

INTERMUSLIM UNITY & ITS ROLE IN WORLD PEACE

By

Mr. Obaidur Rehman *

World politics is entering a new phase, and intellectuals have not hesitated to proliferate visions of what it will be--the end of history, the return of traditional rivalries between nation states, and the decline of the nation state from the conflicting pulls of tribalism and globalism, among others. Each of these visions catches aspects of the emerging reality. Yet they all miss a crucial, indeed a central, aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years.

It is the hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

This clash of civilizations ideology will have us moving on to attack Syria, Iraq, Somalia and Iran once we have finished in Afghanistan. While President Bush has gone to considerable lengths to try to argue that American military action against terrorism is not directed at Islam, the rhetoric and advanced planning of some of those around the President would suggest otherwise. In addition, the rhetorical diatribes of Osama

*- International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

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bin Laden declaring a jihad against Christians and Jews, against America and Israel helps feed this frenzy against Islam in the West.

There are myriad flaws and non-sequiturs in the clash of civilizations ideology. However, the most obvious fallacy is saying that so-called civilizations stand in opposition to other civilization types given the frequency and number of clashes and conflicts within a particular type of civilization. Iran and Iraq were engaged in a decade-long war. Muslim Sufis can be sharply differentiated from Muslim Wahhabis. Turkey and Saudi Arabia can hardly be considered soul mates. World War II saw Christian Germany attacking other Western Christians and Russian Orthodox. And so on.

Despite the fact that the Clash of Civilizations ideology is seriously flawed, the events of 9/11 and after have made painfully clear to us the need for improved understanding between Christians and Muslims. Misconceptions and misunderstandings abound. Little effective communication occurs. How can we look to the metaphor of the bruised reed and the dimly burning wick to guide our efforts at promoting peace and righteousness in our badly divided world?

One of the most moving and influential aspect which has been observed that the religious leaders in Israel and the West Bank last spring was with a devout Muslim sheikh and a devout Orthodox rabbi feel a greater rapport with each other than they do with secular Muslims, by the sheikh, and secular Jews, by the rabbi. There is a bond that can bring religious people together, bridging ideological and theological differences. In the middle of the awful and bloody conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians over the past months, the chief rabbi of Israel and the chief Muslim sheik of the Palestinian Authority have been prepared to jointly declare a religious peace and ceasefire, but Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, thwarted them from doing so. This process, in which I have been a bit player, has been both exhilarating and profoundly frustrating, but it has demonstrated the power of shared religious conviction in rising above political conflict and demonstrating the "bruised reed" approach to promoting peace and righteousness.

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There is an urgent need for Christians, Jews and Muslims to reach out to each other to make joint commitments to peace and to promote greater understanding. This must be done both domestically in this country but even more critically internationally, bringing together Christian and Jewish leaders from the West with Muslim leaders from the Islamic world.

Today the Muslim nations of the world are in the grip of intolerance and violence. Government's religious groups and even common people support narrow minded views against not only non-Muslim and foreign culture but also against different sects that have grown up within Islam. Learning about other religions and visiting their places of worship is considered highly inappropriate. The clergy constantly inform the faithful that they are the only one's who shall enter paradise, while all the non-Muslims will burn in hell without making an attempt to study what Islam preaches about this issue.

Sometimes it is said, "People are tolerant of things that they do not care about." But this is not the case in Islam. Tolerance according to Islam does not mean that we believe that all religions are the same. It does not mean that we do not believe in the supremacy of Islam over other faiths and ideologies. It does not mean that we do not convey the message of Islam to others and do not wish them to become Muslims.

Tolerance comes from our recognition of:

1. The dignity of the human beings,
2. The basic equality of all human beings,
3. Universal human rights, and
4. Fundamental freedom of thought, conscience and belief.

The Qur'an speaks about the basic dignity of all human beings. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, spoke about the equality of all human beings, regardless of their race, color, language or ethnic background. Shari`ah recognizes the rights of all people to life, property, family, honor and conscience.

Islam emphasizes the establishment of equality and justice, both of these values cannot be established without some degree of tolerance.

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Islam recognized from the very beginning the principle of freedom of belief or freedom of religion. It said very clearly that it is not allowed to have any coercion in the matters of faith and belief. The Qur'an says, "There is no compulsion in religion."¹

Qura'anic text:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾ (٢٥٦)

If in the matters of religion, coercion is not permissible, then by implication one can say that in other matters of cultures and other worldly practices it is also not acceptable. In Surat Ash-Shura سورة الشورى Allah says to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, "If then they turn away, We have not sent you as a guard over them. Your duty is but to convey (the Message)..."²

Qura'anic text:

﴿فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِظًا إِنْ عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ وَإِنَّا إِذَا أَذَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنَّا رَحْمَةً فَرَحَ بِهَا وَإِنْ تُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ فَإِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ كَفُورٌ﴾ (٤٨)

In another place Allah says, "Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. Your Lord knows best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance."³

Allah says:

¹-Al-Baqarah 256

²-Ash-Shura 48

³-An-Nahl:125.

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﴿ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ﴾ (١٢٥)

Further, Allah says to the Believers, "Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and beware (of evil): if you do turn back, know then that it is Our Messenger's duty to proclaim (the Message) in the clearest manner." ¹

Qura'anic text:

﴿وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَاحْذَرُوا فَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا عَلَى رَسُولِنَا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ﴾ (٩٢)

One can also cite Allah's words: "Say: 'Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger: but if you turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be on right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear (Message).'" ³

Qura'anic text:

﴿قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْهِ مَا حُمِّلَ وَعَلَيْكُمْ مَا حُمِّلْتُمْ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوهُ تَهْتَدُوا وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ﴾ (٥٤)

All these verses give note that Muslims do not coerce people; they must present the message to them in the most cogent and clear way, invite them to the truth and do their best in presenting and conveying the message of God to humanity, but it is up to people to accept or not to accept. Allah says, "And say, 'The truth is from your Lord, so whosoever wants let him believe and whosoever wants let him deny.'" ²

Qura'anic text:

¹-Al-Ma'idah: 92

²-An-Nahl 29

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﴿ فَادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا فَلَئْسَ مَثْوًى الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴾
(٢٩)

The question then comes: If Allah gave choice to believe or not to believe, then why did He punish the people of Prophet Nuh, the `Ad, the Thamud, the people of Prophet Lut, the people of Prophet Shu`aib and Pharaoh and his followers? The answer is in the Qur'an itself. Those people were not punished simply because of their disbelief. They were punished because they had become oppressors. They committed aggression against the righteous, and stopped others to come to the way of Allah. There were many in the world who denied Allah, but Allah did not punish every one. Ibn Taymiyah, the outstanding Muslim scholar, said, "The states may live long inspite of their people's unbelief (kufr كفر), but they cannot live long when their people become oppressors."

