

**“Peacemaking Among the Religions of Abraham:  
Overcoming Obstacles to Coexistence”**

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## Introduction

In harmonious relationships, dialogue is often taken for granted; sometimes it is not even noticed. In troubled relationships, dialogue is commonly regarded as a dangerous compromise – at best an expression of naïveté, and at worst an act of betrayal or disloyalty.

As ten minutes of surfing the internet can reveal, contemporary Christian-Muslim and Muslim-Jewish relations clearly fall into the “troubled” category.<sup>1</sup> In many cases the quality of discourse is deeply unsettling. Radicalized Muslims are accusing Christians and Jews of grave moral sins – arguing in effect that Christians and Jews have deviated from the truths of their traditions, as understood by Muslims. Polemical thinkers within the Christian and Jewish traditions, in turn, are representing Islam as a completely alien phenomenon, and proclaiming that coexistence with Muslims is impossible. Such theological disputations mirror contemporary political disputes, and project a future dominated by mythic images of confrontation. Calls for racial and religious cleansing have become shockingly commonplace in blogs and in the weblogs that follow stories on mainstream news websites and *You Tube*. Though the internet medium itself is conducive to knee-jerk expressions of hostility, it would nonetheless appear that we have a problem.

Ironically, the dynamics of our post-modern era seem to be reinforcing divisions within the Abrahamic family rather than effacing them. The Abrahamic faiths stand divided not only by the geopolitics of nation-states, but also by their common heritage. This heritage ensures not only deep resonance among faith traditions, but also more points for disputation than are to be found among religions that share fewer common sources and spiritual affinities. As F. E. Peters notes,

[H]ostility among Abraham’s heirs seems often to have masked a common fear of each other’s allure. Polemic among the three communities has in fact been produced mostly for home consumption, written to reassure its own believers

that they, not their obviously (if we look closely) attractive rivals, were the Chosen People.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, polemic among the three communities also contributed to a number of negative historical encounters. The accumulated residues of traumatic historical experiences – from medieval confrontations to the Holocaust, colonialism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the contemporary “war on terrorism” – have been reactivated and reinforced by the events of recent years, bequeathing heavy burden of identity conflict on children who will be born in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Detached observers can perhaps be forgiven for passing judgment on the children of Abraham for their cardinal sin of failing to find the magnanimity in themselves that would be required to appreciate one another. Failures of contemporary Christians, Muslims, and Jews to embody values of tolerance and peace, however, have much less to do with inherent deficiencies within the faiths than with the psychology of fear and adversarialism that has developed in the shadow of political conflict. Overcoming this psychology will require the active cultivation of (1) a clear understanding of how selective perception and geopolitics are driving the Abrahamic faiths apart, (2) deeper appreciation and mutual knowledge of each tradition’s resources for transforming conflict, and (3) a much stronger and more substantive sense of Abrahamic commonality. To change the way the children of Abraham are relating to one another and set in motion new dynamics, there is a need for initiatives that disentangle political and religious dimensions of the current impasse, while drawing attention to religious resources for change and deep resonances among the traditions.

### **Disentangling Precepts and Political Psychology**

In the present climate of recrimination and insecurity, it is not difficult to understand why many Muslims, Christians, and Jews choose to frame contemporary conflicts in relation to religious categories, as theologically driven rivalries between competing claimants to truth and cultural enlightenment. After all, the religions of Abraham may share a common source, but their intertwined histories provide precedents for conflict. Religious

adherents are willing to sacrifice to maintain the integrity of their beliefs, and political leaders are eager to gain legitimacy by appealing to religious values and narratives.

Nonetheless, notions of irreconcilable conflict are both damaging and disempowering. In our current context, the human cost of believing in inevitable rivalry among the spiritual heirs of Abraham has become starkly apparent. Such a conviction not only obscures secular sources of tension, but also impoverishes spiritual traditions by turning believers away from their most compelling and universally appealing moral inheritances. The amplification of religious differences and other markers of group distinctiveness clears the way for entrepreneurs of confrontation, and impoverishes the human moral imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Freud's observations concerning the "narcissism of minor differences" (national or ethnic as well as religious) may fail to capture the import of religious distinctions for those whose lives are defined by a powerful desire to live in communion with the divine, the persistence of adversarial relations among the religions of Abraham through misdirected and manipulated communal sentiment has done much to tarnish the reputation of religion itself. This is evident not only in the rising popularity of anti-theistic literature (Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, among others), but also in a more longstanding tendency among social scientists to overcompensate for exaggerated notions of primordial religious rivalry by "explaining away" the religious dimension of conflict.

