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Interfaith Engagement and Positive Peace: What Works and What is Missing

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Two images



Zapiro is on leave. This is a classic rerun.

Answers?

- polyhedron known as an icosidodecahedron
- Complexity of Interconnectedness
- Complexity and sensitivity in speaking about religion
- Complexities of definition: religion and culture, religion, interfaith, intrafaith, ecumenical

Presentation Outline

- **Human security: Peace, Development, Environment**
- **Contemporary interest in interfaith**
- **Different paths and approaches**
- **Dialogue of theology, engagement of praxis**
- **Some success stories and disappointments**
- **Issues awaiting action: Gender and reproductive health, orphanages, education**

Human security: Peace, Development, Environment

- **Peace and conflict studies**
- **Religion a “Missing Dimension”; need for far better understanding**
- **Recent efforts to link different kinds of conflict and issues**
- **Human security an example of effort to reframe paradigms and with that effort to change disciplines, action**
- **Meaning of peace?**

Scott Appleby: Peacebuilding

“So many of today’s deadly conflicts are cyclical, so much so that it seems arbitrary and ahistorical to presume a starting and ending point, or even discrete, self-contained stages. Just as violence and repression move from latent to realized to contained to dormant phases, so too must the constant building of peace, a set of practices that must be understood as the accompanier of and constant alternative to the forces of violence and dehumanization, not their full and final replacement. We live, sadly, not in Utopia but in Sri Lanka and Detroit and Congo and even Northern Ireland, where war of a sort is an imminent possibility at any given moment. The building of peace does not ignore these phases or conflate them, but rather adapts to them so that measures of prevention are not those of negotiation and measures of resolution are not those of transitional justice, but all are organically related. So peace is never fully made, but always being built”.

Ela Bhatt: an understanding of “Positive Peace”

- “Peace is not about a lack of activities of war. It is not just about general elections. Peace is substantive, lasting; it is about life. It is about the ordinariness of life, how we understand each other, share meals, and share courtyards. And that is what women do. That very ordinariness and the kinds of livelihoods that so many women pursue are absolutely central for life. That is what keeps communities together.

“And all these ordinary things are directly related to the health of nations.”

Contemporary interest in interfaith

- **Mounting interest: UN, governments**
- **Global institutions: WCRP, Parliament of Religions, URI.**
- **Dialogue of Civilizations, UN Task force and Alliance of Civilizations**
- **Specific challenges of Muslim communities, post 1979, 2001**
- **Council of 100 (World Economic Forum), Annual Report on the State of Dialogue**
- **Theme of the Century or specialized endeavor?**

Theoretical Foundations

- **No peace among the nations without peace among the religions;**
- **No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions**
- **No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.**
(Kung)

Interfaith work: paths and approaches

- **The global interfaith world**
- **National and regional**
- **Specific efforts: “Common Word”, “Building Bridges”, Cordoba Initiative**
- **Inspirational declarations: Charter of Compassion, Caux Declaration, Earth Charter**
- **Alliances behind MDGs, Anti-trafficking**

Interfaith questions and frustrations

- **What is purpose? How best to approach?**
- **Fears of syncretism, “watering down”**
- **Fragmented knowledge and effort**
- **The frustrations: only “the converted”?**
- **Widening the circles?**
- **Apathy in policy circles and media**

Two main “schools”

- **Theology: Common Word, Imams and Rabbis, Building Bridges**
- **Praxis: Work to solve common problems that have little to do with religious beliefs**

Examples of Interfaith action

- Ghana interfaith garbage: event, good will. That may have contributed to easing tensions in election period
- Malaria work in Nigeria
- Cambodia: basic knowledge
- Habitat for Humanity: theology of the hammer
- Dialogue on climate change: Moroccan Muslims and US Evangelical Christians
- Quick response teams in Sudan

Refining the range of examples

- No full “mapping”; fuzzy definitions
- Very specific: problem with a building
- Very large: global poverty, feticide
- Morally easy: hunger
- More complex: child marriage
- Intrafaith: family planning within Christianity
- Faith-secular: largest challenge?
- Interreligious

Illustration: Issues awaiting action

- **Reproductive health**
- **Orphanages**
- **Education**

Education

- Education about religion
- Education by religion
- Education for religion
- Education for religious leaders

Issues to explore

- Levels and roles
- Where to start?
- Inclusion: women and youth
- Media and its central roles

Towards a conclusion: Knowledge as the thread

- Ignorance and fear as tinder
- Religious illiteracy, a common refrain
- Research highlights how lack of knowledge shapes attitudes
- And how even simple understanding can reshape views
- Making interfaith tangible and constructive
- Focus on youth