Another question is raised about Jihad. Some people say, "Is it not the duty of Muslims to make Jihad?" But the purpose of Jihad is not to convert people to Islam. Allah says, "No compulsion in religion."¹

Qura'anic text:

﴿ لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴾
(٢٥٦)

The real purpose of Jihad is to remove injustice and aggression. Muslims are allowed to keep good relations with non-Muslims. Allah says, "Allah does not forbid you that you show kindness and deal justly with those who did not fight you in your religion and did not drive you out from your homes..."²

¹-Al-Baqarah 256

²- Al-Mumtahinah 8

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Qura'anic text:

﴿لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ﴾ (٨)

Islam teaches that fighting is only against those who fight. Allah says, "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loves not transgressors." ¹

Qura'an text:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ﴾ (١٩٠)

Islam may tolerate anything, but it teaches zero tolerance for injustice, oppression, and violation of the rights of other human beings. Allah says, "And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Your side one who will protect; and raise for us from Your side one who will help!'" ²

Qura'anic text:

﴿وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا﴾ (٧٥)

Islam teaches tolerance on all levels: individual, groups and states. It should be a political and legal requirement. Tolerance is the mechanism that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), and the rule of law. The Qur'an says very clearly: "To every People have We

¹ - Al-Baqarah 190

² - An-Nisa 75

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appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow, let them not then dispute with you on the matter, but do invite (them) to your Lord: for you are assuredly on the Right Way. If they do wrangle with you, say, 'God knows best what it is you are doing.' 'God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ.'¹

Qura'anic text:

﴿اللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ (٦٩) أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ (٧٠) وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يَنْزِلْ بِهِ سُلْطَانًا وَمَا لَيْسَ لَهُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ نَصِيرٍ (٧١) وَإِذَا تُنزِلَتْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمُنْكَرَ يَكَادُونَ يَسْطُونُ بِالَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِنَا قُلْ أَفَأَنْبِئُكُمْ بِشَرٍّ مِّنْ ذَلِكَُمُ النَّارِ وَعَدَهَا اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ (٧٢) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضَرْبٌ مِّثْلُ فَاستَمْعُوا لَهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ (٧٣) مَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ (٧٤) اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ (٧٥) يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ (٧٦)﴾

There are many levels of tolerance:

- A. Between family members, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between siblings etc.
- B. Tolerance between the members of the community: tolerance in views and opinions, tolerance between the Madhahib مذاهب (Islamic Juristic Schools).

¹-Al-Hajj 76-69

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- C. Tolerance between Muslims and the people of other faiths (interfaith relations, dialogue and cooperation).

Muslims have been generally very tolerant people. We must emphasize this virtue among us and in the world today. Tolerance is needed among our communities: We must foster tolerance through deliberate policies and efforts. Our centers should be multi-ethnic. We should teach our children respect of each other. We should not generalize about other races and cultures. We should have more exchange visits and meetings with each other. Even marriages should be encouraged among Muslims of different ethnic groups.

With non-Muslims we should have dialogue and good relations, but we cannot accept things that are contrary to our religion. We should inform them what is acceptable to us and what is not. With more information, I am sure the respect will develop and more cooperation will develop.

The image of Islam in the modern world is one of intolerance and violence. It is considered a faith followed only by fanatical bedouins and terrorists and is generally regarded as an outdated concept of life.

However, even a cursory study of Islam is enough to show that the current world view on this faith is far removed from the truth. Religion reconciles opposites: religion-science, this world-the next world, Nature-Divine Books, material-spiritual, and spirit-body. It can contain scientific materialism, put science in its proper place, and end long-standing conflicts. The natural sciences, which should lead people to God, instead cause widespread unbelief. As this trend is strongest in the West, and because Christianity is the most influenced, Muslim-Christian dialogue is indispensable.

Religion has not escaped unbelief's onslaught. Muslims cannot limit Islam to a political ideology or an economic system, or consider the West and other religions from a historical perspective and define their attitude accordingly. Those who adopt Islam as a political ideology do so usually out of personal or national anger or hostility. We

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must end this practice, and base our actions on Islam as a religion. The Prophet defined a true Muslim as one from whom others are safe, as the most trust-worthy representative of universal peace.

Muslims must stop acting out of ideological or political partisanship and dressing it up in Islamic garb, or represent mere desires as ideas. This has caused the West to adopt a distorted vision of Islam. For example, American universities teach Islam as a political system in their political science or international relations departments.⁶ Such a perception is found among Westernized Muslims and non-Muslim Asians and Africans. Strangely enough, many groups that have put themselves forward under the banner of Islam export this image and actually strengthen it.

Prof. Muhammad Abu-Nimer on the importance of Interfaith Dialogue assert that it has; "deeper spiritual connection; it becomes the main source for the individual's commitment to social change, peace work and taking risk to confront ones evil. i.e. affirming his position that deep sense of motivation that originates from religious identity distinguishes Interfaith Dialogue from secular or Inter-ethnic encounter. Abu Nimer in his place on miracle of Transformation through Interfaith Dialogue revealed some participant testimony as regard its role in bringing about an enduring transformation thus: - "Religion touches on deeper levels of our identity".

"Moral and spiritual forces of religion can encourage people to act and change" If participants change their attitude in Interfaith Dialogue such change will be deeper than if the change occurred in a non-religious context".¹

Marc Go pin in his book: Between Education and Armageddon re-assert the position of religion in shopping the world thus.

"As religion becomes more important in the lives of hundreds of millions of people, the political power generated by this commitment will either lead a more peaceful world or to a more violent world, depending on how that power is utilized."

¹ - Pg. 17 David Smock 2002

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Distinguish participants the fury behind the passions of religion is much more dreadful than Nuclear and Atomic bomb very few have discovered this synergy. What matter is how positive or negative we use them. Rev. Sam Kujiyat attested to this fact thus:

“Important religious leaders who have power to fire this passion in either nation building or nation destruction is in no doubt from the history of mankind to this day”.¹

Buddhism:

King Ashoka the Great (Late) Mahagosananda of Cambodia and Dhala Lama in USA.

Judaism:

Rabbi Mare Athenaeum (late) Rabbi Melchior of the Knasset. Rabbi Menachem Forman and Dr. Yehezkel Landau who are focal person in various religiously motivated initiatives between Arab-Israel relations.

Christianity:

Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Mrorewa of Zimbabwe, Rev. Martin Luther King and Rev. Jessy Jackson of U.S.A. Pope John Paul II Vartican Rome.

Islam:

Imam EL. Mustapha Grand Mufbi of Bosina Herzegovina, HRH. Prince El-Hasam Bin Talal of Jordan, Sheikh Ahmed Hussani Deedat of South Africa Sheikh Ahmed and Khan Indis, and president Muhammed Khatami of Islamic Republic of Iran that proposed to the UN. General Assembly September 1998 among civilization. He denounced the glorification of violence in his presentation all the UN thus: “The establishment and continued functioning of the United Nations is a testimony to the progressive path of the world and human society,. Let us hope that, in the coming century resort of force and violence shall not be glorified and that the essence of political power shall be compassion and justice externally manifested in dialogue among civilizations”.

¹ - SK Kujiyat 02/05.

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Subjected to above by those who choose the mean of confrontation and violence to achieve set objectives. The reality is that there are more texts that support the part of promoting interfaith dialogue than those text that seems to oppose its. And there are more religiously motivated role model for dialogue than those who serve as confrontationist/role model of negative forces. Some of the motivating scriptural text and messages from unknown religion leaders are as follows: -

Hinduism And Jainism: -

They have a coded message called AHIMSA.

It symbolizes non-violence engagement with others. Secondly. Hinduism had a unique coded message for promoting dialogue (a) both personal and interpersonal level coded:

SATYAGRAHA- it literally mean: "holding on to truth". Mahatma Gandhi translated it as a method of non-violent passive resistance in Hinduism. Gandhi assert that what make people resist to follow the path of peace Is the negative forces he to the real devil inside us as follow:

"The only real devils are those running around inside our heads and hearts". He concludes by saying "I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religion of the world".

