

The Crucial Role of Respectful Interfaith Dialogue in the Search for Religious Peace and World Peace

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Abstract

“There will be no peace among the peoples of this world without peace
among the world religions.”

-Hans Kung, Christianity and the World Religions

Any serious student of the world’s major religious traditions will recognize the tremendous riches of each. The sacred writings have been internationally recognized as inspirations of pure beauty, regardless of whether the reader is a member of that particular religious tradition or not. The moral and ethical codes advanced are remarkably similar, even in religions as diverse as Buddhism (The Eightfold Path) and Judaism (The Ten Commandments). Confucius told his students, “What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others (The Silver Rule).” Six hundred years later, in a far different culture and time, Jesus said to his followers, “Do to others as you would have them do to you (The Golden Rule).”

For centuries, cultures, religions, and political leaders have focused on faith differences as a way to separate people, manipulate trust, and arouse suspicion towards “the other.” In this excerpt from a longer manuscript, the author attempts to create a rationale and method for challenging that historically destructive pattern that has led to centuries of suspicion and violent conflict.

First, by identifying eight basic orientations toward religion, an historical method is determined for identifying similarities among the great religions and religious peoples of our time. Some striking examples of similarities are produced, such as those mentioned in the first paragraph above.

A method is then advanced for the development of a dialogue between brave leaders from the great religious traditions. This model focuses on education, dialogue, and the breakdown of prejudices, and the method is based on the classic theory of nonviolent transformation advanced by Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi. It includes the necessary elements of learning how to hold dear to one’s own religious tradition while accepting the “other” as friend and dialogue partner rather than as enemy.

Biography

Kim A. Hauenstein, D.Min., is adjunct professor of religious studies at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio, and executive director of United Protestant Campus Ministries on seven urban Cleveland campuses. His doctoral work focused on the imaginative and persuasive language of metaphor and parable in the Bible, particularly in the sayings of Jesus, and how that language can assist in the breaking down of prejudices. He has taught courses on comparative religion at the CCC Eastern campus since 1998, as well as a course on the history of western Christianity. Dr. Hauenstein has worked in ecumenical and interfaith settings for the past fifteen years.

Long a student of the writings of Huston Smith and Joseph Campbell, Dr. Hauenstein has completed a manuscript, "Imbedded Traditions and the Future of Religion", suggesting a dialogue among leaders of the world's great religions based on the model of nonviolent transformation advanced by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. This model recognizes the cultural basis for most religious traditions based on the ancient world in which they arose while calling for a brave new initiative for mutual recognition and peace.

“There will be no peace among the peoples of this world without peace among the world religions.”¹

There was a time when there was only one religion. This time would most certainly have been in the deep recesses of pre-literate human history. And though anthropologists speculate on the introduction of religious thought, many believe it might have surrounded the early human’s need to confront the reality of death.² Additional speculation would suggest that the one religion would not have lasted for long, because it seems to be human nature to have different beliefs about ultimate matters and this would have been true among our ancient ancestors as well as our contemporary companions on earth.

Robert Monk has defined religion this way: “Religion is any person’s reliance on a pivotal value or a group of related values in which that person finds essential wholeness as an individual and as a person-in-community. For that person, all other values are subordinate to this central value (or to this group of values).³ Monk has also outlined five religious orientations that permeate religious cognizance from the time of primal religion.⁴

These are:

- Moral
- Mystical
- Aesthetic
- Ecstatic

¹ Hans Küng, Christianity and the World Religions: Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1986), p. 443.

² Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pages 70-89.

³ Robert C. Monk, Exploring Religious Meaning (5th Edition), (Simon & Schuster: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1998), p. 17.

⁴ ibid., pp. 69-70.

- Magical

The **moral** (or legal) orientation to religion seeks to subordinate behavior and attitudes to a pattern of conduct and intention held to have ultimate significance. This pattern may have been given through the commandments of a Divine Being or Beings. It may be held to be intrinsic to basic reality, the universe, or human nature. Or it may be the moral code of society. An example might be the Ten Commandments of Judaism.