Just as exaggerating religion's role in conflict can reinforce negative trends and lead to paralysis, explaining away the religious dimension of conflict also impedes morally responsible action. This reaction has its roots in the visceral reaction of many modern intellectuals to "populist" narratives that exaggerate historical clashes while ignoring obvious spiritual affinities. While useful insofar as it demystifies worldly motives that are obscured by exclusively religious narratives, denial of the role religion can play in conflict can do as much to marginalize religious peace efforts as overstated claims about religion as the monocausal source of antagonism.

To deal constructively with the religious dimension of contemporary tensions, an integrated approach to conflict analysis is necessary. Analysts and conflict resolution

practitioners need to cultivate the habit of examining “religious” conflicts with two eyes, one religious and one secular. Concepts from the social and behavioural sciences need to be “partnered” with genuinely religious insights, as a basis for exploring both theological and political dimensions of conflict. When religious and social scientific insights are paired, it becomes possible to take the interpretive (cultural and religious) aspects of conflict more seriously,<sup>4</sup> and to discover ways in which religious and material dimensions of conflict interact and, at times, camouflage or discolour each other. It also becomes possible to discover, within the contested realm of religious belief and symbolism, natural affinities between deeply religious understandings of peace and more secular bases for affirming human dignity (for example, contemporary international discourse about peace, human development, ecological sustainability, and human rights).

There are many ways in which a well-informed understanding of religious traditions can sharpen political analysis. A clear distillation of similarities and differences between the precepts of two traditions, for example, can illuminate ways in which observers as well as participants in conflict err when they mistake modern political psychology for “ancient hatred.” At the same time, careful efforts to explore similarities and differences between the traditions can prevent trivialization of the theological and religious-identity dimensions of conflict, and make new ways of relating to one’s own and another’s traditions possible.

The structure of the present conference reflects this insight; initiating deliberations with theological and historical reflections enables us to better understand both the interdependence and distinctiveness of the three principal Abrahamic traditions. Serious and disciplined inquiry naturally tends to lead toward the conclusions that the Abrahamic faiths share strong affinities, despite the presence of clauses in religious texts that have been interpreted in ways that created breaches in intercommunal relations. These difficult moments call for self-criticism and proactive exploration of possibilities for new beginnings – not for exclusion of religious frameworks from peacemaking processes that will lack substance if deprived of religious content.

A fair-minded overview of similarities and differences among the religions of Abraham leads quite naturally to the conclusion that theological incompatibilities offer only a partial explanation for current troubles. Many of the more egregious instances of historical antagonism have less to do with differences in precepts than with political distortions of religion, polarization of collective religious identities, and impoverishment of historical narratives about Christian-Muslim and Muslim-Jewish encounter (see *Table 1*). Carefully mapping out these historical and political issues and “putting them on the table” can be one of the most helpful impetuses for reclaiming religious traditions for peace. Because interpretation of traditions takes place within political contexts, reflection on these past and present contexts can have a purifying and restorative function, while also helping to prevent cooption of faith traditions by contemporary entrepreneurs of conflict.

***Table 1: Mapping Relations among the Religions of Abraham***

	<u><i>Commonalities</i></u>	<u><i>Differences &amp; Problems</i></u>
<i>Judaism &amp; Christianity</i>	-belief in one God -both revere Hebrew Scriptures and prophets	-disagreements about Jesus (Trinity/Incarnation) -“love and law,” forgiveness -universalism and particularism -historical relations between Jews and Christians
<i>Judaism &amp; Islam</i>	-belief in one God -both have similar understanding of monotheism and revere Hebrew prophets	-disagreements about universalism and particularism -political rivalries, land dispute, attitudes toward Western culture
<i>Christianity &amp; Islam</i>	-belief in one God -both have central figure and universal mandate -both revere Jesus and Hebrew prophets -both expect Jesus to return	-disagreements about Trinity/Incarnation, crucifixion -“resist not evil,” “love and law” -competitive political and theological encounters