Budhism:

It has a spiritual principle called Metta and Ahammayietra i.e. "Pilgrimage of Truth." The Monk Gosanada interpreted it; the walk for peace

Judaism:

In its tradition there are several texts and messages that relate to promoting the culture of peace and dialogue keep the tongue from evil and they lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace and pursue it".¹

¹ - Psalm 34:14-19

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Christianity:

In the spirit of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the New Testament gives a strong backing to its believes thus. "Let us than pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up-building. Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God...Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him".

"To each among you have we presented a law and way of life. If Allah had so willed. He would have made you a simple people, but His plan is to test you in what he hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues, the goal of you all is to Allah. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute"¹.

Qura'an text:

﴿ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمَنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴾ (٤٨)

Islam-finally enjoined all Muslim to pursue the course of promoting interreligion dialogue thus: - "say, o people of the Book! Come to common terms as between you and us. That we worship None but Allah: that we associate No partners with Him: that are erect not, from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back, say ye: Bear witness that we at least. Are Muslim (Bowng to Allah's will)."²

Qura'anic text:

¹- Maeida: 48

²-The Qu'ran 3:64

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﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾ (٦٤)

Finally, Islam insists on enclosure approach and cooperation in good virtue to the benefit/common good of all thus: - "To each is a goal to which Allah turns him, than strive together (as in a race). Towards all that is good. Wherever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah Hath power over all things.¹

Qura'an text:

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَن يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّن يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِن كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرُؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ﴾ (١٤٣)

One cannot say this is the best practices of promoting interfaith dialogue because of circumstance, cultural orientation, history and the types of actors determined which module is best suitable. HRH Prince Hassan Bin Talal put it straight that. We live in a world where there is no law of peace as there is law of war". He went further to assert the consequences of the use of militancy thus:

"The more we use the power of militancy to silent the foe, the more the foe justified terrorism to make the voice of the powerless be heard."

¹-The Qu'ran 2:143

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He concluded thus: "If we get it wrong militarily we must not get it wrong culturally." Therefore, the need for us to enhance interfaith dialogue is much more desirable how than ever culturally. Since the first world conference of religions leaders at Washington D.C. a Century ago in the year 1873, and the second conference of World Parliament of Religion in 1993, the need for promoting interfaith dialogue is becoming more imminent in today's world where Military might and power of shuttle diplomacy is failing the world political leaders. Major conflict in the world today had religion underpinning. Examples are the statements of Rabbi Yehezkel Landau Co-director of Open House Centre for Jewish-Arab coexistence peace in the Middle East without a spiritual foundation reconciling Jews and Muslims."

Conclusion:

Promoting interfaith dialogue must be pragmatic it must contain frank diplomacy it must not be much of common ground but highly those areas of our differences. There is need for promoting a pluralistic society at the same time respecting the differences that make each and everyone unique. Islam has come as a religion of social justice an inclusive approach yet respecting and affirming the right of others to live side by side in mutual coexistence. Indeed it we don't use the best mean of promoting interfaith dialogue through a strong by Commonwealth of Nations and the U.N various organs in the next decade our next generation of human beings will be Weapons of mass destruction.

Religion has been, and will continue to be, a powerful contributing factor in violent conflict. It is therefore essential to include religion and religious actors in diplomatic efforts. Interfaith dialogue brings people of different religious faiths together for conversations. These conversations can take an array of forms and possess a variety of goals and formats. They can also take place at various social levels, and target different types of participants, including elites, mid-level professionals, and grassroots activists. Interfaith dialogue programs may resemble secular peace

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building programs in some ways. In other ways, though, religious content and spiritual culture are infused throughout the programs, distinguishing them from their secular counterparts. Evaluation requires that a program develop a clear statement of its goals, methods, and outcomes. Making these explicit at the outset helps sharpen thinking by providing an explicit yardstick by which to measure a program's success. Over time, the knowledge accumulated through these types of evaluation will expand our understanding of the actual and potential roles of religious dialogue in international peacemaking. At the individual program level, evaluation is concerned with three components: context, the factors in the general environment that may influence program implementation and outcome; implementation, the core of the program's activities; and outcome, the effect of the program on the participants, the local community, and the broader community. Proposing a relationship between a particular intervention or program and a desired outcome assumes a theory of change. A logic model, which links outcomes (both short- and long-term) with program activities and processes, is one way to clarify the theoretical assumptions behind a particular program design so that it can be shared with all stakeholders as well as with the evaluator. Evaluation must be an integral part of program planning from the beginning and should be an ongoing process throughout the life of the project, providing feedback to program managers and staff that enable them to improve their ongoing work. Because change happens over time, it is important to evaluate the program beyond the completion of the project. Evaluation must include, but not be limited to, personal, face-to-face interviews with program participants. Other outcome measures might include the number and type of participants, program spin-offs, and post-program meetings, as well as the amount of media activity and ultimately, of course, a demonstrable reduction in violence.

Whether in its own right or as a proxy for political battles, religion has long contributed to violent conflict around the world. But only recently has interfaith dialogue provided a way to serve peaceful goals within the

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context of religious faith. Interfaith dialogue can unlock the power of religious traditions and provide the inspiration, guidance, and validation necessary for populations to move toward non-violent means of conflict resolution. Such dialogues have become an increasingly important tool for those who seek to end violent conflict worldwide.

Through interfaith dialogue, each faith group can make its unique contribution to the common cause of creative co-existence. But this is far easier said than done, and to do it well, interfaith dialogue programs must be evaluated so that lessons, good and bad, can be learned for future applications.

A politician interviewed for this report explained, "There's no guarantee that including religion in diplomatic efforts will work. What is guaranteed is that without it, diplomatic efforts have no chance of working. Religion is here to stay; ignoring it won't make it disappear."

Formal intervention in areas of conflict by interfaith groups has taken place in contemporary times since 1965 at least, when the Appeal to Conscience Foundation was founded by Arthur Schneier and a group of high-level clergy representing Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. (Formal interventions are those planned and designed as an intervention, in comparison to informal interventions that might occur, for example, when a friendship that has developed between people of different faiths turns out to be helpful in resolving conflict.) The primary approach of the Foundation is to reach out as a neutral third party to religious leaders in areas of conflict and thereby facilitate interfaith communication.

There are many other approaches to interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding, but so far there has been very little research on their effectiveness. This is unfortunate, because those who design and implement interfaith programs need feedback to determine how to maximize their efforts and resources.

Given the range of approaches and techniques currently practiced and the wide variety of geographic, political, and social contexts in which

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they take place, it is increasingly important to develop methodologies to evaluate what works.

At its most basic level, interfaith dialogue involves people of different religious faiths coming together to have a conversation. "Conversation" in this sense has an expansive definition, and is not limited to verbal exchange alone. In his seminal work, *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah placed conversation at the very heart of civilization, defining cultures as "dramatic conversations about things that matter to their participants."

The notion of interfaith dialogue encompasses many different types of conversations, settings, goals, and formats. But it is not an all-encompassing concept: interfaith dialogue is not intended to be a debate. It is aimed at mutual understanding, not competing; at mutual problem solving, not proselytizing. In his introduction to *Interfaith Dialogue and Peace building*, David Smock lists a variety of ways interfaith dialogue has been organized and targeted:

- High-level religious leaders (elites) have convened to speak collectively as advocates for peace;
- Elite interfaith bodies have engaged in conflict mediation between combatants;
- Grassroots participants have come together across religious divisions to promote cross-community interaction and to develop participants into agents of reconciliation;
- Theological and scriptural similarities among hostile religious groups have been highlighted to mitigate the hostility engendered by theological differences;
- Dialogue during conflict has been organized as a step toward ending the conflict or, in the post-conflict period, as a step toward reconciliation;
- Conflict resolution training for an interreligious group has served as a vehicle for interfaith dialogue.