The **mystical** orientation to religion attempts to negate or subordinate every reality, world, society, self, and all their relations to Divine Reality -- God or universe, absolute spirit or nature, truth, goodness, beauty -- so that at its deepest level or core the self can relate oneness -- union or unity -- with the Divine Reality. Mystics believe that the divine speaks to them directly, not through others.

The **aesthetic** orientation to religion attempts to interpret all experiences in such a way that they are seen to manifest a divine or transcendental pattern as their underlying and guiding reality -- God's mind or will, wisdom, truth, order, beauty. Because of this, those with this orientation often connect with the divine through nature, the visual arts, music, or other experiences of the senses. An example would be a person who feels very close to God watching a sunset, listening to classical music, or walking in nature.

The **ecstatic** orientation to religion seeks supernormal experiences that bring individuals or groups under control of or in close contact with supernatural power(s). An example might be a Pentecostal Christian worship services, where individuals feel the power of God "fill" their body and emotions, often creating a physical response.

The **magical** orientation to religion seeks to discover and exercise methods that allow the control of transcendental power(s) for human purposes.⁵ An example might be a Shaman, who believes that he/she has the power to call upon -- or summon -- the divine through ritual actions.

For the purposes of this paper, and to be a bit more inclusive, we will change the words "religious orientations" to "orientations towards religion" and add to this list atheism, humanism, and agnosticism. Now, atheism, agnosticism, and humanism are not religious orientations. But they are orientations towards religion. This paper, especially as we near its latter stages, will be as inclusive as possible of all people who think about religion, either in a positive or a negative way. For this reason, I have expanded Monk's initial list of five religious orientations to include eight *orientations towards religion*.

Atheism rejects all religious belief and denies the existence of a God or any form of divinity.

Humanism is a modern, non-theistic, rationalist movement that holds that humans are capable of self-fulfillment, ethical conduct, etc., without recourse to supernaturalism. An example might be a person who believes that there is no divinity -- and no need for a divinity -- because humanity's wisdom, if used properly and wisely, would be sufficient to resolve the problems of the world.

Agnosticism believes that the human mind is incapable of knowing whether there is a God or an ultimate cause, or anything beyond material phenomena. An example might be a person who expresses a sense of uncertainty about the divine. Many agnostics cite the fact of evil and suffering in the world and question why a loving divinity would allow such things to exist.

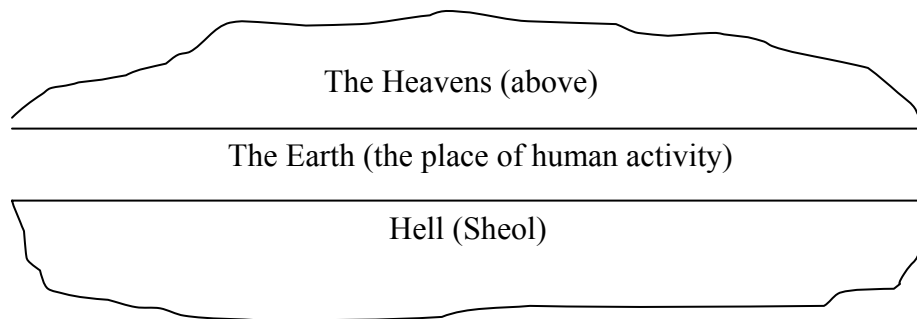
⁵ Robert C. Monk, et. al., Exploring Religious Meaning (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1998), pp. 69-70. The first five of the religious orientations come from this source.

This question leads to their doubt about the existence of the divine and, often, an interest in proof.

Marcus Borg, in his recent book, The God We Never Knew, warns us that some people who question or deny God in our time might actually be reacting against an outdated concept or image of God: a God that is "out there". This is the old image of God as an anthropomorphic figure, a bearded old man sitting out there on a throne somewhere in the sky. That is an image of God that comes from some of our religious writings. And it is important to understand why. In the time in which the Bible was written, the universe was thought to be three-tiered.

Of course, in the first century and before, there was no concept that the Earth was round -- that didn't come until the fifteenth century with Columbus and other explorers -- and there was no concept of a Universe such as the one we know now. For the writers of most western religious writings, the earth was flat and it was the center of the universe.