Current political and economic conditions privilege adversarial approaches to Abrahamic relations, for a variety of reasons. First, the Abrahamic religions exist not only in texts that speak of past human encounters with the transcendent, but also in a world of large-scale social relationships. The religions, therefore, play a powerful role in the construction of cultural and national identities, and religious interpretation thereby becomes vulnerable to pressures arising from geopolitical competition and the efforts of political leaders to imbue their actions with religious legitimacy. Second, as an element of collective identity and a reservoir of cultural symbols, religious elements are frequently used in the definition of “enemy images” and the telling of conflict narratives. Third, the existence of adversarial relations between communities defined wholly or in part in religious terms can present serious challenges to religious peacemaking, particularly when religious warrants for peacemaking at times of insecurity have received little attention from political and clerical leaders.

### *Geopolitical Cooptation*

With respect to the first point, religion has been drawn into larger patterns of realistic geopolitical conflict as a constitutive element of larger cultural and national identities. Geopolitical conflict, however, has its own power political logic, and “selects” for less peaceable and pluralistic interpretive options within a faith tradition. Religion becomes a mobilization and legitimacy tool and an adjunct to nationalism and ethnicity. Thus do Abrahamic religious commitments help to fuel contemporary conflict, without unilaterally directing it.

### *Religiously Coloured Enemy Images*

The second dynamic, the use of religious vocabulary in inter-Abrahamic enemy images, is a particularly tragic correlate of the geopolitical cooptation process. While many of the ways in which the construction of enemy images and conflict narratives reflects real religious history and selected negative encounters among the traditions, the application of concepts from social psychology – including selective perception and the fundamental attribution error – can lead to richer insights into present-day Abrahamic relations. Each

of the Abrahamic religions, for example, steadfastly asserts its own intrinsically peaceful character – attributing deviations to extenuating circumstances – while refusing to grant the same charitable judgment about intentions to its counterpart faiths. With respect to the “other,” breaches of the peace reflect innate disposition, not circumstances.

Collective self-esteem is further reinforced by perpetuating such unfavourable “us-them” contrasts and competitive theology. Hence the oft-heard refrain, “We are peaceful, but what about them?” Group solidarity and existential security are both served by such habits of thought and perception, albeit at a price of lingering ignorance and misinformation.

Sadly, religious symbolism is all too common in North American and Middle Eastern conflict narratives. In the United States, for example, 9/11 has become a shared trauma in a narrative of religious nationalism that connects present-day concerns about terrorism to such distant events as Arab-Islamic conquests, the Crusades, and clashes with the Barbary pirates, as well as to imagined millenarian futures centred around events in Israel/Palestine. Radical Muslim framings of history are similar to their Western counterparts, as Osama bin Laden’s designation of adversaries as “Jews and Crusaders” indicates. In the Middle Eastern context, the almost complete erasure of memory about shared Jewish-Muslim-Christian glories and the projection of the earliest rivalries onto the present Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the great tragedies of our time. The gradual disappearance of a generation of Arab Muslims and Middle Eastern Jews who could remember better (or at least tolerable) times – together with the increased emigration of Middle Eastern Christians – should evoke a sense of urgency among historical researchers keen to discover “unstoried experiences” about everyday Abrahamic coexistence.

Although this-worldly stakes of contemporary conflicts should never be ignored in a way that grants exclusive privilege to psychological analysis, the perceptive observer of Abrahamic relations cannot help but notice a deep reluctance among many of Abraham’s children to face their tradition’s collective shadow. This hesitance is facilitated by projection – preoccupation with faults of the other that are also one’s own – and by a

perception that admitting wrongdoings committed in name of religion will cause the faithful to lose faith. The need for a positive sense of self-identity impedes the difficult work of self-criticism and – more importantly – seeing the other in oneself and oneself in the other. At a more mundane and concrete level, this means inability to see the self as others see it and unfair religious apologetics perpetuated within isolated and sheltered in-group conversations.

Intriguingly, this inability to face the shadow-side of one's culture is also apparent in Western secular culture, with its unbalanced tendency to associate religion (or at least *other* religions) with irrationality and conflict. Best-sellers about religion's deficits, for example, almost completely neglect the great harms committed during recent centuries in the name of non-religious ideologies, including nationalism, "command" communism, and fascism. Although these secular excesses are familiar to narrators of the popular "end of history" story of Western neoliberal triumphalism, efforts to assert the "finality" or unique merit of contemporary Western values are experienced by contemporary Muslims as arrogant, humiliating, and rife with double standards.