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Some writers note, however, that even this expansive definition of "dialogue" or "conversation" is too narrow if confined to the merely verbal. They argue that demonstrable deeds of reconciliation are usually much more effective than engaging in conversation. But these deeds may also be classified under the rubric of interfaith dialogue, in the broadest of senses, because they share one underlying feature: reverence, the shared devotion to high ideals. Reverence enables participants from different faith traditions to jointly affirm transcendent ideals such as honor, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and freedom.

One way of categorizing programs is along the dimension of the participants' occupations: *Elites* are people in top-level positions in politics, religion, academia, and other fields who have the potential to influence widely the group's ideas, practices, and values. *Mid-level* people whose occupations are thought to have influence over smaller groups of people, in a more personal way. Mid-level programs might be aimed at teachers, for example, or local clergy. *Grassroots* participants or activists are individual citizens. Their experience is more intimate, having an impact on their families, friends, customers, and others with whom they have personal relationships.

A Multilevel Program—The Tolerance Project

The Tolerance Project is designed to identify and explore the resources for tolerance and religious pluralism intrinsic in the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with a particular emphasis on the relevance of these resources to educational practice. Its programs aim to reach out equally to religious academicians, practitioners such as program managers and teachers, and local grassroots activists.

The project, which has received financial support from the Institute, is implemented in three sites: Berlin, Sarajevo, and Jerusalem, with adaptations to fit each area's specific context (a Christian Orthodox/Islamic emphasis in Sarajevo, for example). Each program involves teacher training and the distribution in religious schools of handbooks on interfaith tolerance.

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In addition to applied educational approaches, the Tolerance Project has held academic conferences on the subject of religion and tolerance, and has published conference proceedings in several languages. The project also conducts an international summer school program, which brings together people from as many as 22 countries, ranging from organization professionals to college students.

There are more aspects to interfaith dialogue and understanding, however, than simple interfaith mingling. True tolerance is contingent not only upon gaining a more sophisticated view of other groups, but also of gaining a similarly complex view of one's own. Experts have come to appreciate how meaningful it can be to meet members of one's own group who hold different orientations, and have begun to incorporate such experiences into their tolerance-building programs.

Since dialogue alone is not enough, the group also takes action together in their communities, for example by lecturing at one another's schools. In the process relationships are built; when the brother of one Imam passed away, all the rabbis who were in town went to visit the mourning family.

This program was built on the kind of sensitivity that true coexistence requires—which involves, in addition to appreciating the particular faith groups, understanding the complex relationship between secular modernity and religious tradition. To illustrate, all of the leaders in the group are male, and all belong to respected, mainstream Orthodox congregations. For this project to have credibility in the Middle East, it had to forgo the liberal values of inclusion and diversity and not invite women or less mainstream sects.

Grassroots Program

Pastor James Movel Wuye and Imam Muhammed Nurayn Ashafa direct a multilevel program in conflict management and peacebuilding in Nigeria, which has received financial support from the Institute. They are Joint National Coordinators of the Muslim/Christian Youth Dialogue Forum. Both had once participated as "youth leaders" in the violent clashes

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between their communities, and both had been wounded as a result. Because of this involvement, however, their program had far more credibility in their communities than it might otherwise have had. They continue to be respected religious figures who now lead youth in a peaceful direction.

Their most pressing concern is with school dropouts and drug addicts, who can be easily turned to violence. Working at this grassroots level involves giving young people a secure place to learn about other groups, teaching them ways in which their own religious tradition supports peaceful coexistence, training them in conflict resolution skills, and addressing their personal, practical life issues. The program will give these at-risk youth the basic skills they need to have a better life. Leaders of other grassroots interfaith dialogue programs made this point as well: a program that provides something people want—for example, to learn a practical skill or trade—becomes more attractive and, in the process, more effective.

The interfaith gathering itself did not resolve the conflict, but it was an important step toward changing attitudes about the issues and may have helped lay the groundwork for cooperatively building peace in the future.

The foundation of interfaith dialogue is the recognition that in order to achieve sustainable change in the ideas and actions of a religiously identified community, religious actors and institutions must genuinely support that change.

Mutual tolerance is essential for conflict prevention and resolution, and interfaith programs are designed to increase tolerance between participants through encounters with one another in an atmosphere of relative security and mutual respect. These programs foster empathy, and help participants form real relationships and develop a more complex and sophisticated understanding of each other.

Although some peacebuilding projects emerging from faith-based organizations closely resemble secular peacebuilding efforts, in most cases

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the religious orientations of the organizations and individuals involved shape the peacebuilding they undertake. For example, religious mediators often make very explicit use of religious language and texts, such as prayer, when addressing conflict. This spiritual element encourages looking beyond one's personal interests toward a greater good.

Most religions are committed to working for justice and peace, and have long-standing and well-established structures or processes for doing so. They may also have religion-specific approaches to conflict resolution, such as guidelines for resolving conflict or rituals for reconciling relationships that have potential application across religious boundaries. Interfaith programs between conflicted groups can mobilize these and other religious elements in the service of increasing mutual tolerance—a process that begins with the ability to interact without fear or aggression, and progresses, through empathy and understanding, to mutual respect.

Since evaluation requires a clear statement of goals, methods, and outcomes, it is, in the most practical sense, a tool for learning to work better.

Program evaluation is the mechanism by which all stakeholders in the program come to understand what does and does not work—and why.

In this case, stakeholders represent a wide range of people, including:

- Program staff and managers;
- Religious communities interested in peace;
- Granting agencies;
- Government officials;
- Academicians who develop theory and technique;
- The general public.

Even though there are many stakeholders, evaluation is primarily concerned with providing useful, meaningful feedback to the program managers themselves. Evaluation drives program development and institutional learning by providing the means to make mid-course

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corrections and build upon success. Useful evaluation facilitates the ongoing refinement of a program's goals and methods, and helps adjust its methods to suit those refinements. Therefore, evaluation must be an integral part of a program from inception, with program management actively involved in identifying what information it needs to make good decisions and, later on, on what it needs to interpret and apply the evaluative data. Over time, the understanding accumulated through evaluations like these will expand knowledge of the actual and potential roles of religious organizations in international peacemaking.

Broadly speaking, at the program or project level, evaluation of interfaith peacebuilding is concerned with three components: context, implementation, and outcome.

Context. Interfaith dialogue programs take place in conflict areas, where politics and community dynamics play crucial roles in every aspect of the program, from pivotal issues (such as determining the social consequences for individuals who participate in the program) to small yet important details (for example, how do we ensure food delivery?). Context evaluation looks at what factors in the community help or hinder project goals.

Implementation. Evaluation examines what happens in a program, and why. In other words, it addresses the heart of the program by focusing on the program's core activities—those undertaken to achieve its intended goals and outcomes. The challenge of implementation evaluation is to identify the critical components or activities of a program, both explicit and implicit, and explore their relationships as they are tied to the project's outcomes. This level of evaluation seeks to understand which aspects of the program facilitate the desired outcomes and which ones impede them.