The world, or universe, then, was set up like this when most sacred writings were first recorded, and that has an impact on understanding the image of God presented in those writings:



In this "flat" three-tiered world, or universe, God inhabited heaven and the devil, or Satan, inhabited Hell. If you were righteous during your life, you would be expected to go up to live with God in heaven. If you were bad during this lifetime, you would be expected to go down to live with the devil in Hell after your life was completed. This was a common concept of

the first century and before, and it continues to be prominent in much popular theology today, even if subconsciously.

But as Marcus Borg has pointed out in his book, The God We Never Knew, many people today, including religious people and especially people of science, have had difficulty believing in that God. Borg demonstrates that there are new images of God and that these images are in line with science, critical thinking, history, and religious pluralism.⁶

Two things are critical at this juncture in our discussion. First, it is critical to understand an individual's understanding of God in order to understand what that individual is attempting to communicate about her or his faith. Second, it is critical to go back to a time before the historical religions existed to begin to determine the commonalities in thinking among the world's religious peoples. A third concern, addressed later in this paper, is the relationship between religious and non-religious people in the search for world peace. None of these issues can be addressed without the development of serious, probing, and mutually respectful dialogue among all the communities I have mentioned in the eight orientations toward religion.

The Perplexity of Religious Attachments

To the observer, it is clear that the historical religions have separated people. Religions attach themselves to nationalistic governments that are in political competition with other gov-

⁶ Marcus Borg, The God We Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion To a More Authentic Contemporary Faith, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997). This book presents a conceptual image of God which, in addition to being in line with modern thought, addresses key issues such as environmentalism, social justice, and personal spirituality.

ernments, pitting one religion against another. Religions very often ask complete allegiance from their followers, giving the impression of superiority over others.

What is needed in today's world is something very different: something that can *unite* people. Religion separates people. That is the generic problem. In spite of religions and religious fervor, chronic social and economic injustice, racism, and rampant violence continues to exist in those societies where the belief in a deity is so overwhelmingly present.

If one's deity is what is most fully present in one's heart, then it might be better to say honestly that the deities of societies today are nationalism, wealth, violence, and exploitation. These are the things that are in people's hearts most fully, and the evidence is that these are the things that are our social, economic, and political priorities. The thought of deity -- or the thought that billions of religious people claim to believe in a divine being -- has little relevance to what is happening in the world these days.

The idea of deity, in itself, is no longer enough to unite the peoples of the world. There are people who call themselves atheists and agnostics who will not join in any unity which claims a deity. If what we are searching for is a revelation which includes all people, then atheists and agnostics must be included. That makes the task particularly challenging to those with religious beliefs. But the fact cannot be denied that if we are to seek a universal set of values to allow diverse peoples to live together in peace with justice and righteousness, no group can be ignored or left out. To do so would defeat the purpose.

Deities are localized and therefore parochial. The idea of deities has become problematic as the world has become a global village because in different locations, we find different deities. I am a theist, but I would be among the first to admit a basic problem in the belief in separate gods which lead people into wars against each other, or give the people of certain cultures "privi-

leged" status and unique revelatory information. If there are separate deities leading separate bands of people throughout the world, there is no hope for unity. This fact is primary, even before we acknowledge the inclusion of atheists and agnostics in that world community.

The guiding principles of modern life are wealth, nationalism, violence, and exploitation. This is true of individuals as well as cultures. And for those principles to be exercised in the lives of individuals or in cultures as a whole, violence must be done through competition. Some must lose their rights and their just place in society at the expense of others who will benefit. That is violence in its most basic form.

World community cannot be realized with these societal values. Only war, hatred, and violence can be repeated indefinitely to the point of final destruction while these values are in place. Nor can world community be realized through deities and religious traditions which are in competition, whose claims to superiority are won by violence to the body, mind and spirit.

Before going further, it is true that there must be a place for the acknowledgement all traditions in developing a new set of universally valid life principles. No individual can be dissociated from her or his past. For those who set out to form a new set of life principles which will be universally valid, their own cultural, religious, secular and racial traditions will be a part of the process. But the only hope for success is that the individual traditions of people will be secondary to the broader, more inclusive spectrum which can become the basis for peaceful co-existence. If it cannot, then there is no real hope for a future which is in any way different from the past. None of the world religions or cultures has the ability to suddenly become universal.