### *Neglect of Religious Peace Resources*

Given contemporary geopolitics and the role that the "religious other" plays in enemy images, it should come as no surprise that religious peace resources have been neglected, and that many members of Abrahamic religious communities associate feelings of vulnerability with interpretations centred around peacemaking. How, one might ask, can "letting down the defenses" in the face of threats and genuinely traumatic encounters be religiously legitimate? Is not reaching out to the other without preconditions a prelude to surrender? Such questions are implicit in much contemporary religious and political discourse, which adopts a far more liberal approach to the reinterpretation of religious "conflict texts" than to morally creative responses to "peace texts," which are restricted to their original historical contexts. Religiously based paradigms for pluralism, appreciation, and mutuality are rejected as inauthentic or relativistic, leaving the task of

fostering pluralism to secular authorities who rely on pragmatic rather than symbolic, passionate, and scripturally enriched arguments.

In a situation of escalated conflict, religious peace discourse tends to find itself at a competitive disadvantage. Psychologically, appeals to embrace the other appear to lack a proper concern for fused (some might say “confused” or conflated) national and religious loyalties and allegiances. Intellectually, they may also appear to lack the rigor, focus, and zeal associated with more exclusive forms of religious identification. Given what is known about the “other” and the “self” from inherited narratives and present experiences, casual religious arguments about peacemaking appear to presuppose moral relativism and an inability to discriminate between truth and falsehood. Maintaining boundaries becomes a pre-eminent virtue.

As *Table 2* suggests, religious cultures can accelerate or decelerate conflict; similarly, trends toward conflict escalation or de-escalation can create conditions that help to select for pacific or adversarial forms of religious expression and leadership. In a very real sense, each of the three Abrahamic religions bears within itself sub-traditions within which the imprint of past conflicts with communal outsiders is most keenly felt and remembered. Nonetheless, each tradition also bears within itself exemplars and memories of peacemaking – sub-traditions that can and must be taken into account for a proper appreciation of Abrahamic faith’s deeper significance and possibilities.

*Table 2: Religion in Conflict and Peacemaking*

<b>WAYS RELIGION ENTERS POLITICS</b>	<b>WAYS RELIGION CAN ACCELERATE CONFLICT</b>	<b>WAYS RELIGION CAN CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEMAKING</b>
<b><i>Religiously engaged actors (individuals and groups)</i></b>	Actors using religion as “power tool,” “force multiplier,” or barrier	Actors using religion as a bridge or as a source of empowerment for peaceful change
<b><i>Religious symbols, identities, and narratives</i></b>	Competitive polarization of identities and narratives of rivalry/victimization (“us” vs. “them”)	Open religious identities and narratives with positive role for the “stranger”
<b><i>Religious cultures and values</i></b>	Exclusive understandings of goodness and virtue; strong in-group/out-group biases	Inclusive understanding of spiritual values; commitment to social justice, nonviolence, and reconciliation
<b><i>Religious texts and interpretations</i></b>	Cutting off dialogue about interpretation; authoritarianism; emphasis on righteous or purifying violence	Affirmation of transcendent divine mystery, of immanent human responsibilities, and of open-ended quest for understanding

### **Rediscovering Abrahamic Traditions through Dialogue**

In the present context of war and political violence, conventional modernist prescriptions for transcending interreligious conflict are inadequate. Opposing secularism to religious culture or “universalism” to “particularism” cannot solve the problems posed by escalated identity conflict, and actually heightens the sense of identity threat experienced by partisans of beleaguered Abrahamic traditions. It also, one might add, distracts attention from material sources of contemporary problems, including unequal power relations between world regions and competition for privileged access to petroleum resources. Instead of a universal, imposed framework of norms and standards (the

ostensible purpose of the present War on Terrorism), a much more vigorous approach to dialogue is needed.

Destructive encounters can bring out the worst among adherents of the Abrahamic religious traditions, but carefully constructed positive encounters can significantly aid efforts to rediscover resources for peace. Sincere dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims has become one of the most vital tasks for ensuring that religious expression remains life-affirming and life-enhancing in our present global era. Though not a substitute for intra-religious dialogue, interreligious encounters have unique potential not only for cultivating appreciative understanding of the “other,” but also for arriving at deeper self-knowledge.

