

World Religions in War and Peace in Conflict and Concord

Reverend George F. Fry, Adjunct Faculty, Philosophy and Religion, College of The Sequoias

Abstract

It is the thesis of this paper that all the world religions contain within themselves the seeds can that lead either to conflict or to peace. This paper will provide references from the scriptures and the histories of the various religions to show the truth of this thesis. However, it becomes apparent that the seeds that lead to peace must move beyond a particular faith. Implementing the seeds of peace requires people of good will who are open to working with people holding different faith values and beliefs. This paper will provide promising examples of some who are trying to transcend differences that prevent religions from working together in concord.

Besides moderates, liberals and conservatives, world religions often include those who are called fundamentalists, and they are a real problem to the achievement of peace between faiths. Fundamentalists of every religion are characterized by rigidity in terms of the content of their faith, excessive zeal, and the exclusiveness of their religious claims. Due to the foregoing, fundamentalists present a real problem for peacemaking. However, in this paper, an effort is made to find the means to peace, not only among the various religions in general, but also in and through fundamentalists. Toward this end, this paper makes a thorough examination of the tendencies of the major world religions related to peace and conflict in hopes of promoting peace. In this regard, current promising efforts are shared.

Introduction

This paper is my contribution to the twentieth anniversary of the Oxford Round Table that met in Oxford July 13 - 18, 2008. The topic of the Round Table was "Religion: The politics of Peace and Conflict." In choosing this theme the Oxford Round Table cited "the religious strife in national and international affairs," the apparent "insoluble disharmony in The Middle East," and "religious discord in most other sectors of the world as well."¹

While the Middle East is the most salient example of religious conflict, the Religious Tolerance organization based in Ontario keeps tabs on twenty-five conflicts worldwide.² These range from the Afghanistan War-- pitting the Taliban and Al Qaida against the Northern Alliance of Afghans (with an assist from the U.S. and Britain), to the conflict between the Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka, to the Sudan where the Muslim regime committed genocide against both Animists and Christians.³ The listing may be found at Religious Tolerance. org.

It should be obvious from this listing referenced above that--though other factors enter into these conflicts: economics, race, class, ethnicity, nationalism, and political ambitions--religious conflict is real, and, if we wish to gain a peaceful community of nations and states, we neglect it at our peril. For this reason, we need to understand the dynamics that lead to religious conflict and also what it is within religions that may provide a basis for concord.

In this regard, it is the thesis of this work that every world religion contains within it both the seeds that lead to conflict and those that lead to concord and peace. Many of the sources that lead to conflict or peace come directly from "divine" commandments or directives, teachings from scriptures and the writings of the interpreters of a particular faith. Other conflicts arise, not from⁴ "divine" direction, but out of the claims of one religion which run counter to the culture, politics, and beliefs of other religions. It is in the area of the mutually exclusive claims of one faith vis-à-vis another that conflict may arise as these religions bump up one against another.

¹ Letter from Andy Boyle, Facilitator, The Oxford Round Table.

² B.A. Robinson, "Religiously -Based Civil Unrest & Warfare," *Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance*, 1999-2006, via Religious Tolerance. org.

³ Ibid. 3.

Another cause for conflict occurs when persons forget the “true values” of their religion and are enticed by culture, the state, zealots, or political leaders into committing acts contrary to the teachings of their faith. One of the best examples of this is the Crusades in which the participants meant so well when they went into battle to glorify Christ. However, when we reflect on the Crusades, it's hard to imagine “The Prince of Peace” at the head of those armies with their swords red with innocent or not so innocent blood. More of the contradictions between faith and action, peace and conflict, will be discussed later under the heading “A Brief History of Religion in War and Peace.”

The aim of this process is that the information provided may begin to provide a framework for understanding some of the causes and cures for interfaith conflict. I also pray that it will push us toward renewed effort in finding ways for differing faiths to work together for the common good and in promoting peace in the world. In our common discourse, hopefully, we may find reasonable and workable means to resolve conflicts among religions and cultures while producing a model that will allow adherents to maintain their religious loyalties as they work together in harmony for the good of humankind. It is “God’s” love and our love for humanity that should bind religions together in peace and in common cause.

Methodology

Prior to the next section of this paper, “The Dialectic Problem,” we need to understand how the scriptures and “Holy Writings” of the World’s Religions will be used here. We want to be clear that in dealing with the sources of conflict and peace found in the writings of the religions of the world, no attempt will be made to interpret or subject to literary criticism the writings of these faiths. Why? Because we are aware that adherents may read these accounts differently - literally, spiritually, metaphorically, and/or interpretively. This is not our concern at this point. Our concern is with the images and teachings of Holy Writings that encourage either conflict or peace.

As to my methodology, I plan to make the case as realistically as possible that seeking peace between and through religion is a very difficult task, but it is not without hope. Therefore, the reader will see a strong emphasis placed upon the images and sources of conflict found within religions. I will also point to the limitations of those scriptures and teachings directing us in the way of peace before possible solutions are discussed. We are not hoping for a fairy tale ending in our quest for peace, but a workable one.

The Dialectic Problem:

A Brief History of Religion In War and Peace

This is to be a demonstration, not exhaustive, that all religions contain within them the tendencies that may lead to conflict or nurture peace. I will briefly address the religions in the following order: Western Religions that originated in the Middle East - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This will be our major thrust. Two major Eastern religions will be addressed to show the validity of my thesis. They are in order: Hinduism and Buddhism (Mahayana and Theravada). We begin with Judaism.

Judaism

Judaism contains within its writings bases that very obviously lead both to war as well as peace. Those writings consist of The Torah, Tanakh, and Talmud. Reuven Firestone in his article in “The Journal of The American Academy of Religion” wrote about “Holy War” in The Hebrew

Bible this way: “Heroes such as Joshua, Gideon, Saul, David, and even Moses led Israel into wars that devastated Israel’s enemies. **In some, God commands genocide against Israel’s adversaries** (Deut. 3:6, 7:2, 20:17; Joshua 6:17, 10:28-40). In others God even enters into the fray Himself.”