Outcome. Evaluation begins by asking what the program is trying to accomplish: What impact is the project having on its participants, staff, other organizations, and the community? Since projects often produce unanticipated outcomes, and since the goals of interfaith dialogue are particularly hard to measure (e.g., conflict prevention) in a complex

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environment, outcomes need to be evaluated at multiple levels of the project and at multiple points in time. The challenge is to focus not only on expected outcomes, but also on unanticipated ones.

- Multiple levels of project outcomes might include:
- Participant-focused outcomes;
- Program and system-level outcomes;
- Broader community outcomes.

The participant-focused outcome asks what difference this program made in its participants' lives. Most often, program and system-level outcomes are what evaluators have in mind when thinking of the "success" of any program. Broader community outcomes are both interim and long-term, and might include such "spin-off" effects as increased cooperation between faith groups on non-political tasks.

When we posit a relationship between a particular intervention and a desired outcome, we have assumed a theory of change. A logic model and graphic display of the theory is one way to clarify the thinking behind a particular program design, so that it can be shared with all stakeholders, as well as the evaluator.

A logic model includes:

- A succinct statement of the problem and what community needs or assets require intervention;
- A statement of desired results, both short- and long-term;
- A list of factors believed to influence change in this community;
- Strategies used elsewhere to achieve similar results;
- Assumptions behind how and why the strategies work.

In addition, evaluation of conflict resolution programs always face the challenge of how to link smaller "micro-changes" (in attitude or behavior of participants) to larger "macro-changes" in the community that create peace.

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Pearson-d'Estree's group proposed an inclusive framework that permits the evaluation of all outcome criteria that may apply in conflict resolution programs. They argue that this framework can be adapted to cover all the various types of conflict resolution programs, including dialogue, training (as intervention), trauma healing, and peacebuilding.

The categories in this table are based upon the type of change the program seeks. The first, "Changes in Representation (Thinking)," encompasses the implementation of new ideas and ways of conceptualizing issues, new languages, better communication, and the like. The second, "Changes in Relations," includes indications of change in those variables that engender improved relationships, such as trust, empathy, and new understandings of identity and security.

The next two categories transcend the particular moment of intervention: "Foundations for Transfer" focuses on those achievements that establish the groundwork for transferring new progress—an output such as formulating a new joint, interfaith agenda—to the larger community. The fourth category, "Foundations for Outcome/Implementation," covers the structures that participants create or support that help them bring changed ideas and relationships into the larger culture. These include networks participants may create, new political structures, new media, educational forums, and the like.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor do they imply causality. The world of conflict and intervention is far too complex for simplistic models. In real life, relationships between criteria exist and interact across the four categories.

Because change happens over time, it is important to plan to have multiple evaluations that extend well beyond the initial intervention. Pearson-d'estrée's group suggested a grid in which evaluation takes place at three "phases of change" in order to assess three levels of impact.

- a) Micro.
- b) Meso.
- c) Macro.

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The "promotion stage" is immediate and follows the intervention itself (e.g., weekend workshop). The "application stage" is short-term and occurs when the participant has had time to bring his new ideas or behaviors back to his primary community. The "sustainability" phase then examines the farther-reaching impacts, over the medium- to long-term. In other words, did these new ideas or developments remain effective and viable on their own over time?

The grid in Table 2 recognizes that change takes place on different levels as well as at different times. "Micro" level refers to the program participants, "meso" level represents the participants' reference groups (such as professional organizations, extended families, and religious communities), and the "macro" level refers to large-scale social or national changes.

With this terminology in mind, it is easier to enter into the evaluation process, even if the process itself remains challenging.

Effective evaluation of interfaith dialogue programs depends upon identifying variables that can be measured. There are some obvious and simple measures of success, such as the number of participants attending, or the number willing to return or who refer others to the program. There are also quantitative measures of attitude change, which rely on self-report to questionnaires. Both of these are important. But what really makes a difference is what people do following the program that they did not do before. Behaviors of various sorts can be observed and quantified once they have been identified as target behaviors.

The Five Pillars of Interfaith Dialogue

Our approach to interfaith dialogue rests on five pillars:

- I. Islam is a dynamic civilization with a rich history. Islam is not a collection of religious tenets that exist in a vacuum. The development of Islam occurs in historical context. Islam, like all religions, has faced challenges in adjusting to modernity and encountering other religions. Islam is a dynamic civilization that is today in the process of reconciling itself with the challenges of modernity in communities throughout the world.

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- II. Islam is not monolithic. Muslims have a wide diversity of religious and political views. Just as Christians and Jews are not monolithic in their practices and politics, so too are Muslims diverse. For instance, there is the massive ethnic and religious diversity within Islam, ranging from the skeptics to fundamentalist, Sunnis to Shi'is, Arabs to Indonesians - all of whom represent and participate in one way or another the diversity that is Islam.
- III. Break the silence. We should feel comfortable discussing hot-button cultural and political matters. Muslims can achieve genuine dialogue with others if we generate open dialogue amongst ourselves. We should empower everyone in our community to not feel discouraged or intimidated about speaking their minds. This involves encouraging people to ask difficult questions in a friendly manner and to get to the heart of each other's concerns.
- IV. Self-criticism is a sign of strength. American Muslims can take the lead in working for a brighter future for the Muslim World.

Rather than shy away from shortcomings, we should feel free to address the massive problems facing the Muslim world: the threat posed by radicals who advocate violence and religious supremacy based upon their interpretation of religious texts; the social status of women; the treatment of minorities; and the lack of civil society, democracy, and economic development.

- V. Reach out beyond Jews and Christians. We should be careful not to limit dialogue to Christianity and Judaism. Given Islam's troubled history with polytheistic and post-Muhammad faiths, we must begin to engage the many other religions that are blossoming in America alongside us: Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, Baha'i, etc. If we can establish constructive dialogue with these groups, we will be opening up a new chapter in Muslim interfaith dialogue.

Diana Eck of Harvard and a specialist on interreligious relationships has said, "Dialogue is the foundation for One World. One World cannot be

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built on the foundation of transnational corporate capitalism. One World cannot be built on the foundation of competition and polarization between the superpowers. One World cannot be built on the foundation of science, technology and the media. One World cannot be built on Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Sikh triumphalism. One World cannot be built on the foundation of mutual fear and suspicion. Laying the foundations for One World is the most important task of our time. These foundations are not negotiated statements and agreements. These foundations are, rather, in the stockpiling of trust through dialogue and the creation of relationships that can sustain both agreements and disagreements. Moving forward as Christians, in dialogue with those other faiths, we will create the foundational relationship of One World. Moving forward alone, we will not."

I can envisage multiple purposes being served by this kind of dialogue but four are particularly critical:

1. Christians and Jews need to understand the varieties of Islamic thought. Only through dialogue can we fully appreciate the extent to which the fanatical and heretical theology that motivates Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network are aberrations and perversions of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Mohamed.
2. There is an opportunity emerging out of the tragedy of 9/11 and the aftermath for moderate Muslims to reclaim the initiative within Islam and for moderates to marginalize the extremists. A growing number of moderate Muslims are speaking out and critiquing Islamic practice in an effort to promote reform and reenergize the Islamic center. Through interfaith dialogue, Christians and Jews can lend their support to these efforts. The reforms will be purely internal matters, but the moderates who are challenging the extremes and thereby running the risk of arousing hostile reactions within the Muslim community can benefit from moral support from Christians and Jews.