The intensity of the work that must be done to develop a set of universally valid life principles -- along with the historical tendencies of human beings toward separation, exploitation, and war -- seem enough to discourage anyone from the attempt. However, the alternative is un-

acceptable: continued wars, destruction of the eco-balance of the world, starvation and hunger, an inability and unwillingness of human beings to share their resources in just and humane ways, and people who might otherwise be friends looking at each other with eyes of hatred, distrust, prejudice and suspicion. That is the legacy of our nationalistic governments, our individual and imperialistic religions, our racial and cultural heritages, and our secular and technological efforts. It is not acceptable to continue with this alternative. It can only lead one day to the destruction of the earth and the extinction of life as we know it.

So, though difficult, the effort must begin. We must hear the winds that are blowing among those who love peace and appreciate each other. We need to gather those people and work together to initiate a set of universally valid life principles for life in our time. This will be done, predictably, without the support (and possibly the active discouragement) of organized government, religion, and other agencies of life which have much to lose from a world where people accept each other and live together in peace. In such a world, self-perpetuating hierarchy is out of place.

As a theist, I believe that there is a spiritual inspiration that will inform efforts to develop a set of universally valid life principles. I realize, as well, that my personal belief must be secondary to the primary purpose of the effort, which is to be totally inclusive of all people, including atheists and agnostics. The world is no longer large enough to exclude people. Whatever the process for the future will be, all people must be integrally involved in it. If the goal for the future is to be peaceful co-existence, then all people will need to adjust to the beliefs and values of others. Power, might, and control are no longer an acceptable model in a world of peaceful co-existence. Mutual respect is essential to peaceful co-existence. Assuming that the great masses of people-- heretofore controlled by leaders who have had more to gain by keeping the masses

separated into warring factions -- can realize their own power over despots and work together to set the agenda for peaceful co-existence, what will that agenda be?

The world has shown signs of its desire to indicate that agenda. The most recent examples have been in eastern Europe and Central America, places where people have been willing to risk their very lives in order to be free and in order to challenge the oppressive control and manipulation of oppressive governments. There seem to be some universally valid life principles which people are indeed living, and hence, these need not be subjective fantasies. In fact, they seem to emerge from necessity in the most difficult of circumstances.

A primary life principle desirable to the masses of people seems to be that of justice.

Another seems to be peace.

However the process evolves, it would seem that a set of universally valid life principles will have to include the following:

1. The principles must be valid in all world religions and belief systems.
2. The principles must be valid in secular belief systems.
3. If a principle espoused by one or more groups is not universally acceptable, it is, obviously, not a universally valid life principle.

The effect is a winnowing one. The key to success is openness to universality rather than the parochialism with which we are so fascinated and accustomed. **The pride in our own tradition must come not from what separates us from others, but rather in what unites us with others. That is a major change in human thought.**

The goal, then, is to find dynamic, unifying life principles. How can we test the validity of a universally valid life principle? First, it will be something that will be affirmed and accepted by all people. Second, it will break down the current barriers which exist between people and

will, instead, begin to build bridges of understanding between people. Third, it can only be created by truly mutual and respectful dialogue.

There is no naiveté concerning the difficulty of this task and there must be no apology for its boldness. Things that were previously thought to be impossible are made possible every day by acts of will by individuals: a refusal to give up and an absolute determination to succeed. If the world wants peaceful co-existence, it can have it. It is not an act of fate; it is a choice we make together. It is an act of corporate will. It is no more difficult to achieve than a decision to continue the violence.

Wisdom's Clue

There are fascinating themes running through the wisdom traditions of the world. More than the comparative myths which all tend to include stories of creation, a flood that covers the earth, and trickster figures, there is incredible consistency in the ethical and social codes of various wisdom traditions. Compare the Eightfold Path of Buddhism to the Ten Commandments of Judeo-Christian belief. Compare the Silver Rule of Confucius with the Golden Rule taught by Jesus of Nazareth. These common themes are too numerous to mention here.⁷

But there is a theme that exists in various nuances in virtually all of the world's wisdom traditions that has a direct bearing on the current discussion. In Christianity, it is said this way: "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."⁸ In Hinduism: "They are forever free who renounce all selfish desires and break away from the ego-cage of "I," "me," and "mine" to be united with the Lord. Attain to

⁷ Huston Smith's classic text, *The World's Religions*, is an excellent example of a book that makes constructive, informed, and favorable comparisons of the common mythological themes among the world's religions and wisdom traditions.

