

INTERVENING IN RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

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ANALYSIS AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Multiple Causation

There is no such thing as a protracted and intractable conflict that is exclusively religious, and it is quite possible that there is no such thing as a non-religious conflict. All protracted conflict embraces the inner lives and cultures of all human beings involved. Therefore, it is safe to say that these conflicts are inherently complex and always caused by multiple factors. These factors include power distribution, distribution of scarce resources, class issues, inherited meaning systems and worldviews, psychological conditions, the burdens of history, the state of fulfillment of basic human needs, and many other factors.

"Religion" includes one or more of the following: abiding and venerated personal and communal values, intricate hierarchies of religious social control that claim absolute authority-and is that authority in many people's eyes, transcendent

symbols, myths and rituals, dogmas of faith, and structures of transcendent meaning. All of these may or may not be contained within written or oral sacred texts.

Considering how broad religion's conscious and unconscious influence is on inner life and communal existence in most of the world, it would seem that Western legal and political constructs of separation of religion and state-which have undoubtedly had a beneficial impact on human rights-often lead to a secular psychological denial of the power of religion's impact on most conflicts. At the same time, religion is always only one factor among many.

Your first job is to identify the interaction of all those factors, and to understand to the best of your knowledge how religion contributes to the conflict. Clearly there is a vast range of influence in that some people are completely influenced by religion, while others deny any influence. 1. Reading and study, 2. extensive interviews, and 3. relationship building, should be the three activities that help you sense whether and how religion contributes to the conflict.

Reading a broad range of literature is the first and ongoing activity that you should be engaged in, even before you are asked to intervene. This is quite simply part of the life of the peacemaker. Where possible, you should know about the dynamics of many conflicts so that you are already working on the conflict well before you are called. The reading should include the literature, poetry and philosophy of the peoples of the conflict, and, of course, history, religious history, political science, anthropology, and a detailed knowledge of the flow of current events.

It goes without saying that study is a task without limits, and that your job is to familiarize yourself with a broad range of these bodies of knowledge, knowing full well that this is a limitless task. The key is to study broadly and avoid exclusive

reading of narrow academic disciplines-including conflict resolution--that may skew your interpretation of the situation.

Interviews should be conducted and relationships built with the broadest range of actors. Wherever possible, you should not allow anyone to determine the limits of who you talk to. This is an exceedingly complex challenge because someone in particular is usually your point of entry into the conflict, and whoever that is may have objections to the broad range of who you engage, or may hold you in suspicion as a result of your choice of contacts. That is why it is best to enter in a way that holds you least responsible to any particular party. The less responsible you are to any constituency the more free you will be-and also the less funded you will be.

The more funded you are, generally speaking, the more beholden and limited you may be. Keep in mind that third parties sending you in-religious peacemaking organizations, missionary groups, aid and development organizations-all constitute parties that hold claims on you, and who also may object to your efforts to know everyone. This may be the case for a variety of reasons, some understandable and some quite narrow. In the end, if you want to be helpful you often have no choice but to buy into one vehicle of entry or another. You simply require their support and their network, and these will set limits on you. But no one can control your mind, and that is why reading and study often release you from the limitations of circumstance that are imposed on human relations.

Symbols, Myths, Rituals

Research the symbols, myths and practices that are most prominent in the conflict. Find their roots. Know myths and values that move people the most in each tradition, and know the linguistic expressions of this, even if you do not know the whole

language. Listen to religious and cultural music of both sides extensively. If you are able to, experience the religious services on all sides, especially symbols, sermons and homilies. Study texts emerging from these experiences whenever you have spare time or find yourself in travel. Go over them again and again until you begin to feel them inside of you.

Communal Interviews

Conduct two types of interviews with members of each and every religious community: one with official leadership, and the other much more informally with a wide variety of individuals, including-if you can and it is safe-at traditional gathering spots of the popular culture.