An example of the call to genocide is quite clear In Deuteronomy 20:16-17. In this scripture God calls Israel to do the following: “In the cities of these peoples that the Lord God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them . . . as the Lord your God has commanded.”⁵

There are more verses like these in the Torah with similar commands, especially as Joshua led the Israelites into the Holy Land. Firestone calls these “Mitzvah Wars,” i.e., “Commanded Wars.”⁶ These were the wars commanded by God to obtain the “Promised Land for His people.” Later, in the Talmud, the rabbinic scholars defined two different types of war, the one just described as war commanded by God and discretionary wars as when King David went out to do battle for his own economic and political reasons. These discretionary wars happened so often and were so matter of course in the Middle East that it was written, “It was spring when kings went out to war.”⁷

The call to “Holy War” in the Torah is one seed that would definitely move the Jewish faithful into conflict, but later limits were put on this possibility. Firestone writes about the time following the Roman defeat of Israel in 70 C.E. when the Rabbinic leadership, fearing for the future of the Jewish people, wrote into The Talmud the rules concerning “The Three Vows.” The Three Vows originated from a verse in The Song of Songs that the rabbis interpreted in such a way that made it almost impossible for Jews to wage war. It was designed to keep a remnant safe within the context of Gentile society as a result of the “Dispersion” of the Jewish people following their defeat by Rome.⁸

The Song of Songs appears on the surface to be a love poem, but both Judaism and Christianity have spiritualized it to mean much more. Judaism thought of it as revealing the love of God for His people and Christians thought of it as demonstrating the love of Christ for the Church. With this as the background perhaps you may understand how the three vows were birthed out of this verse in the Torah, “I make you swear, o daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field, do not wake or rouse love until it is wished.”⁹

The three vows, the spiritual meaning applied to the Song of Songs 2:7, according to Rabbi Yose were: 1) “that Israel would not go up to Israel in a wall, i.e., seek return to Israel by force. It is based on the phrase, ‘do not wake or rouse love until it is wished,’ i.e., wanted; 2) Israel would not rebel against the nations of the world because, if they did, their flesh would be consumed like that of ‘the gazelles and the hinds of the field;’ and 3), the Holy One made the nations swear they would not subjugate Israel too harshly.”¹⁰ Of course, as far as we know, no such vow was ever made by the Gentile nations, and obviously Hitler did not make the vow, to everyone’s great sorrow.

4 Reuven Firestone, “Holy War in Modern Judaism?” *The Journal of The American Academy of Religion*, vol. 74, no. 4, Oxford University Press, Dec. 2006: 956

5 Bruce M. Metzger, ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, Deuteronomy 20:16-17.

6 Firestone, “Holy War,” 959.

7 *Bible*, II Samuel 11:1.

8 Firestone, “Holy War,” 96.

9 *Bible*, Song of Songs: 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

10 Firestone, “Holy War,” 961-962.

Most would not have found the meaning that the rabbis found in the Song of Songs, but it can be argued that, because of the “Three Vows,” the Jewish people were able to survive all these centuries in the midst of the Gentiles. Sadly these three vows are now under attack by right wing Zionists. Many Jews feel that since Israel is once again a nation, according to Jewish law, they have the right to control and defend all of what was once the Biblical territory. Unfortunately, there are some who may wish to revive the idea of the “Mitzvah War.”¹¹

The Three Vows were one of the means that led to peace in the Jewish Faith and perhaps it may continue to influence people of good will within Judaism. There are, of course, many other sources emphasizing peace within the Faith. For example, according to Firestone, “the Hebrew Bible contains many images of peace and longings for the cessation of war.” He cites the following: Micah 4:1-5, Isaiah 11:1-9, and Psalms 34 as examples. But how useful are these citations?¹²

While it is true that Psalm 34 has elements that lead to peace such as in verse 14, “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it,”¹³ its effectiveness as a symbol for peace is tempered by threatened acts of violence on the part of God toward evildoers and unbelievers that follow in the text. Apparently, the use of persuasion is bypassed, and one wonders why! Are the evildoers and unbelievers totally beyond recall?

Even the magnificent affirmations of peace found in Micah (4:1-7) are limited in this most marvelous reading. In it the nations are described as “beating their swords into plowshares” and “their spears into pruning hooks,” and the prophet says “nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore . . . every person shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree . . . for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.”¹⁴

But why is this vision suspect? Because, again future hope comes up against brutal reality. In the very same chapter God is portrayed as saying to Israel, “Now many nations are assembled against you (Israel), but they do not know the thoughts of the Lord . . . He has gathered them (the nations) as sheaves to the threshing floor.” Then God says to Israel, “Arise, thresh O daughter of Zion . . . you shall beat in pieces many peoples.”¹⁵ On the other side of the coin, I must say that the future Messianic kingdom brings peace for all, and the desire for peace is very strong as witness the emphasis on shalom in Jewish worship.

What is going on here? The concept in play is endemic to most religions. Peace and victory is only guaranteed for those within the faith. From a particular religion’s point of view, peace, salvation, shalom (wholeness) comes only to those who believe in and serve God the way the adherents do. This is that great barrier which stands in the way of peace between different religions and even faith groups within the same family of faith. **Every religion has its own exclusive faith claims that define its existence and they divide us one from another.** One wonders if this is a barrier that may ever be crossed. It certainly can never be bridged, except by men and women of good sense and good will. Understanding, respect, and tolerance are the starting points.

¹¹ Firestone, “Holy War,” 975-976.

¹² Firestone, “Holy War,” 976.

¹³ *Bible*, Psalm 34:14.

¹⁴ *Bible*, Micah 4:1-7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Micah 4:11-13.

Christianity

Next we turn to the Christian Faith and as we start looking for those images, directives, and teachings that influence those of the Christian faith toward conflict or peace the first thing that should be recognized is the tie between Christianity and Judaism. One is that the Old Testament is the same as The Torah of the Jews. Therefore, the same images of God calling the Jewish people to war also have an influence on the acceptance of war by many Christians, especially in terms of the “just war.” There is always the unthinking adherent who would say any war “ordered by God” or done in His name is a “just” war. That is a disastrous assumption to adopt, and It is most certainly wrong in my view.

