identity marker within and across strata. When the attention and action of such religiously-oriented persons focuses on peacebuilding, they can be a powerful force for peace. As used here, religious actors as treated in *God's Century*, are: "Any individual, group or organization, that espouses religious beliefs and that articulates a reasonably consistent and coherent message about the relationship of religion to politics, e.g., Martin Luther King."²⁴

A bewildering range of people—including religious actors—adapts political pursuits, including various forms of peacebuilding, in the name of religion.²⁵ But, how do religious actors come to a form of political thinking and action? Here is one answer from the same source: "Religious actors arrive at their political theologies through reflection upon their religious texts and traditions and their foundational claims about divine being(s), time, eternity, salvation, morality and revelation, etc."²⁶ This reflection concludes with a segment that has special meaning to my life as a peacebuilder. The citation ends: "particular context, political theology translates basic theological claims, beliefs and traditions into political . . . *Contemporary circumstances* (emphasis added); however, matter as well in ideals and programs."²⁷

At a time that "contemporary circumstances" intervened in my life with a prompt toward peace, I was the Spiritans' Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Coordinator at the generalate. In the midst of a series of workshops in Nigeria for Spiritans, I came upon a local newspaper in one of our community rooms there. It read that Muslims and Christians were killing each other in a certain part of the country. That contemporary event—far away from my everyday life—prompted me to think about the peace content of my ministry. Eventually, it led to a profound change in the peace direction of my ministry.

Religious Leader as Religious Actor

A priest, deacon, imam, Buddhist teacher or other prominent faith leaders have a decided advantage as religious actors. Such a person has a "Bully Pulpit." This may be a religious leader's actual pulpit in a house of worship. Or it may be a facsimile in the form of a public platform from which one's thoughts will be heard by a relatively large, receptive audience. When these religious actors speak and/or act, they carry with them the respect and authority of their office. They more readily use evocative religious, persuasive, and emotionally impactful language.

This often reaches beyond one's attentive, even if not devout, co-religionists. It can appeal to a larger, more diversified, and attentive audience. Quite frequently, such a religious actor either has special oratorical skills acquired through training or comes upon it somewhat naturally, e.g. Rev. Ian Paisley, Northern Ireland's fiery Protestant pastor, politician and leader during Ireland's "Troubles."

Other historical figures reach a special prominence as notable religious actors: Archbishop Tutu, Martin Luther King, Jr. and, in a similar way, Gandhi. Our own Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga and his interreligious colleagues took advantage of this asset for the cause of peace in the Central African Republic. The much-publicized team of the Imam and Pastor in Nigeria did the same.

PRACTICE: INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR PEACE

In thinking most concretely about practical strategies for interreligious dialogue as an aid to peacebuilding, I have found helpful a typology attributed to the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC).²⁸ It is referenced widely and interreligiously. I will work with one of these mutations.²⁹ This ordering system has four overlapping categories, each of which we will examine. When I work the four areas with a number of examples in a seminar or workshop, I find that it jogs a group's recollection about what they and colleagues of other faith traditions have done interreligiously to advance peace. Hopefully, it will provide a similar assistance for you. Allow a caution, however. A specific peacebuilding strategy does not fit in every situation. The application of an approach is not a matter of one action fits all settings.

One way of testing the appropriateness of a method is to examine one's "theory of change." This begins by simply asking, "What do I/we want to see happen that will have a positive and peace-filled outcome in this conflict?" Follow this with a second question: "Which of the available approaches will advance peace in a given context?" This is far better than doing something that potential change-makers are "good at," "saw it done elsewhere," or you have the "resources to do it."

FABC'S TEMPLATE

As suggested above, there are four general categories of interreligious peacebuilding approaches in the FABC's model. I invite you to work through them with me. First, I briefly explain a category. Then, I follow each with examples exemplifying the category. For experienced missionaries such as yourselves, I suspect that this will be but a reminder of what you know, tried, or have experienced. It is in "working" the examples and providing your own in group work, which will, hopefully, make a difference.

Not every interreligious effort ends in success! Let me share a recent personal failure. San Diego is one of the most ethnically diverse parts of our country. Despite growing restrictions on immigration, the Islamic segment of the community continues to grow. So, too, do tensions between the various groupings of people, e.g., the bombing of a Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh.