⁸ Mark 8:36.

this, and pass from death to immortality.”⁹ Islam: “Remember, those who fear death shall not escape it, and those who aspire to immortality shall not achieve it.”¹⁰ The traditions teach that there is a power in letting go of the ego, of pride, of desire.

It is common to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism that it is only through the control of the ego that we can find pure effectiveness. Should people become able to experience the richness and truths of their own tradition while recognizing and affirming others, the ability to work toward universally valid life principles would become possible. But this would take incredible courage among people who are unafraid to enter into dialogue concerning its possibility.

Fortunately, there are those who have led the way. Stephen G. Post offers three exemplary stories of altruistic behavior in Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service, the last of which is a story of the eighteenth-century American Quaker John Woolman, “one of the most courageous and effective ‘tough’ lovers in world history. An undistinguished colonist, he traveled to Quaker meetings across the colonies, witnessing to people one by one about the evils of slavery. ‘My heart was tender and often contrite,’ he wrote, ‘and universal love to my fellow creatures increased in me.’¹¹ The modern antislavery movement began precisely at the moment when, as a matter of conscience, Woolman could no longer assist his employer in the sale of a slave. After convincing his fellow colonial Quakers to give up slavery, Woolman went on to spread his message in England, where he died after a short period of intense endeavor. Many Quakers both in the colonies and in England had been slave-owners. Woolman set about the task of creating change through the art of tough love. He was confronting evil in the spirit of love, defying a convention that he found intolerable, and succeeding in quiet one-on-one conversa-

⁹ Bhagavad Gita 2.71.

¹⁰ Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 43.

¹¹ John Woolman, The Journal of John Woolman, in The Harvard Classics: Franklin, Woolman, Penn, ed. Charles W. Elliot (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1937), 174.

tions. He visited his fellow Quakers individually, farm after farm, for most of the two decades of his adult life. As Robert E. Quinn, a leading scholar on contemporary leadership skills, writes in his study of visionaries and “deep change,” Woolman did not criticize people or anger them, but ‘by 1770, a century before the Civil War, not one Quaker owned a slave.’¹² Due to the efforts of one man who seems to have approached the ideal of unlimited love as nearly as anyone, the Quakers were the first religious group to denounce slavery. If there had been a John Woolman in every religious denomination, perhaps the institution of slavery could have been abolished without the need for civil war. A single visionary individual committed to change under the power of unlimited love can make a difference in the world.”¹³

Given the history of the world, the nature of faith traditions, and the inherent prejudices scripted into our psyches by years of suspicion, stereotypes, and misinformation, what method could lead toward resolution? This is a matter for discussion far beyond the pages of this paper. But it would not be fair simply to leave it at that.

The method of nonviolent social change seems to have the capability of providing a model, not only for the cooperative development of a set of universally valid life principles, but for dealing effectively with the prejudices, hatreds, and historical violence that must be overcome if such an effort were to prove fruitful. The method of nonviolent social change also invites respectful dialogue. It is to that method we now turn.

Nonviolence in Theory and Practice

The spiral of violence has continued to turn since the beginning of recorded history. With each violent act and each violent response, the spiral is thrown into another cycle which, as

¹² Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-bass, 1996), 218.

¹³ Stephen G. Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), 22-23.

with the downward spiral of a tornado, becomes tighter, more energized, and more dangerous as it nears the vortex at the bottom. This is true not only of international affairs, but of societal and individual relationships as well. Violence is so endemic to our lives that we do not even notice it where it affects us most vitally: in our personal relationships, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our national policies.