Yet because of this, it is not difficult to believe that the images from the stories of Israel’s war of conquest of the Holy Land under the direction of God had a significant influence on the Crusaders in 1097 as they sought to retake the same territory conquered by Joshua in the past. This time, however, they sought to conquer in the name of Christ. Fully aware that Islam, which held Jerusalem, had conquered Spain and was just now being challenged by Ferdinand I of Castile, the Crusaders no doubt saw themselves as soldiers of God. As one historian put it, “They thought they were doing something great and wonderful in the name of Christ,” as well as enjoying plunder and revenge against Islam.¹⁶

How were the Crusaders able to think that this warfare would please Christ, the Prince of Peace? Probably from the very commands of God during the Mitzvah Wars, as Firestone calls them, in which God is portrayed as commanding war against the inhabitants whose land was being taken from them by Israel. The Crusaders thought they were going, at the call of God, to fight the enemies of Christ! So they painted the cross on their shields and went into battle. Many Christians have felt the need to apologize ever since that the name of Jesus Christ was invoked in this cause.¹⁷

The Crusaders are not the only examples of the followers of Christ who have lost their way. Some examples of Christians losing the ideals of Christ are the Roman Catholic Church which pushed the Inquisition which led to many being tortured and burned at the stake; Protestants in their zeal did the same with John Calvin burning Servetus at the stake in October 1553 C.E. being the most infamous;¹⁸ The Roman Catholic/ Protestant conflicts and wars of the 16th century were politically and religiously ugly (untold thousands died); and the religious persecution of The Latter Day Saints in America was also a sad chapter. For the most part these are all ancient history now because people of good sense and good will have made it so. Yet even in these modern times we witnessed the spectacle of Protestant/ Roman Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland that just recently turned a positive corner.¹⁹

The Crusaders got much of their encouragement for war from the Old Testament. Is there also a source in the New Testament that might compare, at least in imagery? Yes, there is. According to the Book of Revelation, God and his host will again take up the sword to destroy and take vengeance on evildoers as they did in the Old Testament. Only when evil in the world is overcome will God will provide peace, joy, and eternal bliss for His children in the City Foursquare. The problem is that evil is portrayed as being overcome through battles, metaphoric or otherwise. In these visions of John, the writer of the Book of Revelation, the conflicts are unbelievably brutal and catastrophic.

¹⁶ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959, 220.

¹⁷ Fry, “Judaism,” pg. 4 of this paper.

¹⁸ Walker, *History of The Christian Church*, 356.

¹⁹ Robinson, “Civil Unrest,” 3.

In one vision God's angels kill one third of the world's population; in another a third of the sea is turned to blood; and in another an angel releases giant locusts on the earth. According to the story, these giant locusts are allowed to "torture mankind for five months and the pain of their bite is described as being like that of scorpions." The pericope ends, "And in those days man will seek death and will not find it; They will long to die, and death will fly from them."²⁰ The vision of the writer is extremely brutal even if it has a good ending for those of faith.

So whether you take it literally, spiritually, or discount it entirely, the Book of Revelation contains images of violence that can't be ignored. Could some weak-minded person reading this violent scripture of God's wrath against evil be inspired to take on the role as the Lord's policeman, and take action against God's enemies? We scoff at the idea, yet individuals have taken that role. In recent memory "Christians" have blown up abortion clinics in the United States in the name of God, and a physician was shot to death.

I personally doubt that the Book of Revelation had anything to do with those who took these actions on behalf of Christ, but these stories of violence in the book do not help us in our search for peace. In fact, because the violent stories are so out of "sync" with Christ's call for actions and attitudes leading to peace, there are those who agree with the view of Martin Luther and of others that, perhaps, The Book of Revelation should not have been included in the New Testament. While there are large portions of the Book that are truly inspiring, far too many are about dealing death and destruction and are out of character with the teachings of the one portrayed as the Prince of Peace.

Having pointed out a few of the images and influences that can lead to war and conflict in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, I posit as true that there is not a greater treasure trove of images and teachings pointing the way to peace than in the New Testament. First is the second commandment which Christians received from Judaism and taught by Christ. It is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."²¹ This commandment is central to the peacemaking enterprise.

From this starting point we turn to the "Sermon on The Mount" in which the sayings of Christ point the way to peace and make clear the personal requirements for fostering peace with one another. Found in Matthew 5:5-9 they are as follows: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;" "blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied;" "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" and "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children (sons) of God."²² It seems to me that anyone who reads these verses thoughtfully will discover what is necessary, in terms of personal characteristics and actions, to qualify as a peacemaker. Without real efforts on behalf of peace, the game is lost before it has begun: but those who try, should be revered by those who treasure the effort even without success.

Two other wonderful directives for peace, among many, are also found in Matthew; "You have heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you, 'Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'"²³ Again Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you

²⁰ *Bible*, Revelation 8:9, 9:3-6, and 9:15.

²¹ *Bible*, Matthew 22:39 and Luke 10:27.

²² *Bible*, Matthew 5:5-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, Matthew 6:38.

may be children of your Father who is in heaven.”²⁴ I’m not sure that you can find better examples than these of what it takes in terms of behavior, attitudes and values to achieve peace between peoples.

St. Paul’s paean on Love in Chapter 13 of I Corinthians should also be included. It plumbs the depths of our love to God and for one another so that there is no doubt that love and respect are the basic ingredients necessary for true peace between peoples as well as with God.

Then, just as we think we have all the elements in place for Christianity, we are faced by this troubling saying of Jesus, ”Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” He then goes on to talk about how he “has come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother and a man’s foes will be those of his own household,” and he finishes by saying, “He who loves his own father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.”²⁵ Jesus is saying that, if a person is to be his disciple, he, Jesus, has to be first in a person’s loyalties. It is unequivocal!

Here, once more, we find ourselves facing up to the exclusive claims of religion. Each Abrahamic religion has these absolute claims that require people to make choices without which the blessings of the faith are not given. Because of this there will continue to be conflict over whose exclusive claims are valid and right.

Yes, within the boundaries of faith and obedience one may find peace with God and peace, for the most part, within the confines of one’s religious group. But, if Jesus is suggesting that his absolute claim will cause conflict within the family, it will certainly cause conflict with those who hold different religious views. It is as people of every religion have found, when one lives in lands where another religion dominates life can be difficult in that situation. Conflicts can and do occur when the official faith maintains its position and exclusive religious claims with force or religious law.

