



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Inter-Religious Dialogue for Peace

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Had God pleased He could have made you one community.

But it is His wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed upon you – to vie with each other in good. (Quran 5:48)

EXPERIENCE

I have just read *A Mighty Heart*,¹ Mariane Pearl's book about Daniel Pearl's murder by terrorists in Pakistan. It occurs to me that my education did not provide enough information about Pakistan, about Muslim distress over the division of Hindus and Muslims in 1945, and certainly not enough knowledge of the conflict over Kashmir. This is only one area that I feel I should know more about to be a responsibly informed adult in our multi-cultural world. For too many years my American education and interest turned toward the West where European culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition are predominant. As a consequence, I am lamentably ignorant about the Middle East, South East Asia, Africa, and the Far East. To live responsibly in our globalized world, an interest in cultures and religions not our own is essential.

Another influential book this year was *The Faith Club*,² a fascinating, engaging story of a two-year dialogue among three women representing the Jewish,

Christian, and Muslim Abrahamic traditions. The questions these women asked one another and their deepening friendship through the dialogue reflect my own desire to learn as much as possible about how God is revealed through different traditions.

My experience of inter-religious dialogue began in the '90s when I joined The Temple of Understanding, the oldest interfaith organization in this country, dedicated to extending respect for and understanding of all religious traditions. As a young woman in 1960, Juliet Hollister was scandalized by religious conflicts. It became her life work to explore as many religious traditions as possible and to respect the truth in the path they offered. Juliet's life was dedicated to bringing religious leaders together in international summit meetings.

Today a large number of interfaith organizations are committed to conflict resolution, to grassroots organization and to education. At the United Nation unprecedented interest in inter-religious dialogue for peace includes member states, UN agencies and religious NGOs.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

As societies around the world become more interconnected, the question of how we engage and understand cultural and religious diversity is increasingly important. Inter-religious dialogue lays a radical new groundwork for peace-making.

One of the most serious obstacles to overcome remains the claim to sole access to truth. Pope John Paul II, who led Catholics in many initiatives for inter-religious dialogue, observed: "*there is basis for dialogue and for the growth of unity, a growth that should occur at the*

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same rate at which we are able to overcome our divisions – divisions that to a great degree result from the idea that one can have a monopoly on the truth.³ As Christians, we believe that the differences among religions reflect the spiritual richness that God has poured out upon the human race.⁴

Once we acknowledge that other religions can enrich us, the way to dialogue opens up. Willingness to dialogue underlies the possibility for our global, multicultural societies to live together in peace. A dialogue is neither a debate nor an empty exchange of compliments.

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The secret of dialogue is passing over and then returning. We pass over into an appreciative attempt to understand the experience of another person or tradition. When we return to ourselves, as we inevitably do..., we are no longer precisely the same person we were before. We are changed by the experience, in some way transformed and enlarged. This pattern may be a paradigm for spiritual growth in a pluralistic world.⁵

Thus, dialogue is not only a way of knowing the other; it is a way to know myself and to see my own religious beliefs in a deeper and enlightened way. Raimon Panikkar, long our teacher in inter-religious dialogue, tells us... *dialogue is a religious act par excellence because it recognizes my religio to another, my individual poverty, the need to get out of myself, transcend myself, in order to save myself.*⁶

Inter-religious respect and understanding, enlarged, deepened, enlightened by dialogue is the way that leads to a more peaceful existence in pluralistic societies. Inter-religious action then becomes action for peace.

REFLECTION

We have known forever of the existence of different traditions that attract different people. Why should we interact with other religions now? Why, if we love and are satisfied with our own tradition, especially one so favored by the presence of God's own Son, should we be interested in the diversity of religious traditions? A persistent concern heard from Christians today is of a loss of faith among the young, a diminution of religious vocations, and worry about the future of the priesthood. Could God be teaching us that there is a rich spiritual experience to be learned from paths laid deep in other cultures?

All religious traditions link human beings to the sacred. Pir Inayat Kahn, the great Sufi Master prays: *"Enter unhesitatingly Beloved, for in this abode there is naught but my longing for Thee."* Universal yearning for transcendence connects us across cultural boundaries. Zen Buddhists find essential nature through meditation. Beyond subject/object distinctions, right and

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wrong judgments and all concepts, to an awareness of *having* nothing, of *being the other*, surprisingly, we find ourselves close to the Christian ideal of the unitive way. The quest for ethical behavior; efforts to treat each other and the environment with love and respect, some form of meditation practice characterize religious traditions while the promotion of peace is claimed by each tradition

"I have learned more about God's inscrutable ways from other traditions," "I have grown spiritually through dialogue with people of other faith traditions," and "I have a much deeper appreciation of my own tradition now." These comments we often hear from those who follow interfaith programs offered by the Temple of Understanding.

ACTION

A spiritual journey is in order. It is very possible in our pluralistic cities to visit religious sites, to learn about the art, architecture, music, and ritual of other traditions. This would be a fascinating first step. Study your neighborhood, visit a mosque, a synagogue, temples, gurdwaras. Find out who are the leaders of the traditions

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in your neighborhood and ask if you might attend a service with your friends and invite them to visit your religious site. As you get acquainted, you will begin to identify dialogue partners.

Another wonderful way to begin an interfaith relationship is through social action. Every religious believer is moved by the 13 billion children living in extreme poverty and hunger. Inter-religious projects to eradicate hunger in an African village would help others and prepare friendships ripe for dialogue.

Good luck. You are on your way and I pray that deep growth will be yours. You may even follow an attraction to walk in the shoes of another tradition as I have while remaining firmly a Catholic.

Endnotes

¹ Mariane Pearl, *A Mighty Heart*, Scribner, New York, 2003

² Idliby, Oliver, Warner, *The Faith Club*; Free Press, New York, 2006

³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 147

⁴ Ad Gentes 11.

⁵ J.A. Buehrens and F. Church, *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1998, 101.

⁶ Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 243