In these interviews:

1. Find out how traditionally conflicts were solved and current attitudes to this history
2. Elicit attitudes to the character and parameters of the following values: justice, peace, suffering, compassion, democracy and human rights. Identify the linguistic expression of these values and be open to the complete uniqueness of each value system's nuances.
3. Find out who makes the decisions in the religious community, how rigorous is this in the lived experience of average people, and what the real situation is concerning freedom of interpretation.
4. Find out who are the peacemakers and why. Can you identify all, including quiet ones? What is their standing socially and politically? Are they fundamentally isolated or merely unsupported financially, for example?

MEDIATION AND RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

What bystanders can do

What the parties can do

What you can do

There are three inquiries to make: what bystanders can do, what the parties to the conflict can do, what you can do as a peacemaker. I state these three in this particular order due to what we know increasingly about the nature of conflict. Thanks to the work of Bill Ury, we have all become far more aware of the enormous power, for good as well as for ill, of bystanders. They are the majority in any conflict, both locally and internationally. Instead of placing them last, I place them first because you, as a peacemaker, must think both analytically and creatively about their presence and their potential effect on the course and direction of conflict. There are several ways in which you may come to be in a position to influence their impact.

First I want to list that which people in all three categories can do in general, and then how this can apply in particular to the religious element of conflict. It is your job to not only act yourself but to elicit the most that you can from the other two groups of people.

Bystanders:

- learning and creativity
- self-examination and principles of do no harm
- generosity in ethics and deeds to all sides

Parties to the conflict:

- learning and creativity
- listening
- self-examination
- symbolic gestures
- ethics and deeds
- use of the word in gesture and dialogue
- relationship building

You as peacemaker:

- gestures
- listening and passivity
- compassion and temporary suspension of judgment
- the steady moral compass
- the calculus of morality and intervention
- shuttle diplomacy
- infiltration of your influence in all sectors of the culture
- integrative solutions
- receptivity, surrender, strength, and the creative moment
- working completely outside the box
- following the path where it takes you while holding to the moral compass

Applications to religion:

- elicited and third party gestures, tailored religiously and culturally to harmonize with human rights agendas, conflict resolution strategies, and the building blocks of democracy
- bilateral and multi-lateral religious rituals and dialogues that are tailored to practices and strategies listed above
- ethics and deeds chosen that speak to the heart of religious traditions
- dialogic strategies that not only include religious elements and religious actors, but also address in their very nature the sensibilities of religious communities and their processes of good communication

Bystanders:

- learning and creativity
- self-examination and principles of do no harm
- generosity in ethics and deeds to all sides

Eliciting constructive contributions toward peace and justice from bystanders is an essentially difficult task. Their position is such that do not want to or are afraid to engage in such activities. Nevertheless people of influence, such as political and religious leaders, teachers, and great writers, may be in a position to influence them in one direction or another. Many leaders and opinion makers tend to infantilize the majority of bystanders, arguing instead that they, the leaders, will take care of everyone. You may find yourself, however, in a position as a third party peacemaker to influence indigenous leaders and persuade them as to the hidden power of the silent majority. Especially if these leaders are nervous about the future viability of their leadership and personal security, they may be motivated to hear you out on these matters. If you get such an opportunity and manage to cultivate such relationships, you can make the following arguments:

1. The more that everyone knows and understands about the conflict and the groups involved, the more will some become motivated to contribute to its solution. The more that everyone knows the more new ideas and creative impulses will emerge. The more knowledge the less foolish will be political attitudes and biases. No conflict can be solved without a multitude of contributions, and the more we can elicit that the faster will solutions come.

2. There are ways in which we all contribute to conflicts with our biases, and also the ways in which we seek after and acquire our own resources for survival. Inculcating a message of collective responsibility (as distinguished from collective guilt) is a powerful stimulus for the majority of bystanders and a good model for the parties to

the conflict who are watching. The latter tend to feel isolated and misunderstood, and such gestures would defuse some of those feelings and create possibly bridges of cooperation.