Once more, I will say, only people of good will are able to see the larger picture and recognize the absolute necessity for the religions of the world to work together for peace and the future of humankind. Think what would happen in a world short of food, for example, if most of the world’s religions did not cooperate. Disaster! Look what happened after the cyclone in Burma when the junta was reluctant to receive aid for disaster victims. The same would happen if religions did not cooperate in bringing aid to victims.

It seems to me that three things need to happen if we are to form structures and avenues to ensure peace: first, we must learn to respond to those influences in every religion that may lead to concord between peoples; second, we must learn to be open to the faiths of other peoples and respect them; and third, we must work toward the day that all governments will, at the very least, tolerate those of other faiths and assure all of equal standing as citizens.

Islam

The faith of Islam (lit., surrender) originally begins in humility and unpromising beginnings. Abu’l Kassim was in the caravan business with his wife, Khadija in Mecca. The Meccans and much of Arabia worshiped many gods and goddesses and Mecca was a center for tourism because the *Ka’aba* featured the idols of these gods. Abu’l became convinced, perhaps because of his conversations with Christians and Jews, that there was only one God and,

²⁴ Ibid., Matthew 6:43.

²⁵ Bible, Matthew 10:34-39.

secondly, some day there would be a judgment in which all those who practiced idolatry would be judged and cast into a fiery hell because of false worship.²⁶

These thoughts agitated him more and more. He began to visit a cave for meditation at the foot of nearby Mount Hira. One night an angel, a messenger of God, visited him and cried out, "In the name of the Lord who created man from blood coagulated, 'Cry! Thy Lord is wondrous kind who by the pen has taught mankind things they knew not' When the vision ended he was able to reproduce the whole revelation of Sura 96 of the Koran."²⁷ Thus began a long process of the revelation of the Koran to and through Muhammad.

As time went by, he began reciting these messages in the streets of Mecca. This created friction between him and those who profited from tourists coming to Mecca, because he was preaching that there was only one God. The tourists came to worship the many idols in and around the Ka'aba. He also preached that the Meccans would have to change their moral behavior. Because of this, he was extremely unpopular and eventually had to flee (Hegira) to Yathrib (Medina).²⁸ The Meccans sought to have him killed which led to war between Medina and Mecca, and in this Muhammad finally prevailed.

So Islam began in near defeat, humility, and war, but one has to admire Muhammad who, unlike other leaders of his day, didn't take full revenge on his enemies at Mecca. Instead, he invited them to join him in the service of Allah (the God).²⁹ He became an excellent leader and statesman and it wasn't long before other tribes were joining under his banner. Two years after his victory over Mecca, he passed away in 632 C.E. Yet In spite of his death, a unified Arabia under the direction of Al-Walid set siege to Damascus and conquered the city in 635 C.E.³⁰

So immediately we are faced with another source of conflict in Islam. The war against Damascus, three years after Mohammed's death was an offensive war. This is surprising since in the Koran, Sura 2:187, it says quite clearly that offensive war is not allowed: "Fight in the way of God with those who fight you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressors."³¹ Muhammad could fight the Meccans because they were fighting him, but, as I understand this Sura, Caliph 'Umar and his general, Khalid ibn al-Walid, went against the Koran in starting an offensive war against Damascus. In fact, it is my view, that all of Islam's wars of expansion went against the Koran; except it seems they had an out when it came to war against the infidel (does not include Christians and Jews). In this regard Sura 9:5-6 are the most famous of the Jihad (Holy War) verses in the Koran:

Then when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way; God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate."³²

I think this verse, and others like it, gave the leadership of the fledgling Islamic faith the idea of wars of expansion in which the conquered would be given the option of converting to

²⁶John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 5th ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1974, 513

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 513.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 515-516.

²⁹ Huston Smith, *World's Religions*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, 153.

³⁰ David S. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions*, 12th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, Prentice Hall Publishers 2008.

³¹ A.J. Arberry, Trans. *The Koran Interpreted*, 1st ed. Touchstone, New York : Simon & Schuster, 1996, Sura 2:187, 53.

³² *Ibid.* Sura 9:5-6.

Allah accepting his mercy or death. It also probably helped that the Koran allowed the soldiers to keep four-fifths of the booty and, if they died in battle in the way of God, they were assured entrance into paradise and all its pleasures.³³ A theology developed that supported this effort in extending the sway of Allah around the world.

Important to this theology is the flexibility of the word jihad (holy war). First and most importantly is **greater jihad**. The greater war (jihad) is an inner war against sin which is pleasing to God, and every positive thing that you do is part of this, including making sure the sidewalk in front of your house is safe for those who pass by.³⁴ This jihad is first in your spiritual life and is a source that leads to peace. This is only fully realized in Dar al-Islam, the House of Peace. Dar al-Islam exists only in an Islamic state which is ruled by Islamic law with security guaranteed by Islamic governance.³⁵ That's why it is the "House of Peace."

The second kind of holy war is the **lesser jihad**, which is the armed struggle against unbelievers and it is subsumed under Dar al-Harb, the House of War. This is a basis for conflict. Dar al-Harb follows the rules that were previously mentioned about aggressive war and defensive war.³⁶ For one thing, it makes a big difference whether the populace is *ahl ilkitab*, people of the Book or not. Christians and Jews are considered people of the Book. Such are not to be harmed if they behave. Others were to have no such advantage. Actually, as you shall see, wars were waged against Christian communities by Islam.

When one reads the history of this warfare, it is casually mentioned that Islam quickly defeated the kingdoms of the Middle East, conquered the west even to and including Spain and the Baltics, and extended their kingdom into China and India. Put this way it almost sounds benign. Some communities, of course, did surrender quickly and suffered no real harm. However, some Christian communities that were attacked. Ani, the ancient capital of Armenia, and is one such example. Matthew of Edessa, was an eye witness in 1064 CE. Here is his description:

"The army entered the city, massacred its inhabitants, pillaged and burned it, leaving it in ruins, making prisoners of all who escaped the massacre, and took possession. (The number of dead were such) that they blocked the streets and one could not make way for himself without crossing over them. The prisoners were no less than 30,000 souls."³⁷

It should be made clear that this slaughter was no more cruel than that of the Crusaders when they defeated the Muslim forces in Jerusalem. An anonymous eye witness to the slaughter in Jerusalem wrote in *Gesta Francorum*, "the slaughter was so great that our men waded in blood up to their ankles."³⁸

So we have seen that Islam, both in its Scripture and its history, has many seeds that illicit conflict and war just as do the religions of the Jews and the Christians. The question arises, does one find in Muslim practices, Muslim history, and in the Koran attitudes that may be helpful in leading to peace between people, religions, and nations? The answer is "yes!"