To transcend past legacies and come to know one another better, representatives of Abrahamic traditions need to negotiate the very content and conduct of the “dialogue” that must emerge among them. There is no ideological or theological prerequisite. What is required, however, is a shared conviction that coexistence is preferable to the moral incoherence that arises when in-group/out-group distinctions become absolute and solipsistic thinking prevails (“*mirror, mirror on the wall...*”). Both genuine and fabricated interreligious hostility call for authentically religious responses, and for justifications for coexistence with the “other” that emerge from within the heart of each tradition.

Dialogue is not a panacea and (fortunately) does not erase differences. Moreover, each religion is a “particular universalism,” with diverse possibilities of interpretation and expression. There are no guarantees of positive outcomes. But there are many benefits:

1) *Seeing the “religious other” in social, cultural, and political context.*

It is helpful to situate *interreligious* dialogue in the larger context of *human* dialogue among people with different beliefs, social identities, value priorities, and material interests. Dialogue helps us sort through the many factors that shape our own behaviours and those of our counterparts. Some of the reasons for actions related to peace and

conflict are genuinely religious, but a more comprehensive understanding of human behaviour comes with recognition of the contexts through which beliefs are filtered and inflected. Having first-hand experience of how people in different religions struggle to translate precept into practice can be vital when we seek to discern how deeply “religious” a given action may be. Awareness of context can also raise awareness of diversity within religions and religious experiences. Muslims in the West, Christians in the East, and Sephardic Jews may have unique experiences that can enrich Abrahamic encounters.

2) *Developing an experiential basis for making “fair” contrasts between belief systems, and between practices.*

All too often, judgments about the “religious other” reflect self-serving contrasts, through which one’s own *essential doctrines and values* receive reinforcement through comparison to the *most extreme interpretations and problematic practices* of the other. Whereas unfair contrasts juxtapose “our” precepts with “their” most deviant practices and most “unusual” beliefs (effectively using the misrepresented “other” as a foil for the idealized “self”), fair contrasts compare a “full package” of precepts with another “full package” of precepts, and contrast our full range of practices with their full range of practices. Developing the habit of making fair comparisons can arguably create a basis for seeing oneself in the other and the other in oneself, without erasing distinctiveness.

3) *Finding points of commonality and complementarity in the domain of religious values.*

It is not an exaggeration to say that most of the religious values held by Muslims, Christians, and Jews are shared. Followers of the Abrahamic religions differ, however, in the *priority* they give to different values (e.g., justice and mercy, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, accountability and forgiveness, love and law), and in the ways they formulate and practice the same values (e.g., forgiveness, faithfulness). With respect to the value of forgiveness, Christians idealize (but do not always practice) unilateral, preemptive (i.e., unconditional) forgiveness as a means of breaking the cycles of violence or the bondage of sin, while Muslims and Jews place greater emphasis on the virtues of conditional forgiveness, based on acceptance of responsibility and moral accountability

by the wrongdoer. Yet Muslims and Jews also practice unilateral forgiveness, and conditional forgiveness is built into contemporary Christian approaches to restorative justice (perpetrators, after all, are encouraged to accept responsibility, in a manner that facilitates healing of victims and of the community). Discussing similarities and differences in understandings as well as applications of values can create opportunities for revitalized practices and insights that support peacemaking. It can also shed light on the interface between culture and religion – different subcultures within a single religion, for example, can differ more profoundly than members of different religions in the resolutions they propose for various value polarities (e.g., individual and community, “modest dress” and “self-expression,” reason and revelation, equality and authority, human relationship and economic efficiency, “freedom to do” and “freedom to be”).

#### *4) Developing a more realistic understanding of the self.*

It has been said that “s/he who knows but one language/culture knows no language/culture.” This may be an exaggeration, yet dialogue in any context offers an escape from self-referential thinking and a pathway to growth. To become more truly ourselves, we need to be able to see ourselves as others see us. Through dialogue, we might even discover profound meaning in our common membership in the “Abrahamic family.” It is a truism that the worst fights are fights within the family; choosing to value our relatedness can provide a basis for conflict transformation and self-knowledge. Rather than a threat to authenticity, encounter with others is actually an opportunity to rediscover a tradition, to relocate the essential and redefine authenticity even as greater respect develops for others. Many participants in interreligious dialogue have found themselves drawn towards deeper exploration of their own tradition, through personal investigation and intrareligious conversations.