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3. Effective interfaith dialogue and alliances can strengthen the role of religious leaders as international peacemakers. If religious leaders can speak with one voice on an interfaith basis in times of conflict between Muslim and western countries, peace and righteousness can be advanced.
4. Effective dialogue can moderate Christian and Jewish self-righteousness and superiority in relation to Islam, and dialogue can help overcome mutual demonization.

A variety of approaches can be employed to generate effective dialogue. Interfaith dialogue needs to be a conversation among people of different faiths on a common subject, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow. Dialogue can occur at elite levels or at grassroots levels. It can actually strive to achieve peace agreements by mediating among those in conflict or, at a more basic level, it can transform the relationships among the participants.

Probably the most successful efforts at interfaith dialogue focus on the telling of personal and group stories, particularly when members share the pain and suffering that they have experienced at the hands of the other religious group represented in the dialogue. Dialogue with Muslims will almost inevitably provoke Muslim references to the Crusades and will provoke references to more contemporary manifestations of what Muslims consider to be Christian aggression against Muslims. Thus, dialogue sessions provide opportunities for sharing grievances and articulating the suffering of each community. Moreover, dialogue becomes most transformational when those who have sinned against the other repent and seek forgiveness from the aggrieved party. The admission of guilt by members of one group for past wrongs committed against the other religious group can provide a powerful basis for healing.

The dialogue process should aim at building relationships between participating individuals and between religious communities, both within the dialogue setting and more widely. Intergroup reconciliation should be the overarching goal.

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True many Muslims today still retain the qualities of tolerance and generosity towards all people of different faiths, culture and races. But these are mostly a part of the small educated minorities that exist among the vast illiterate populations of most Muslim nations of the twentieth century.

To face the challenges of the next century which is definitely going to be a truly global century, Muslims all over the world not only have to learn to live together, but they also have to learn to live with others in the most amiable and tolerant ways possible. There is no place for isolationism and narrow mindedness in the global village of the 21st century to survive in this bold new world the Muslims need to relearn the message of Islam and to review their own history, both of which contain the answers for a successful future live side by side in mutual coexistence. Indeed if we don't use the best means of promoting interfaith dialogue through a strong by Commonwealth of Nations and the U.N various organs in the next decade our next generation of human beings will be Weapons of mass destruction.

Whether in its own right or as a proxy for political battles, religion has long contributed to violent conflict around the world. But only recently has interfaith dialogue provided a way to serve peaceful goals within the context of religious faith. Interfaith dialogue can unlock the power of religious traditions and provide the inspiration, guidance, and validation necessary for populations to move toward non-violent means of conflict resolution. Such dialogues have become an increasingly important tool for those who seek to end violent conflict worldwide.

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guaranteed is that without it, diplomatic efforts have no chance of working. Religion is here to stay; ignoring it won't make it disappear."

Formal intervention in areas of conflict by interfaith groups has taken place in contemporary times since 1965 at least, when the Appeal to Conscience Foundation was founded by Arthur Schneier and a group of high-level clergy representing Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. (Formal interventions are those planned and designed as an intervention, in comparison to informal interventions that might occur, for example, when a friendship that has developed between people of different faiths turns out to be helpful in resolving conflict.) The primary approach of the Foundation is to reach out as a neutral third party to religious leaders in areas of conflict and thereby facilitate interfaith communication.

There are many other approaches to interfaith dialogue and peace building, but so far there has been very little research on their effectiveness. This is unfortunate, because those who design and implement interfaith programs need feedback to determine how to maximize their efforts and resources.

Given the range of approaches and techniques currently practiced and the wide variety of geographic, political, and social contexts in which they take place, it is increasingly important to develop methodologies to evaluate what works.

At its most basic level, interfaith dialogue involves people of different religious faiths coming together to have a conversation. "Conversation" in this sense has an expansive definition, and is not limited to verbal exchange alone. In his seminal work, *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah placed conversation at the very heart of civilization, defining cultures as "dramatic conversations about things that matter to their participants."

The notion of interfaith dialogue encompasses many different types of conversations, settings, goals, and formats. But it is not an all-encompassing concept: interfaith dialogue is not intended to be a debate. It is aimed at mutual understanding, not competing; at mutual problem

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solving, not proselytizing. In his introduction to Interfaith Dialogue and Peace building, David Smock lists a variety of ways interfaith dialogue has been organized and targeted:

- High-level religious leaders (elites) have convened to speak collectively as advocates for peace;
- Elite interfaith bodies have engaged in conflict mediation between combatants;
- Grassroots participants have come together across religious divisions to promote cross-community interaction and to develop participants into agents of reconciliation;
- Theological and scriptural similarities among hostile religious groups have been highlighted to mitigate the hostility engendered by theological differences;
- Dialogue during conflict has been organized as a step toward ending the conflict or, in the post-conflict period, as a step toward reconciliation;
- Conflict resolution training for an interreligious group has served as a vehicle for interfaith dialogue.

Some writers note, however, that even this expansive definition of "dialogue" or "conversation" is too narrow if confined to the merely verbal. They argue that demonstrable deeds of reconciliation are usually much more effective than engaging in conversation. But these deeds may also be classified under the rubric of interfaith dialogue, in the broadest of senses, because they share one underlying feature: reverence, the shared devotion to high ideals. Reverence enables participants from different faith traditions to jointly affirm transcendent ideals such as honor, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and freedom.

One way of categorizing programs is along the dimension of the participants' occupations: *Elites* are people in top-level positions in politics, religion, academia, and other fields who have the potential to influence widely the group's ideas, practices, and values. *Mid-level*

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people whose occupations are thought to have influence over smaller groups of people, in a more personal way. Mid-level programs might be aimed at teachers, for example, or local clergy. *Grassroots* participants or activists are individual citizens. Their experience is more intimate, having an impact on their families, friends, customers, and others with whom they have personal relationships.

The interfaith gathering itself did not resolve the conflict, but it was an important step toward changing attitudes about the issues and may have helped lay the groundwork for cooperatively building peace in the future.

The foundation of interfaith dialogue is the recognition that in order to achieve sustainable change in the ideas and actions of a religiously identified community, religious actors and institutions must genuinely support that change.

Mutual tolerance is essential for conflict prevention and resolution, and interfaith programs are designed to increase tolerance between participants through encounters with one another in an atmosphere of relative security and mutual respect. These programs foster empathy, and help participants form real relationships and develop a more complex and sophisticated understanding of each other.

Although some peace building projects emerging from faith-based organizations closely resemble secular peace building efforts, in most cases the religious orientations of the organizations and individuals involved shape the peace building they undertake. For example, religious mediators often make very explicit use of religious language and texts, such as prayer, when addressing conflict. This spiritual element encourages looking beyond one's personal interests toward a greater good.

Most religions are committed to working for justice and peace, and have long-standing and well-established structures or processes for doing so. They may also have religion-specific approaches to

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conflict resolution, such as guidelines for resolving conflict or rituals for reconciling relationships that have potential application across religious boundaries. Interfaith programs between conflicted groups can mobilize these and other religious elements in the service of increasing mutual tolerance—a process that begins with the ability to interact without fear or aggression, and progresses, through empathy and understanding, to mutual respect.