³³ John Noss, *Man's Religions*. 527.

³⁴ Abdullah Beig, Imam, Visalia, CA, U.S.A. conversation in May 2008.

³⁵ David T. Curp, "War without End: A Brief History of the Muslim Conquests," in *Crisis Magazine* November 8, 2005, posted November 9, 2005 by NYer, 1 *Ma*

³⁶ *Ibid.* 1.

³⁷ David T. Curp, "War Without End," 4.

³⁸ August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, (Princeton:1921) 262.

First, Muslims are a moral people. They are against lying, stealing, and bearing false witness. They must meditate on Allah, be good to the poor, be modest and peace-loving, generous, and kind. They believe in the equality of all races before God. All of these attitudes are helpful in realizing peace in the world.³⁹

According to one writer, there are 124 verses in the Koran that stress peace and tolerance toward non-Muslims, especially Christians and Jews as theists. This is positive, but the Koran is also very negative about infidels. In fact, In the Koran, Muslims are counseled not to be friends with unbelievers in one verse, and in another, not to be friends even with Christians and Jews.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Islam accepts all races equally.

The Muslim is to be generous as well. In the Koran we read, “True piety is this: . . . to give of one’s substance to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveler, the beggars, and to ransom the slave.”⁴¹ The Koran is also clear that there is a certain amount of religious toleration. Huston Smith quotes this verse in its support: “Let there be no compulsion in religion.”⁴² However, this is only true if adherents of other religions obeys Shari’ah law and seek no converts among the Muslim populace . That is why Bahai is outlawed in Iran, according to one who fled the country.⁴³ The previous characteristics indicate promise in working toward peace with others, with the exception of the constant threats toward unbelievers in the Koran. How is it possible to get beyond this problem?

Perhaps the problem could be erased by the ideal of the love of neighbor. Yes, Islam believes in the second commandment in the Jewish and Christian Scripture with different words, of course, but with the same meaning. Muhammad said, “None of you have faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself,” and “None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.”⁴⁴ In a letter written by Islamic leaders to Christian leaders is found this: “. . . justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part of the love of neighbor.”⁴⁵ It’s a starting point. If it is possible for Islam to extend the idea of brother and neighbor to those not of the faith yet loved of God anyway, then this writer has hope for peace between religions and hope for the world.

To conclude, Islam, like both the Jewish and Christian faiths, has within it both the seeds that could lead to conflict and influences that could lead to peace. Like Christianity, Islam also has its mutually exclusive faith. The Shahadah says it all, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.” Another absolute is that the Koran is God’s truly inspired book. Its archetype is eternal in heaven.⁴⁶ Therefore, it is the final word from God to humankind. This is a problem, of course, because not everyone will agree with that view, but if we all recognize it is God’s word to them, and if there is respect and tolerance, we can still work together.

Hinduism and Buddhism

This will be a very brief treatment just to show that, even in Eastern Religions, my thesis is still true: in all religions there are influences that lead to conflict and seeds that lead to peace.

³⁹ David S. Noss, *History of the World’s Religions*, 558 & 559.

⁴⁰ A. J. Arberry, *Koran*, Sura 4:143, p.121 and Sura 5:56, p. 136.

⁴¹ Ibid. Sura 2:173, 50.

⁴² Ibid. Sura 2:257, 65.

Anonymous member of the Bahai faith shared this with the author.

⁴⁴ Wal-Salaamu ‘Alaykum, *A Common Word*. An Open Letter and Call From 138 Muslim religious leaders to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, et al. October 13, 2007, 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 14.

⁴⁶ David S. Noss, *History of World Religions*, 556

Hinduism's **syncretistic nature** is a characteristic that leads to religious peace. For example, Hinduism seems to look favorably on Christianity and considers Jesus an avatar of God. They feel Christianity is an ideal form of Bhakti Yoga. This is the form of Hinduism that emphasizes the love of a chosen ideal as the means of achieving salvation. In this regard, there has been a form of Christianity in southern India since shortly after the crucifixion of Christ. The apostle Thomas is believed to have brought the faith there.

Nevertheless, Hinduism has sources pointing to conflict, and, in fact, have been involved with conflict and war in the past and present with Islam and others. In one of their scriptures one of the gods gives permission and a rationale for war. In the Bhagavad Gita, King Arjuna is having a discussion with the God Krishna. He finds that he has to fight a war against his kinfolk, and he would rather die than do this. He lists all his reasons, but Krishna explains that all people are really Brahman Atman (God), so even if Arjuna slays his kinsmen it is not possible to harm them. Since all participate in Brahma, none are actually destroyed when they "die." Therefore, Krishna tells, Arjuna, "Fight!"⁴⁷

In my thinking, If there were ever a religion that offered no indicators leading to conflict, it is Buddhism, yet the samurai warriors of Japan were sustained by Zen Buddhism, a Mahayana form of Buddhism. Also the Theravada Buddhists in Sri Lanka whose Scriptures and laws bar them from hurting any living thing have pressed a war against Hindus (Tamils) in the northern part of the country.⁴⁸ Perhaps what this shows is that it is not so much the nature of religion to be inclined toward war and conflict as it is the nature of humankind to protect or defend its territory or way of life. It is also human nature to seek to expand both territory and power often at the expense of others.

The Problem of Fundamentalism

As has been demonstrated in the section on "A Brief History of Religion in War and Peace," history gives ample examples of religion's involvement in war and conflict between faiths, continuing from their beginnings to our present times. Current conflicts are documented by the many listed by The Religious Tolerance Organization of Ontario, Canada.⁴⁹ Most often these conflicts are colored by national and tribal loyalties along with desire for political power and the protection or expansion of territory, but religion is often used as an effective tool in solidifying loyalties in these wars. Yet, by endorsing war, Religion unintentionally grants permission for often brutal acts that go against its core beliefs.