I designed an education and training program for imams and Catholic clergy. Religious specialists were to give short courses on the two faith traditions. Participants would together learn basic conflict resolution skills. We added shared meals and visits to mosques and churches, including interaction with local congregants. The operative theory of change was built on the theory of learning, which argued that once exposed to a positive interfaith experience, these religious leaders would pass on insights and learnings to their institutional members through various interactions. Despite initial enthusiasm and promises of support from institutional leadership to recruit imams and clergy, the program died for lack of participants.

a) *Dialogue of Theological Exchange* where specialists seek to deepen understanding and appreciation of their religious heritages as well as that of others. This is the classic expression of inter-religious dialogue. It conjures up an image of theologians and religious leaders sitting around that proverbial mahogany table, holding deep discussions about refined theological matters. These do happen and much positive effect can come from them. Sometimes, as some examples show, the setting is less formal.

Examples

- Shortly after 9/11 when interfaith and cultural tensions were high in the U.S., an interreligious coalition put together a team of Christian and Islamic ministerial personnel. This team traveled about the region for several months, both listening to the fears and concerns and offering an educational experience. The good work of our Spiritan Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, C.S.Sp., and his interfaith companions did something similar in his Central Africa Republic.
- On one occasion, the mahogany table gave way to a synagogue. An erudite mixed-faith congregation listened intently to skilled pastors and theologians give a presentation on their common father, Abraham.
- Our local bishop in San Diego, Bishop Robert McElroy, plays a leading role in the U.S. Bishops' Conference when it comes to ecumenical and interreligious matters. On two recent occasions, he brought together Islamic and Christian theologians into a "Catholic/Muslim Dialogue." An evening session during such events is open to the public. Topics handled in the closed sessions of the dialogue are more generally shared with this broader audience.

b) *Dialogue of Life* where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit. This form of dialogue acknowledges the potential for interfaith exchanges and growth that happen, often unnoticed, at a local community level. It points to, honors, and celebrates peacebuilding from the ground up.

Examples

- Fr. Peter Phan, as a child in Vietnam, was raised as a staunch Catholic when there was antipathy between Catholics and Buddhists. Father Phan tells the story of going recently with his mother for a visit to Vietnam. He was startled when this very Catholic woman asked to visit a Buddhist temple. Her intent was to light candles for her Buddhist friends at home. Her son asked, “Why?” She told of Buddhist Vietnamese friends back in the States who were so very kind taking her to the store and to doctors. When they learned that she was going home, they asked her to light candles for them. So, she did.
- In December 2004, Banda Aceh became the epicenter for a huge tsunami. The community was overwhelmingly Islamic. As a response to the tragedy, the U.S. military, Catholic Relief Services, and other aid groups came to help. Religiously, many of the responders were Christian by background, if not in practice. Certain Islamic schools absorbed many orphans. In one case, religious pride prevented the school from accepting food from the Christian-oriented Catholic Relief Services. Quiet negotiations led to “Christian” food being delivered at night in unmarked CRS trucks.
- In Northern Ireland when the “Troubles” between Protestants and Catholics reigned, a Protestant man passed through a separating wall into the Catholic side. He was killed. Members of a live-in ecumenical center baked a cake for the wake. It was the custom for a Catholic priest and Protestant minister associated with the center to carry the cake to the wake of the murdered person as a sign of solidarity and sympathy.

c) *Dialogue of Action* in which persons of all religions collaborate for the integral development of all. I noted earlier that the FABC categories overlap at times. This is particularly true when one juxtaposes dialogue of action and dialogue of life. It is helpful, when I teach this to graduate students, to treat Dialogue of Action as the peacebuilding efforts of various religious *groups* or *institutions*.