Interreligious dialogues that focus on peace can prompt efforts to reclaim precisely those elements on ones own tradition that have been marginalized by contemporary conflict. It can lead to new insights about how conflict – past as well as present – has affected religious consciousness. This introspection can lead to a cleansing or purification of collective memory – to a critical self-awareness of political manipulations and distortions of faith – that need not dampen commitment to essential precepts, particularly if critical

reappraisal is accompanied by efforts to reappropriate past peace leaders, rediscover examples of resistance to provocation, and renew outreach efforts intended to mend relationships and confront the “burdens of history.”<sup>1</sup> Conscientious effort to understand ways in which a tradition may have “gone astray” can create new possibilities in the present, expanding awareness of positive precedents as well as exclusionary temptations.<sup>5</sup> Thus can encounters with the “other” broaden the peacemaking repertoire and potential of each participating tradition.

### 5) Fostering the emergence of “new stories.”

While it is true that participation in interfaith dialogue is not always without costs – particularly in zones of violent conflict – those who commit to sustained interaction with the religious “other” often find that their world changes in remarkable ways. They discover (to borrow a phrase from Patrice Brodeur) Christian, Muslim, and Jewish extremists are “codependent.”<sup>6</sup> They revisit their “shared history,” and find experiences and testimonies that need to be revived.<sup>7</sup> “Old stories” about the “other” lose their appeal, and new experiences call for new narratives that support the objective of *getting religion out of the conflict and into the peace.*<sup>8</sup>

Given the dramatic rise in structured interaction among representatives of the religions of Abraham, it could be argued that the children of Abraham are “between stories.” The old stories of confrontation are tired and deeply constraining. Their problematic assumptions have become all too apparent. Many are seeking to rededicate themselves to fostering the emergence of new stories about Abrahamic solidarity.

### **Moving Toward Abrahamic Solidarity**

Through formal dialogue as well as through informal habits of “living in relationship” with one another, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish peacemakers have an opportunity to embrace their interdependence, and to acknowledge those aspects of their spiritual and cultural heritages that are shared. Formulating these new narratives of Abrahamic

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Montville, Vamik Volkan.

solidarity will require sustained communication at a deep level, willingness to grow, and acceptance of risk.

Given the extent to which Abrahamic religions have been coopted by religious nationalism and drawn into contemporary geopolitical conflict, building Abrahamic solidarity will require sustained efforts to challenge the legitimacy of religious as well as secular militancy, and to transform the role of religion in conflict by providing positive options. The following principles are already being applied in dynamic religious peacebuilding initiatives, and provide hope for our common future.

*1) Educate for religious literacy and respectful coexistence.*

Jonathan Swift famously remarked that while it only takes a little religion to provoke antipathy between human beings, and much more to foster loving relationships. “At little religion,” it would appear, is a dangerous thing. In many zones of intercommunal conflict, adversaries’ conversance with the depth and intricacies of their traditions is profoundly limited; the atrocities in Bosnia, for example, were perpetrated by religious neophytes emerging from the collapse of a communist order. Other conflicts display a similar pattern, with religion functioning as a categorical identity equivalent to “nation” or “tribe” rather than as a source of spirituality, connectedness, and transformation.

Pointing to such examples, R. Scott Appleby has argued that a key basis for ameliorating religiously justified conflict is broad-based religious literacy.<sup>9</sup> This need not presuppose “religious indoctrination of the masses” – though deeper study among the religiously committed is something to be desired – but does mean taking religions seriously in public as well as confessional education.

In a secular educational system, taking religion seriously can mean learning about world religions and the dynamic roles they have played in history. Particular attention can be given not only to historically “emergent” meanings of religious value such as human dignity and ecological stewardship, but also to the complex and mutually constitutive interactions among religious traditions. Secondary school and university curricula should

also highlight “high points” in religiously defined civilizations defined by openness to others, conversation across confessional boundaries difference, and the advancement of human knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Genuinely religious education can go farther in exploring the unique dynamics of particular religious traditions, sensitizing the laity to the constant interplay between text and context, and to the struggle to bring out the peace teachings of religious traditions under adverse historical circumstances. Such education can convey knowledge of precedents for peacemaking, as well as familiarity with the disciplines of hermeneutics.