Effective evaluation of interfaith dialogue programs depends upon identifying variables that can be measured. There are some obvious and simple measures of success, such as the number of participants attending, or the number willing to return or who refer others to the program. There are also quantitative measures of attitude change, which rely on self-report to questionnaires. Both of these are important. But what really makes a difference is what people do following the program that they did not do before. Behaviors of various sorts can be observed and quantified once they have been identified as target behaviors.

Conclusion

We therefore begin the evaluation by seeking out those at the source of the dialogue programs—people currently working in the field. How do they make ongoing program decisions? What methodologies do they use to assess their own progress? How do they know what works? More than 20 directors of interfaith programs and others involved in interfaith work were interviewed either in person, by phone, or via e-mail for this report. Despite their differences, the data yielded common themes regarding the program dimensions to be evaluated and how that might be done. Their insights form the basis for the following recommendations:

1. Evaluation should direct the way change takes place. It is through effective evaluation that a program articulates clear goals and objectives, describes specific steps taken in

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interventions, and observes and assesses its own outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

2. Specificity is a crucial key to effective evaluation. Thus, a program goal should not be described merely as "teaching conflict resolution skills." Rather, the program activity should describe the specific skills to be taught and the specific teaching method to be used. For example, one basic skill might be "active listening," in which the listener summarizes and repeats what has been said to make sure he has understood fully what is being communicated.
3. Evaluation must be an integral part of program planning from the beginning, and should be an ongoing process throughout the life of the project, providing feedback to program managers and staff that enable them to adjust and improve their work in real time. Repeated evaluations are also necessary after the program is completed to assess medium- and long-term outcomes.
4. Although the primary goal of evaluation is specific to the program it serves and is geared toward local and changing needs, it is nevertheless helpful to begin with a list of dimensions to be evaluated (see Table 1). This kind of list permits the accumulation and sharing of knowledge in the field.
5. The power of face-to-face contact in the evaluation process cannot be overstated. The importance of dealing directly and personally with participants was repeatedly emphasized at both program and evaluation levels. At the program level, many program directors were convinced that powerful change occurred predominantly through the process of interpersonal encounter. Getting to know individuals from the other side as fellow human beings was perceived by nearly all program directors to be a transformative experience.
6. Similarly, when evaluation is conducted privately and personally, the participant often yields observations and comments about his experience with the program that would not have been

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shared in a less intimate setting. Therefore, the evaluation of most types of interfaith programs should include a personal interview with both participants and staff. Ideally, the interview would combine both structured and open-ended elements. It would also include both attitudinal and behavioral indices.

7. Since programs of interfaith dialogue are programs of social change, media activity can serve as a crude, but broad-based measure of change in the general society. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of "mediawatch" tracking efforts that have grown increasingly sophisticated. Today, the media can be monitored for increases in articles that focus on peace or cooperation, for decreases in the number of articles that incite violence, for the language it uses in describing a particular religious group, or for virtually any other relevant criteria. The mass media play a role in setting the agenda and influencing the issues people talk about; programs of interfaith dialogue exist in that environment. It is an important contextual factor.

Media monitoring can be supplemented by "man in the street" interviews. This additional source of data provides a check on whether the media are impacting or reflecting popular opinion; it is particularly helpful in places where freedom of the press is not guaranteed and where the population questions the media's credibility.

8. Additional means are available for evaluating programs aimed at academic elites. As change agents within their own societies, their ideas exert influence mainly through their writing and lecturing. Therefore, one outcome measure appropriate to an interfaith dialogue program for academics would include an assessment of participants' work products—articles, papers, and books—before and after the intervention. Does their work indicate changes in attitudes, ideas, information, or action plans?
9. Simplest measures of success include:
 - a. Number of program participants;

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- b. Number of post-program meetings;
 - c. Number of program spin-offs;
 - d. If the program is targeted to a particular audience, who the participants are, what their standing in the community is, how "senior" they are, and so on.
10. Technology—both hardware and software—can be borrowed from other fields. Examples of hardware would include the use of videotape for purposes of evaluation, training, and general information dissemination. Software applications would include adapting evaluation approaches that have been used effectively for other programs of social change, such as programs for reducing gang violence in urban areas, or strategies for changing health beliefs and behaviors among certain demographic groups.
11. In addition to evaluating a program's context and the nature of its intervention procedures, personality variables should also be evaluated. Certain character traits, behaviors, or social roles are important to program effectiveness, such as a person's status within his or her religious community. The measurement of status or reputation is community-specific, of course. In some faith communities it might be based on scholarship; in others, leadership of a large congregation; and in still others, a reputation for effective community activism.

In discussing the traits that make for effective staffing for interfaith dialogue programs, our interviewees focused on attitudes they observed but could not measure, such as possessing a sense of security in one's religious identity coupled with a curiosity about others'; the ability to listen to and consider contradictory views with an open mind; integrity; a capacity for empathy, the ability to appreciate other participants' anger and pain—and, perhaps more importantly, channel it into something constructive; and a willingness to be changed personally by the encounter.

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12. When evaluation becomes a more standard part of programs, its staff and managers will begin to think more like social scientists. That is to say, they will think about goals and measurable criteria that evolve over time, and include a control group whenever possible (e.g., a waiting list control, evaluated over time before they are exposed to the program).
13. It is important to bear in mind the power of a "grand gesture." The visual and public action of a celebrity or political figure (such as President Sadat's trip to Israel) carries considerable weight, and with it the ability to transform the context of a conflict. In a similar but subtler fashion, including or consulting major religious figures in public peacemaking efforts lends credibility to those efforts.

For purposes of evaluation, interfaith dialogue is a particular type of social change program. Therefore, these are the steps toward meaningful evaluation:

1. Build evaluation in from the beginning, to be an integral component of program planning.
2. Begin with a "theory of social change" which makes explicit the assumptions behind your project. For example, the following assumptions might underlie a program of teacher training in interfaith dialogue: 1) teachers influence the attitudes and behavior of their students. 2) Teachers influence by serving both as role models and as sources of information. 3) Schools are microcosms of the larger society.
3. The next step in evaluation is to specify both short and longer-term goals (outcomes and impacts). In our example, short-term goals would include the following changes in the teachers who participate in the intervention:
 - a. The expression of more positive ideas about the other religions;

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- b. The expression of more positive attitudes toward interacting peacefully with members of the other religions;
- c. Increased knowledge and understanding of the other religions.

Mid-term goals for the trained teachers might be:

- d. To develop a curriculum (and materials) for teaching what they have learned;
- e. To become sources of interfaith dialogue programming;
- f. To increase in amount and quality of interfaith activity by the teachers themselves.

A long-term program goal might be:

- g. Over time, to see that the teachers' experiences with interfaith dialogue will be reflected in an increase in positive, tolerant ideas expressed in the school community.
4. Specific evaluation approaches are part of developing strategies aimed at reaching the goals. Whenever possible, pre-testing should be done to develop a baseline for quantitative measures. Thus, before the intervention one would collect the following data:
- a. Questionnaires about the attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs participants have about the other religions;
 - b. Information on the amount and quality of interfaith interaction teachers have in their own lives;
 - c. Attitudes participants have toward peaceful interaction with members of the other group.

Baseline measures would be taken on the long-term goals as well, for example, the number of incidents of hate-based

activity on school grounds, the quality of school-sponsored interfaith activities (e.g., clubs, extracurricular activities), or the number of positive and negative interfaith references in student publications.