If this is the case, when not even orthodox or middle of the road religions can get along, what happens when each religion's core faith is made even more exclusive and demanding through the strictures of fundamentalism? How does fundamentalism affect the possibilities of war or peace? Fundamentalism makes it almost impossible for religions and societies to work together for peace because fundamentalism demands total surrender of every other religion and culture and opinion. This is a form of faith that "takes no prisoners." For example, Islamic fundamentalism is a crucial component in our ongoing conflicts and religious radicals are simply fundamentalists pushed too hard. Every effort toward religious and cultural peace is put at risk by fundamentalism. Therefore, we need to understand the dynamics of fundamentalism, how it

⁴⁷ S.E. Frost, Jr., Ed. *The Sacred Writings of The World's Great Religions*, New York, McGraw-Hill 1943
vs. 1:28 - 2:19, 46-47.

⁴⁸ B.A. Robinson, "Religiously Based Civil Unrest and Warfare," 3.

⁴⁹ Robinson, 1-4.

develops, and how to deal with it if we are to make any progress toward religious peace in the world.⁵⁰

Fundamentalism Understood

There has been a definitive study of this topic in recent years. The Fundamentalism Project was a six year effort under the guidance of Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby and conducted under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. It has made a great contribution to understanding fundamentalism and its consequences for all religions. We need to heed their findings if we would seek peace among peoples, cultures, and nations.

In Christianity, the word fundamentalism was coined as a result of conflict between ultra-Christian conservatives in opposition to liberal theology in the late nineteenth century in the United States. "At the Niagara Conference in 1895 a statement was prepared that became known as the Five Points of Fundamentalism. It stood for the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement (Jesus' death atoned for the sins of people) , and the physical resurrection and bodily return of Christ."⁵¹ A person's faith was questioned if he/she didn't agree.

This was the shape of western Christian fundamentalism. It consisted of a reaction against liberal beliefs that were thought to be destructive of the Christian Faith such as scholars who tried to demonstrate that the scriptures were not verbally inspired of God. Being reactive in a defensive way is the chief defining characteristic of fundamentalism in any religion.

R. Scott Appleby and his co-authors of *Strong Religion* define fundamentalism in all religions as being reactive to threats to their faith: "Fundamentalist movements form in reaction to, and in defense against, the processes and consequences of secularization and modernization (also liberal theological views) which have penetrated the larger religious community."⁵² Fundamentalism is a militant effort to save the faith from those who would weaken it.

Marty Martin's speech to the American Philosophical Society outlines another important characteristic of fundamentalism. "Fundamentalism(s) tend to rise only where there has been a religiously orthodox, conservative, and traditional base, so they (also) need the presence of a generation . . . of moderates, who negotiate riskily . . . with modernity. The fundamentalist movements rise after a tradition has been challenged . . . or eroded. It is moderates and adapters who trigger reaction (by emerging fundamentalists)."⁵³

Enclaves of Faith

From this we can see why very conservative religions become more rigid still as they react defensively to those elements that threaten the most holy aspects of their lives. Such fundamentalist groups then try to protect their way of life by building up walls of rigid beliefs as in the "five points of fundamentalism."⁵⁴ On these points no discussion is allowed. Sometimes these groups become so fearful of their faith disappearing that they set up **physical enclaves** in hopes of drawing completely out of harm's way. David Karesh's compound in Waco, Texas was a tragic example.

⁵⁰ Gabriel A. Almond, et.al.. *Strong Religion*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, Intro. 1-2.

⁵¹ Walker, *History of Christian Church*, 516.

⁵² Almond, 93.

⁵³ Martin Marty, "The Future of World Fundamentalisms." *American Philosophical Society*, vol. 142, no.3, September, 1998, 3 and 8.

⁵⁴ Almon, *Strong Religion*, 34 and 35.

However, if a fundamentalist religion is really successful, it will outgrow the walls of a compound. The walls will not contain it. For example, the Shi'a in Iran are considered a fundamentalistic form of the Muslim faith. They came to power in reaction to the Shah's regime. It is very successful in its aims, and, because it is a modified theocracy, **the whole country became the enclave**, a fortress of boundaries and laws holding back the inroads of unworthy faith. This is only possible when a country is a theocracy.⁵⁵

How to Change Fundamentalists

The point of all this is that fundamentalism is a roadblock to religious peace, because of the absolute rigidity of its faith claims. The question for governments, religions, cultures, and modernity is: what if anything can be done to help fundamentalists be more open to working together with others in seeking peace? It's difficult when so much that surrounds fundamentalists is perceived as a threat to their faith and causes them to see **the other** as the enemy. For example, fundamentalist Christians often classify liberal Christians and faiths, other than their own, as "being of the devil." What a roadblock to dialogue that is!

So what may we do to open fundamentalists of every faith to work with others in seeking peace in the world and between religions? Because fundamentalists are so threatened by ideas not in conformity with their own, I originally thought that the moderates in a faith, those who had something in common with them, might be able to bridge the gap and gradually open up conversations. However, the various discoveries made by those in the Fundamentalism Project made me realize that this might not work. One of their discoveries was that the moderates often are the trigger that causes conservatives to retreat into the cover of fundamentalism.⁵⁶ I still suspect that a sensitive moderate has the best chance for having a direct impact.

Is there anything that will help Fundamentalists moderate their position? The passage of time along with life experience often moderates the theology of a fundamentalist. Billy Graham, near the tail end of his life, has changed his view that salvation is given only to those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, at least, that is what I read in News Week Magazine in 2006. He now grants that salvation is God's prerogative.

Education often helps a person change. I was a fundamentalist myself at one time when I was young. I was converted from atheism to faith, and fundamentalism is often the first step a convert takes. But an intensive seminary education based on honest scholarship changed my mind about a number of things. Life experience along the way also helped in the process. Fundamentalism makes promises too big and too assuredly to be always realized; so sometimes people need to step back and reassess their beliefs. I think that education is crucial because ignorance and superstition are good ground for fundamentalism. Many agree with me.