Interreligious dialogue meetings have a vital role to play in religious literacy, not only for participants learning about other and self, but also for broader religious communities. Whenever religious leaders meet to engage in dialogue about peace and coexistence, there is a powerful demonstration effect. When religious leaders as well as religious laypersons temper apologetics and engage in genuine dialogue, they “give religion a good name” and set a positive example. They move to the forefront of leadership in efforts to apply their own most essential values – which, fortuitously, are also the values that have the most universal appeal. While it is true that religion has too often gotten “a bad rap” from hard-line secularists who discount the largely *non-religious* nature of modern wars and of economic exploitation, religious leadership in the cause of peace is one of the best ways to ensure popular appreciation for the role of spiritual values in modern life. Acts of dialogical engagement should not stop with symbolism, however; interreligious study and dialogue can lead to enhanced knowledge and collaboratively produced study documents for broader dissemination.

Education for religious literacy need not gloss over enduring differences between understandings of religious truth. It is sufficient that religious education resist the psychological temptations noted earlier in this paper, and affirm that appreciation and respect do not require agreement.<sup>11</sup> In addition, care needs to be taken to encourage *respectful* disagreement with those who find it difficult to embrace contemporary forms of religious pluralism and critical hermeneutics. Humiliating those who adhere to non-

pluralistic religious syntheses only exacerbates conflict by creating a “siege” mentality among traditional and revivalist communities.

*2) Explore linkages between the journey toward peace and the journey toward God in Abrahamic faith traditions.*

According to the dominant narrative in the theory and practice of international relations, religion is a distorting factor in international diplomacy that is best constrained to the domain of domestic politics or personal belief. Contemporary international relations theory identifies the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 – settling the Thirty Years War – as the decisive break between a religiously inflamed medieval political order and the modern world of nation-states. The result is a lack or preparedness to consider potential religious contributions to peacemaking, and a predominance of secular peace constructs that exclude the traditional spiritual overtones of the idea.

When religion is viewed solely as a distorting factor in global politics, the religious impulse is forced into narrower channels marked by defensiveness and negation of the existing order. ...

In light of Raimon Panikkar’s observation that peace as a shared myth and symbol that holds positive meaning for virtually the whole of humanity, making space for sacralized conceptions of peace in public discourse can become a constructive response to over-politicized religion. Religious peace traditions emphasizing spirituality, connectedness, and reverence for life provide not only a compelling response to religious war discourse, but also a valid critique of secular modernity and the inequities of globalization.

*3) Affirm that peacemaking requires as much struggle and courage as war making.*

To counteract perceptions that “this-worldly” peace means surrender, passivity in the face of wrongdoing, or acceptance of injustices, Abrahamic leaders seeking to galvanize religious peace discourse would do well to heed the advice given by William James in his

essay, "The Moral Equivalent of War." Both religious texts and historical experiences have granted all three Abrahamic traditions ready access to narratives of struggle and martial metaphors; only by assert the priority of the inner struggle and disciplined non-violent activism can religious leaders transform these themes through spiritual and social disciplines. From Gandhi to Chaiwat Satha-Anand and the Christian Peacemaker Teams, there are many religious leaders who have demonstrated the power of interiorization and non-violent discipline to redirect religious enthusiasm towards constructive programs of social change that require courage, risk, and sacrifice for a greater whole.<sup>12</sup> Rereading the mystical traditions of the Abrahamic religions can also provide impetus for shifting the relative weight given to internal/moral and external/martial struggle, promoting new syntheses linking spiritual development to non-violent engagement with social justice issues.

*4) Encourage prospective thinking about alternative interfaith futures.*

Recent controversies surrounding Danish cartoons, Pope Benedict's Regensburg address, the grave situation in Iraq, and the future of multiculturalism in Western societies suggest a need for prospective thinking about the future of Abrahamic relations. Particular attention needs to be given to the requisites of coexistence and the prevention of interfaith crises.

Honest people can differ in their reading of Pope Benedict's intentions as expressed in the 2006 Regensburg address, and all people of goodwill should reject the actions of those who used his remarks as an excuse for deeds that deepened the Christian-Muslim divide. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to suspect that the more provocative passages in his speech were not altogether accidental, and that they reflected inexperience in interfaith relations, particularly Muslim-Christian relations, and a prospective, self-justifying approach to interreligious discourse. His subsequent visit to Turkey, in contrast, was far more skilful and compatible with lessons learned about Catholic-Muslim relations since Vatican II. It reflected the contributions of interfaith dialogue to experientially grounded knowledge of how others respond to one's own discourse, as well as a prospective concern for future relationships.