Violence, for the purpose of this paper, will be defined as **any individual act which impugns the integrity or puts into question the dignity of any other human being**. We have made a huge mistake in judging that violence is only what happens in wars and in physical confrontations. Violence appears on every level of our existence, but, as we shall see, it is ignored or rationalized on many of those levels. It is an act of violence, for instance, for one person, through her or his language, to attempt to humiliate another person for any reason. Whether this attempt comes from a position of personal power over the other person, or whether it is simply insensitivity, it is an act of violence against the other's personhood. It is impossible to estimate how often this happens every day in the world as we know it: in our schools, in our homes, and in our neighborhoods. Yet this is where violence begins. This is where violence must be recognized for what it is, at its roots, and this is where it must be addressed by each of us.

Nonviolence and Social Change

Nonviolence is more than a philosophy or a method for application to a specific problem in need of resolution. It is both of those things, but nonviolence is also a system. If properly understood, nonviolence can apply to almost everything we do. The application of nonviolence to the many issues of our lives is a critical part of the structure if we are to develop a set of universally valid life principles.

First, what is nonviolence? Most of us have had some knowledge of the lives and teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Using the tradition of nonviolence, both Gandhi and King were able to bring about exceptional and decisive social change.

But can nonviolence *only* be used for massive social change? Or can the individual use this philosophy to deal with the critical issues of life in the everyday world? The answer to this question is yes. Nonviolence is, in fact, a learned action which follows a conscious decision that violence is a morally bankrupt way to deal with conflict.

The fact that nonviolence is a learned action means that education is an essential first step. Most of what we observe in society is violent. This includes sensory experiences such as watching television, reading the newspaper, or seeing movies. But it is more than that. The method many people use to relate to each other often includes violence in its most basic form. This is caused by undisciplined envy, pride, jealousy, and ego satisfaction. It is violence because the dignity and worth of the other person is brought under attack by the words or actions of the person using psychological violence. This may be conscious or subconscious, but the result is the same: violence against another person.

The Philosophy of Nonviolence

The classic concept of nonviolence includes several tenets that are applicable to our everyday lives and relationships.

It is important for us to understand our dependence upon violence and what it means. Violence is not only what is visible and physical. It can be in the words we say about other people or to other people. Violence can be in the prejudices which actively separate us from other

people or, more passively, keep us from including other people in our circle of friends and associates. Violence can be in the way we actively mistreat our environment or even in our unthinking actions toward the earth when we passively acquiesce to the use of products which destroy rather than repair the land, air, and water. Especially, violence can be in our attitudes, invisible to the world, perhaps even tucked away in our unconscious mind in such a way that we are not aware of it, but causing us to be at odds with other people and with the world.

It cannot be underestimated how difficult it is for us to acknowledge our own acts of violence, no matter how minor they may seem to us, and to then leave those acts behind in the pursuit of nonviolence. The concept of power is directly related to violence and the sense of superiority which comes from our ability to be in control of people and situations. Almost everything we know is related to the violence of competition, and the "winners" are those who defeat the competition. The "losers" of this world's battles are to be pitied. More than that, they are often understood to have been humiliated.

One thing, above all others, needs to be said about the person who fully accepts and absorbs the methods of nonviolence: there is no such thing as humiliation. Humiliation exists only in the world of violence and competition. When a person truly rejects the use of violence in life, that value supercedes all others. If one can live in the violent world without resorting to violence, humiliation does not exist. Injustice exists. Pain and suffering continue to exist. But one's dignity and integrity remain intact, because the nonviolent response has been chosen out a value system which represents what is most believed deep inside oneself. Throughout, one knows that the refusal to renew the cycle of violence is all that can be trusted to lead to a world where one day injustice, pain, and suffering will end. As Gandhi said, there is much sacrifice involved in nonviolent social action, but one must never sacrifice honor.

The philosophy of nonviolence, then, is attached to five key concepts. These concepts must be understood and internalized before the practical uses of nonviolence that follow can be used successfully. It may take months or even years to replace learned violence with a new system of values in which nonviolence supersedes it. Much of what one hears and sees each day is part of the violent paradigm the individual is learning to resist. It is not easy to overcome such assaults, and there are always temptations to resort to "power plays" in order to get what you want in a specific situation. The discipline required to overcome such temptations can take many months to form and takes continual practice through the individual's conscious thought processes.