Low education levels, poverty, and lack of opportunity put people at risk of falling into despair and extremism -- whether to the left or to the right. Public policy should work to eradicate these blights wherever they are found. A side effect of such a policy would be a blunting of the anger against injustice and ameliorate the call of fundamentalism as a means of expressing that anger. I believe that poverty and injustice are recruiting tools for fundamentalism. Yet, In the United States, the parking lots of fundamentalist megachurches are full of expensive cars.⁵⁷ These adherents, unlike the poor and dispossessed of the world, are

⁵⁵ Ibid., *Strong Religion*, 152 - 153.

⁵⁶ Marty, "Future of Fundamentalisms," 3.

⁵⁷ Marty, "Future of Fundamentalisms," 4.

reacting almost purely to religious and cultural changes that threaten their beliefs, values, and way of life.

One Thing that Worked

So is it ever possible to work together with fundamentalists in common cause for the things that lead to concord? It is hard, but it is possible as long as the core beliefs of the fundamentalists are not threatened, and the result has positive outcomes in terms of their ideology. Here is an amazing case in which that happened.

An ad In Time Magazine pictured a liberal black minister/politician, Al Sharpton, sitting on a “love seat” next to a right wing Christian minister and politician, Pat Robertson, with the Atlantic Ocean viewed behind them. It was stunning that these two, a black liberal and a fundamentalist, should be sitting together on a settee. Below the photo is the explanation:

“It’s American to disagree. It’s also American to come together in the face of a challenge. And few challenges are as urgent as global climate change. Together we can solve the climate crisis.”⁵⁸

This gives us a clue. What if we could raise the fate of humanity itself to this level of common concern! That would be a rallying cry for all faiths. Fundamentalists might even come along, but, if not, moderates, and liberals would. I believe that an overwhelming cause would bring all together. It will work if people of good will and common sense reach out to everyone, including fundamentalists. Also, to be successful, everyone will need to be familiar with each religion and be aware of the “flash points” for each faith.

Promising Signs and Possibilities Leading to Peace

When researching this paper, I came across stories and efforts giving me hope that religious attitudes are changing. In sharing some below, I am hopeful they will stir your imagination as they give life to the possibility of religious peace and concord among cultures, religions, and nations.

People Are Ready

In my college Comparative Religion class a variety of faiths is represented among my students. I received a term paper last semester from a Sunni Muslim. She began by writing about religion in general and how each has its place and purpose. Then she wrote, “The sad thing is, for may centuries, religion, instead of being a way of living, has become a reason of war, death, and torture for many. Two religions that seem to be going at [it] since they came about and have caused feelings of distrust, violence, and hatred amongst its followers are Islam and Judaism. Two religions with almost similar purposes are fighting, it seems, since the beginning of time.”⁵⁹

She goes on to compare the two religions in terms of their similarities and differences, and then concludes, “It’s gone too far, the disputes truly need to end between Jews and Muslims. They need to stop fighting over a ‘Holy Land;’ they need to learn how to compromise. Both these faiths daily have to face the same issues, same uncertainties, yet, they refuse to seek aid from each other. It’s sad, sad, how they could accomplish such a great friendship, yet, they refuse to. As Mahatma Ghandi once said, ‘You must be the change you wish to see in the world.’ As well as, ‘An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.’⁶⁰ We need to stop this bickering to

⁵⁸ WE, ad, “Alliance for Climate Protection,” *Time*, vol. 171, No. 22/ 2008, 2.

⁵⁹ Student, “Judaism and Islam,” *Term Paper*, Spring 2008, 1.

⁶⁰ Student, 3.

create a benevolent future of tomorrow for we're honestly not getting anywhere arguing and killing each other.'"

This young woman reflects the viewpoint of just about every Muslim in my class. People are ready! People are ready for peace! The moderates in Lebanon, Israel, Palestine -- probably everywhere there is conflict today -- would treasure it.

A Letter of Hope

Another reason for hope is a letter that I have in my possession. It is "An Open Letter and Call From Muslim Religious Leaders to: His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, et. al." (all the Christian denominations in the world).⁶¹ It is signed by 138 Islamic religious scholars and leaders. This letter, sent October 13, 2007, is seeking common cause with Christian Churches everywhere in working together for world peace. They seek to establish a common basis for the two faiths to work together. Their premise is that both religions believe in one God; both believe that all should love God with every fiber of one's being; both are commanded to love one's neighbor as oneself; and both seek justice in the world.

Justice is crucial to both religions. The author quotes al-Muntahinah 60:8 in the Koran, "Those who warred not against you on account of religion, you should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! God loveth the just dealers."⁶² The writers say this makes it clear that justice and freedom of religion are part of the responsibility of love in the second commandment's call to love one's neighbor. They are right.

In the summary and abridgment of the letter is found a basis for peaceful coexistence and for working together in common cause. "Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities they believe that there can be no peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians."⁶³ With the addition of the Jews could this be the overwhelming cause that might bring these religions together?⁶⁴ The bases for this peace and understanding already exist. It is part of the very foundational principles of the three faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbor. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. This invitation has been received favorably by The Holy Roman See, The World Council of Churches, The Archbishop of Canterbury, The World Alliance of Reformed Churches, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), et. al.

Hopeful Events

As is becoming increasingly obvious there is a lot of ferment at work relative to getting people together. While the above invitations are positive, one process has been underway for awhile. It was reported on Haaretz.com, "The 'Alexandria Process' pledges religious leaders to work together to promote a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to continue interfaith dialogue."⁶⁵ The reporter writes, "More than 30 Palestinian Muslim religious leaders met Wednesday for the final day of a three-day conference in Cairo, within the framework of the

⁶¹ Alaykum, "A Common Word," 1-29.

⁶² Arberry, *Koran*, Sura 60.8.

⁶³ Alaykum, 2.24.

* See Sharpton and Robertson pg. 21 of this paper.

⁶⁴ Donna Abu-Nasr and Abdullah Shihri, AP, "Saudi King Seeks Religious Dialogue," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2008 (Specific date lost).

⁶⁵ Yoav Stern, "Israeli Rabbis Participate in Muslim Peace Conference," *Haaretz.Com*, Thu., June 12, 2008 Sivan 9, 5768, 1.