Examples

- CRS, a major American Catholic relief, development, and justice and peace agency, has worked in peacebuilding for better than 20 years. For the last few years, the agency has concentrated on developing peacebuilding models for Islamic/Christian grass-roots communities. The models have been field tested, scrutinized by its worldwide team of peacebuilders, and written up and culled into a book for general use, *Interreligious Action for Peace*.³⁰
- Pacific Institute is a Sufi organization with branches all over the world. It is particularly known for establishing schools. In southern California, their interreligious outreach includes programs that counter religious extremism, good will gatherings, and sponsoring cultural enrichment trips to their native Turkey.
- I give a presentation on the work of humanitarian services by Islamic organizations

to graduate students. Inevitably, someone in a class will ask, “Why don’t Muslim groups provide human services such as we see Lutherans, Jews, Catholics, and other faith traditions do?” The answer is simple: They do. I usually finish off this discussion by listing, as I do here, a number of Muslim groups chosen at random that offer such services. I cannot witness to the effectiveness of the groups, but they are engaged doing good as they see it and to the degree that they can. Here is a somewhat dated list of humanitarian Muslim organizations in America: Islamic Society of North America; Zaytuna Institute (1st Islamic University in America); American Society for Muslim Advancement: builds bridges with the Muslim and non-Muslim communities; Muslim Public Affairs Council: works for the civil rights of Muslims and connects with political representatives; Council on American Islamic Relations: the largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy group; and American Muslim Alliance: trains and supports Muslims in the US political system.

d) *Dialogue of Religious Experience*. When a conversation deepens to this level, one’s dialogue with another about his/her religious experience occurs. This is probably the most difficult form of dialogue for the ordinary person to grasp. I will offer a piece from the short and fabled interreligious document of Vatican II to help. Men expect from the various religions’ answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment, and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going? (*NA*, no.1)³¹

Examples

- I did research in Thailand about the low intensity war along its border. A young junior Buddhist professor at a university in northern Thailand was my guide. My visit was along the Thai-Malay border. This resulted in long car trips with my guide. Our relationship, though very new, had grown. Soon, we had gone deep into our personal faith lives: prayer, afterlife, peace, being married or single.
- Earlier in this paper, I spoke of Thomas Merton, the American Cistercian monk. He spent much of his adult life searching the deeper questions of spirituality. Toward the end of his life, he hungered to share the intimacy of the spiritual life with monks and nuns of Asian faith traditions. Merton’s life was cut short while he was engaged in this very exchange process.³²
- I am not an impulsive buyer, except for books. It took me about four minutes to decide on the book that I am about to describe, *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions*.³³ At the time of the purchase, I was preparing a course with the improb-

able title, “Warmongers and Peacebuilders: Religious Extremism.” This particular book is designed in a special way. Seven faith traditions are treated. The first section of each of these chapters explores a particular faith, its history, development, and key personalities of the faith. It is the second part of each chapter that gives expression to dialogue of religious experience. At that point, the text delves into each of the faith traditions and identifies a theological and/or spiritual contribution that a certain faith makes to peacebuilding.

Conclusion

I started with a somewhat impassioned plea that everyone, with a special emphasis on religious persons, should be a peacebuilder. A discussion followed of peace—both negative and positive—and those who pursue it. I gave extra care to locating peacebuilders in a given society or group. I attempted to show how they interact. Attention next turned to the formation and functioning of the religious peacebuilder.

Finally, I offer messages of hope for interreligious peacebuilding:

- Sarajevo, located at the heart of the recovering, but still tense, Balkans offers the first sign. Three seminaries—Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic—are working together. They are forming a common master’s degree in peacebuilding. The hope here is that young clerics entering the ministry will augment their ministerial training with peacebuilding competencies.
- The episcopal conference of an African country (name withheld) recently submitted a large funding proposal for interreligious dialogue project for the entire country. The hope: this nation-wide program will focus on training for interreligious dialogue.
- This hope began with a 2010 peacebuilding planning process held in Bujumbura, Burundi. Regional conferences of the East and the Great Lakes Regions participated. Subsequently, conference-countries of the Great Lakes Region designated the Catholic University of Bukavu as their regional center for peacebuilding. Last fall, this University admitted its first cohort of candidates for an MA degree in peace studies. This hopeful university sign in Bukavu expanded into a third one last November, when representatives of seventeen universities, either with peacebuilding programs or plans for them, gathered in Entebbe, Uganda. They formed a working group. The Africa Working Group affiliated with the predominantly American Catholic Peacebuilding Network. The Network, based at the University of Notre Dame, is composed of twenty major Catholic universities and service institutes.

Hope, the saying goes, springs eternal. May it continue to express itself in interreligious dialogue as a tool for peace-building.

Endnotes

1. Interventions into violent conflict are alternately referred to as peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Peacebuilding can apply as the broadest term, applicable to pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations. This wider term is used here.
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