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5. Short-term evaluation would assess output, i.e., was the service delivered? In this case, did the teacher-training take place as planned? Measurement would include number and type of meetings, number and type of attendees, meeting content and process.
6. Then outcome would be assessed—what was the effect of the program on the participants? Post-testing repeats the pretesting questionnaires to note changes in relevant attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors. This is the time for qualitative evaluation as well. Face-to-face interviews add a great deal to an understanding of how the participants experienced the program. What was helpful? What made an impression on them? How could the training be improved for the next time: What would they want to have had more of? Less of? In what way do they think they have changed? What are they doing or planning to do differently? Open-ended face-to-face interviews can yield important feedback that would not emerge either in a group or on paper.
7. Mid-term assessment in this example is behavioral: Was a curriculum developed for teaching some aspects of what the teachers had learned? Did the trained teachers develop any type of interfaith dialogue programming? What did they do? What helped or hindered the achievement of mid-term goals?
8. The long-term goal of disseminating positive attitudes would repeat the pre-intervention assessment, looking for lowered incidence of hostility between groups (such as less graffiti, vandalism, or hate-based violence in the school), as well as increases in positive (or decreases in negative) interfaith references in school newspapers and other public communication.

When it does its job well, religion offers an alternate vision of reality. It insists that the current reality—violent conflict—is not the only one possible. Religion gives people food for their imagination, and the ability to consider another possibility. As one of our participants said, "you're a

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slave in Egypt, then along comes Moses and says, 'There's another way—we're going to be free!'"

Many people involved in interfaith dialogue in conflict areas around the world noted that one act of terrible violence can wipe out in a moment what takes the parties a long period of painstaking work to build. It is not unlike what happens to a village that experiences a natural disaster. The violent spasm destroys and spreads ruin quickly, but leaves some things intact. And, just as the storm passes, allowing the villagers return to rebuild, reinforce, and renew, so too do interfaith peace builders recommit themselves to nonviolent alternatives to resolving their differences.

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- 2- Raimon Panikkar, "The Category of Growth in Comparative Religion" in *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 85-102.
- 3- The three Abrahamic traditions, stemming from the same historical root, understand themselves in terms of their primordial revelations; but they too often define themselves in opposition to the other traditions. Speaking for Christianity, the truth of our understanding of the fullness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ has been used as a battering stick against other traditions--especially Judaism and Islam--whose primordial religious experiences could not and do not allow for belief in divine incarnation nor, its corollary, a trinitarian God. See Gerard Hall, "Interreligious Perspectives on Incarnation" in *The Australasian Catholic Record* lxxvi:4 (October, 1999): 430-440.
- 4- David Klemm, "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55:3 (1987): 456.
- 5- See, for example, David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1988) who distinguishes four ideologies for interfaith encounter: ideology; hostility; competition; partnership.
- 6- For a discussion of the Church's changing relationship to the world, especially other religious traditions, see Gerard Hall, "Catholic Church Teaching on its Relationship to Other Religions since Vatican II" in *Australian E-Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1 (August 2003): [Accessed 28th July 2005]
http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aet_1/Hall.htm
- 7- Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, hereafter LG; Gaudium et Spes: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, hereafter GS; Ad Gentes: The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, hereafter AG; Nostra Aetate: The Declaration on the Church's Relations with non-Christian Religions,

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hereafter NA. See LG 16; GS 92; AG 9, 11, 15; NA 2. Documents available in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Northport NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1975).

- 8- See, for example, *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 6. Encyclical Letter of John Paul II (1990), available (accessed 28th July 2005) on: <http://www.wf-f.org/RedemptorHominis.html>
- 9- NA 2-3.
- 10- AG 11.
- 11- This is stated unequivocally by Vatican Commissions and in papal pronouncements published in Francesco Gioia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church 1963-1995* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1994): *Secretariat for Non-Christians, Dialogue and Mission* (1984), hereafter DM; Pope John Paul II's Address to the Secretariat (1987) and his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), hereafter RM; the Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelization, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), hereafter DP; and the Declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (2000), hereafter DI. See DM 13; RM 55; DP 6, 55; DI 22.
- 12- DM 13.
- 13- DP 43-49.
- 14- RM 21
- 15- RM 28
- 16- See Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Gerard Hall, "Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism" in *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 15/1 (February 2002): 37-50.
- 17- Other examples of Trinitarian Theologies of Interfaith Dialogue are: Raimon Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973); Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books,

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- 18- The Intra-Religious Dialogue, 1.
 - 19- Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 23-40. *See also his Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 232-256. Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason; dialogue is the optimism of the heart. Dialectics believes it can approach truth by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners. Dialogue does not seek primarily to be duo-logue, a duet of two logoi, which would still be dialectical; but a dia-logos, a piercing of the logos to attain a truth that transcends it. *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 243.
 - 20- See Panikkar's "The Rules of the Game in the Religious Encounter" in *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 61-71. In summary: it must be free from apologetics (in relation to one's particular tradition or religion in general); one must be open to the challenge of conversion; the historical dimension though necessary is insufficient; it is not merely a congress of philosophy, a theological symposium, let alone an ecclesiastical endeavour; it is a religious encounter in faith, hope and love; intra-religious dialogue is primary.
 - 21- See DM 28-35; DP 42. *See Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 566-579 & 608-642.
 - 22- Although not dealing explicitly with interfaith dialogue, an interesting presentation of optimum conditions for dialogue and desired outcomes is provided by David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London: Brunner-Routledge, 1996).
 - 23- Panikkar, "Faith and Belief: A Multireligious Experience" in *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 41-59.
 - 24- "On Dialogue with Unbelievers" [*Humane Personae Dignitatem*], Secretariat for Unbelievers, promulgated by Paul VI (1968), in Flannery, 1002-1014.

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- 25- Importantly, Panikkar's book is entitled *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. He emphasizes the importance of the intra-religious preparation for the dialogue and then the intra-personal soliloquy that follows the interfaith dialogue with the other(s).
- 26- DP 41. Panikkar also stresses that interfaith dialogue involves the risk and challenge of conversion. As he states, the truly religious person is not a fanatic who has all the answers but a pilgrim who is open to the experience of grace and truth. One may lose one's life or even lose faith in one's own tradition--but one may also be born again and one's own tradition transformed. *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 62f.
- 27- See Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002); and Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 60-81. Some thirty-five years ago, Panikkar expressed his religious situation in the following terms: "I 'left' as a Christian; I 'found' myself as a Hindu; and I 'return' a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian". See *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 42.
- 28- As one example of Indigenous-Christian dialogue, see Joan Hendriks, "Indigenous and Christian: An Australian Perspective" in Damien Casey, Hall, Gerard and Hunt, Anne, eds., *Foundations of Christian Faith* (Southbank VIC: Social Science Press, 2004), 171-177.
- 29- Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 10; Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 78.
- 30- "We assert that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions and that these form the basis of a global ethic". Hans Küng & Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 14.
- 31- Hans Küng & Helmut Schmidt, eds., *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibility* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 9.
- 32- *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 32.
- 33- Panikkar calls for a "cosmotheandric" or "new religious

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consciousness". The foundations for this growth in "divine-human-cosmic" awareness are developed in his *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

- 34- Among accessible publications dealing with this theme from an interfaith dialogical perspective are the following: David Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* (North Blackburn VIC: HarperCollins, 1995) and *Re-enchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (North Blackburn VIC: HarperCollins, 2000); Rod Cameron, *Alcheringa: The Australian Experience of the Sacred* (Homebush NSW: St Paul's, 1993) and *Karingal: A Search for Australian Spirituality* (Homebush NSW: St Paul's, 1995).