‘Alexandria Process’ -- an initiative which brings together senior Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious leaders in an effort to work together for peace in the Holy Land. . . . On Wednesday, the group met with Osama El-Baz, senior aide to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who offered the Egyptian government’s support for the initiative.”⁶⁶

In addition to the above event, “King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia called an interfaith conference on Wednesday, July 16th, in Milan, Spain aiming to bring Muslims, Christians, and Jews closer together at a time when the world often puts the three faiths at odds. The King addressed the gathering saying, ‘My brothers, we must tell the world that differences don’t need to lead to disputes. The tragedies we have experienced throughout our history were not the fault of religion but because of an extremism that has been adopted by some followers of all religions, and of all political systems.’ Spanish King Juan Carlos also addressed the gathering . . . , saying, he hoped the conference would be successful. ‘We have always been interested in strengthening peace, dialogue, and cooperation on the International stage.’ Buddhist and Hindu participants, as well as practitioners of several Eastern religions were included in the event.”⁶⁷

Conclusions

First, it is essential to nurture those of religious faith away from war and conflict to the practice of being peacemakers. We have reason for hope here, because the growing desire among all peoples is the need for peace and concord in the world.⁶⁸ Secondly, I would encourage all, Christians, Jews, and Muslims to respond positively to the overtures from the 138 leaders called “A Common Word Between Us,” The religious dialogue sponsored by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is also very hopeful. Further those who are participating in The Alexandrian Process are to be congratulated. It is especially exciting to see that senior leaders of Judaism, Palestinian Muslims, and Christianity are involved in trying to resolve the conflict in Israel/Palestine.

Next, in this paper it is suggested on page 2 that we try to discover means to resolve conflicts between religions. The first steps in this process are being respectful of and sensitive to the beliefs of others, less arrogant about our own faiths, and more faithful in working with others toward the well being of all. Further, we need to relate in such a way that each faith is able to maintain its own core faith with peace and dignity. Religions can work together if that is assured. Also crucial to this relationship is the sincere salaam/shalom that we wish to one another as we work together.

Another core suggestion on page 11 would be very helpful in enabling both religions and nations to live together in concord. The suggestion is that we all should do everything in our power to assure that the governments under which we live, not only tolerate those of other faiths but also assure all of equal standing as citizens. This would be a great step forward for peace.

There is yet another solution that concerns the core issues of each faith. The question has to do with who is right about God and salvation among all the faiths? The answer is found in the Koran. In Sura 2:108 we read. “The Jews say, ‘The Christians stand not on anything,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews stand not on anything;’ . . . God shall decide between them on the Day of Resurrection touching their differences.”⁶⁹ So the solution and the determination is God’s. It seems this is the same position Billy Graham, the famous evangelist, has adopted. Should we

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁷ Paul Haven, AP, “Saudi King Calls for Religious Reconciliation,” *Sacbee.com*, Wed., July 16, 2008, via The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee.

⁶⁸ Student, “Judaism and Islam,” 3.

⁶⁹ A.J.. Arberry, *The Koran*, Sura 2:107, 42

accept that God is the final arbiter of religious truth this should soften one's arrogance toward other faiths and make it much easier for all to work together for the common good.

I have also concluded that religions really have no choice but to build bridges one to another. Why? Because there is an even greater cause than global warming that we must work on together, and it is the future of humankind. In Abrahamic religions, the underlying oneness that calls us together in service to humanity is the precious nature of human beings in the eyes of God.⁷⁰ In the Eastern religions it is the ultimate spiritual nature of humankind.⁷¹

This must transcend all our differences when it comes to the following: suffering, hunger, ignorance, drug use, injustice, and war. It must also transcend our differences when it comes to seeking our best for our neighbor. It is required of us to desire that our neighbor should thrive because each person is God's most prized creation. That is also why we join together to fight global warming, pollution of the atmosphere, and poverty. It is for the sake of our neighbor. It is the call of God.

Is it really possible to bridge the gaps among us so that we may serve humanity better? We need a common rationale to do that, and we do have one. Besides the knowledge that humankind is precious in God's eyes it is true that every religion has a version of The Golden Rule, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." In Confucianism, for example, you have the Silver Rule, "Do not do to others what you do not want done to you." Also every major religion has a version of the second commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The Muslim version is mentioned on pages 15 and 23 of this paper. Behind these commandments and rules for behavior is the precious nature of humanity in the eyes of God.

And finally, what needs to take place is that the religions of the world must reexamine their theological understanding of human life. This is what we must do to heal ourselves! We must rediscover the value of human life in the eyes of God. In fact, what needs to happen is that all religions need to transcend their current treatment and understanding of humankind.

For example, in Hinduism, in which the world is *maya* (illusion) and one's "conditioned" life is illusion, nevertheless, it needs to be recognized that the "conditioned" life is important and suffering is real until moksha (liberation) is achieved. Human needs should be met. I personally believe that Ghandi transcended the classical view of individual life as illusion (*maya*) as he went forward in his efforts seeking independence for the people of India, and as he redefined the "Untouchables" as harijan, God's people.

Within the faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam a central tenet of their common anthropology is that when God made man, he made him in the image of God.⁷² This is the doctrine of the "*Imago Dei*." The problem for those of the Abrahamic tradition is that they, in their treatment of humankind, have often failed to treat others in line with the God-given status of human beings. If all people are made in the image of God, we ought to treat them as such! If God loves all the people of the world and thinks of them as his children, why have all three of these faiths often treated people of other beliefs so shabbily and often savagely? What is our excuse?

It is my opinion that we have misunderstood the range of the "*Imago Dei*," and have acted as though the doctrine only applies to the adherents of our particular faiths when, in fact, it encompasses the whole of humanity. It includes persons of every condition of life, of every persuasion of faith, even those who disagree with us.

⁷⁰ Bible, I John 4:10-11.

⁷¹ Smith, "World's Religions, 34.

⁷² Bible, Genesis 1:27

To conclude, It is clear that we will never accomplish our goal, nor receive God's offer of peace on earth, until people all faiths reconnect with the precious nature of human life as God's gift. If we can do that, and relate to everyone in that light, then we will be able to open our arms of acceptance and love to all peoples. Rediscovering our oneness in God will transcend that which divides us.

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