The first key to the concept of nonviolence is the philosophy of **noninjury**. This concept is attitudinal. It applies to everything which exists outside oneself. The nonviolent person seeks to live without harming or injuring other persons or parts of the environment in which they live. This is a conscious decision, practiced daily and brought to mind by regular meditation, to treat each person and thing as a precious part of the creation.

The second key concept is that of **non-possession**. This concept accepts the fact that everything we receive in this life is a gift to be used for good purposes. Nothing ever really "belongs" to us. This concept runs counter to the obsession we have with possessions in a materialistic world. It is therefore very difficult to master. Yet, we know in truth that even life itself is a gift and that the portion of life which we live in this world is temporary. We know, as well, that when we exit this life, we do so without our collection of "things." The amount of energy which we have spent in gathering materialistic goods is -- at least at that point -- fruitless. Those who learn this truth earlier can gain an alternative perspective on life.

The third key concept of nonviolence is **a refusal to cooperate with that which divides rather than unites** and a focus on the truth (in the case of this book, the truth is what we find together in the set of universally valid life principles, and this truth is both dynamic and revelatory not only now but in the future, as well). When one decides to live by these principles, there will be opposition from the world as we know it and there will be consequences. This type of situation will most usually arise with regard to rules and laws which have been set and defined by individuals and groups. If a rule or law is objectionable because it leads you away from the set of universally valid life principles, then you must refuse to cooperate with it. This may very well mean that you will be banished from the group, or even arrested and incarcerated. But in nonviolence, to obey a law which you believe to be immoral or unjust is unacceptable. You must focus on the truth (as you understand it) and trust that the outcome will be positive.

The fourth key concept is that when, in conscience, you must oppose some issue or request, it must be clear in your own mind that you are **opposing a system** which you consider to be flawed or immoral, **not a person or a group of people**. This concept is absolutely key to the current discussion. It is always a temptation to personalize our opposition and to hate human beings because of something they say or do. Only a great deal of discipline, accompanied by regular meditation and focus, can overcome this opposition with clear vision to see that opposition is focused on beliefs and systems and not on individuals or groups. To hate an individual is itself violence. Nonviolence, as we have seen, avoids not only physical violence but internal violence of the spirit, as well. In fact, the effort to make the truth clear in a given situation is an effort to clarify that truth for both sides through dialogue. Those who were previously in opposition are now in harmony. It is impossible to accomplish this by force or other violent means. Submission to force on either side of an argument is a false harmony which exists only because

of a greater power on one side. The undercurrent is hatred, which is violence and which will one day be released as such. Nonviolence recognizes the dignity and integrity of every human person, no matter how different or how antagonistic. This is not negotiable. Nor is it easy. As Gandhi suggested, those on the other side of the issue are not enemies and are not to be seen as such. Rather, they are friends who are in need of liberation.

The fifth key concept of nonviolence is the philosophical basis for all the others. It is that **the universe is on the side of good** and that there is great hope for the future. It is the belief that people can be transformed toward this good when their environment and surroundings allow them to be; most specifically, when they live in an atmosphere of peace with justice for all people. This need for social justice requires a belief that all human beings have the right to food and clean water. It requires a belief that all human beings have a right to a place to live and the means to support themselves and their families. Only when we demand of ourselves the equal rights for all people will the foundation be established for peace with justice. That is when hope for the future can truly begin.¹⁴

The Call for Courageous Dialogue

This paper does not pretend to be a solution. Rather, it is a call for courageous dialogue concerning the things that have separated people and spawned violence throughout history. In this, religion must take its share of the responsibility for both the initiation and perpetration of violence as well as the responsibility to resolve the root causes of it. This requires initiative on

¹⁴ James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), pp. 7-9.

behalf of all those related to the various orientations toward religion outlined in this paper. Specifically, it requires a willingness to deflect the focus away from differences and towards commonalities, the building blocks of peaceful coexistence in the future.

The proposed method for this dialogue is that of nonviolent persuasion in which the perceived “enemy” or “opponent” is understood to be a friend seeking liberation. To effectively use the method of nonviolence, however, it has been pointed out that a “nothing to lose” attitude must be adopted by the individual. This attitude is based on the teachings of many of the wisdom traditions of the world at their very best.

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