Whatever our evaluation of Pope Benedict's theology of interreligious (and indeed, intrareligious) relations, one point that he has raised should be taken up by Christians, Muslims, and Jews in interfaith forums: the issue of *reciprocity*. Pope Benedict has focused on reciprocity primarily as it relates to freedom of religious practice and expression, in the West and in the Islamic world. This is a valid concern. Let us not stop with this issue, however; let us also consider the many other *reciprocities* that might be cultivated in interfaith and intercultural relations: reciprocities of respect, of spiritual recognition, of acknowledging relatedness, of political cooperation, and of commitment to conflict resolution, justice, and human rights. Reciprocity should not be a narrow demand from one side to another; rather, it should be a framework for ongoing dialogue, a basis for improving relations in many spheres, and for building greater consensus about shared values. Only through open-ended dialogue about the terms of Abrahamic coexistence can we learn to address the needs and fears of the other, and arrive at a point of genuine security and harmony with one another. Such an ideal may seem far off, but we would do well to consider a dream articulated by Kenneth Cragg, a lifelong protagonist of Christian-Muslim and Abrahamic understanding: "How self-conscious we still are about our identities! ... Can we not hope that sometime, somewhere, we might somehow be so aware of God... that we might forget we are partisans of His theologies?"<sup>13</sup>

5) *Begin telling new stories now.*

The rapid ascendance of "clash of civilizations" thinking in the aftermath of 9/11 reflects not only the increasing politicization of religious and cultural identities, but also the impoverished nature of Abrahamic historical narratives. If past conflicts continue to dominate present relations and conceptions of the other, the "Crusaders" will always be sallying forth from behind the walls of their Levantine fortresses and the "Mohammedans" will always be at the gates of Vienna. We need new stories, and we need to start telling them now.

Particularly vital at the present juncture in history is the demonstration value of coexistence and interfaith peacebuilding initiatives. Positive examples of Abrahamic solidarity need to receive far greater “air time,” as do the justifications used by those who are pioneering them. Abrahamic solidarity movements offer our greatest hope for revitalizing the spiritual content of Abrahamic identities at a time of great polarization.

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<sup>1</sup> While Christian-Muslim and Jewish-Muslim tensions are more pronounced in our current era, residues of past wrongs and polemics can still be found in Christian-Jewish relations. In focusing primarily on the politically activated Christian-Muslim and Jewish-Muslim rivalries, this paper in no way seeks to imply that Christian-Jewish relations are free from historical burdens and lingering prejudices.

<sup>2</sup> F. E. Peters, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition: Volume II: The Words and Will of God* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[comment/develop linkage]

<sup>4</sup> Marc Howard Ross – interests and interpretations.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Montville and Heidi Winder, “Creative Coexistence in Muslim Spain,” in *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding*, ed. Sampson, Abu-Nimer, Liebler & Whitney (Washington, DC: PACT Publications, 2003); Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002); *Waging Peace: A Two-Part Discussion of Religion-Based Peacemaking* (Washington National Cathedral and USIP); David A. Smock, ed. *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> (Date of presentation in Ottawa.)

<sup>7</sup> Paul Peachey, George F. McLean, and John Kromkowski, *Abrahamic Faiths, Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997); Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Bradford E. Hinze and Irfan A. Omar, *Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Relations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005); James L. Heft, ed., *Beyond Violence: Religious Sources of Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Harold Coward and Gordon Smith, eds., *Religion and Peacebuilding* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2004), Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Gerrie Ter Harr and James J. Busuttil, eds., *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence, and Visions for Peace* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Menocal; Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle’s Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2003); ....

<sup>11</sup> Liechty on “mitigation”; Volf.

<sup>12</sup> Monika K. Hellwig, “Peacefulness, a Personal Discipline,” in *A Case for Peace in Reason and Faith* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 77-89.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Cragg, “Preface,” in *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam*, ed. Annemarie Schimmel and Abdoldjavad Falaturi (London: Burns & Oates, 1979), p. ix.