3. The failure of ethics is at the core of destructive conflict, almost by definition. The more that bystanders can promote an atmosphere of common ethical commitments the more pressure is brought to bear on combatants to join that larger commitment to ethics. Furthermore, what the parties to the conflict often need most is compassion and generosity. Combatant groups are generally so diverse in their membership that it is relatively easy to demonstrate such compassion and generosity to at least some of them, even if bystanders and the majority do not want to support the actual perpetrators of crimes.

Parties to the conflict:

- learning and creativity
- listening
- self-examination
- symbolic gestures
- ethics and deeds
- use of the word in gesture and dialogue
- relationship building

Parties to the conflict need to be encouraged to learn as much as they can about their adversaries. This is the key to empathy, and empathy is the key to the discovery of creative solutions and problem solving. Listening is a skill that you need to help elicit, especially by your personal model. Self-examination is another trait that you can promote by word and deed, especially if you can help provide paradigms or opportunities for this to be done bilaterally.

A major feature of adversarial spirals is the way in which enemies parallel each others' behavior. Anything done outside of that cycle of parallel acts is often suspect. It can be viewed as a concession. If you can coordinate activities with both groups in which they both engage in conciliatory behavior, they may feel safer engaging in such "concessions".

Once there is more understanding through empathy and listening, the next step is the deed, especially bilateral deeds. Deeds come in the form of ethical acts, symbolic gestures and rituals of transformation. The use of the word is a kind of gesture as well. Dialogue must be seen as a victory itself, which then leads down the standard path of negotiation. But if it is unprepared by or unaccompanied by the other steps we have outlined, it will be bound for failure.

Dialogue is only the most basic stage of relationship building. Relationship building involves a very broad range of people to people contacts, and the full range of emotional life. This is the ultimate goal of conflict resolution and healing.

You as peacemaker:

- gestures of dignity, honor, and compassion
- listening and passivity
- compassion and temporary suspension of judgment
- the steady moral compass
- the calculus of morality and intervention
- shuttle diplomacy
- infiltration of your influence in all sectors of the culture
- integrative solutions
- receptivity, surrender, strength, and the creative moment
- working completely outside the box
- following the path where it takes you while holding to the moral compass

It is your job as peacemaker to be in a position to elicit from the parties everything that we have outlined in the above paragraph. How can you engage such a gargantuan task? How can you succeed where so many fail? How can you preserve your soul from degradation in the process? Here are some suggestions:

1. Make frequent gestures of dignity, honor, and compassion to all parties to the conflict. Make these gestures even to those who do not deserve it, even to those who commit terrible crimes. Do it as long as you do not in the process place people in greater danger or strengthen criminals who can conceivably be detained or deterred in some better way.
2. Become a model of listening and compassion.
3. In the process, become a model of the receptive side of human experience, in which you demonstrate how to make space for others, for their needs, their very presence, their pain, and their story.
4. When you choose to act, become a model of calculation of moral priorities, fully sharing the moral dilemmas that you face as you pass between enemies. Your model of compassion, moral concern and caution, and your skills of shuttle diplomacy, will hopefully become a model for the actual parties to the conflict. Ultimately it is they who must embrace these values and styles of interaction.
5. Finally, as you experiment with solutions, try to surrender to the details of the situation. Even as you remain aware of the general lessons of conflict analysis and resolution, have the courage to follow paths of the unique situation where they take you. The major limitation on your unique path should be your internal moral compass. Know when the actual solutions that you and others are devising are crossing too many boundaries to be justifiable ways of pursuing peace and justice.

Applications to religion:

--elicited and third party gestures, tailored religiously and culturally to harmonize with human rights agendas, conflict resolution strategies, and the building blocks of democracy

--bilateral and multi-lateral religious rituals and dialogues that are tailored to practices and strategies listed above

--ethics and deeds chosen that speak to the heart of religious traditions

--dialogic strategies that not only include religious elements and religious actors, but also address in their very nature the sensibilities of religious communities and their processes of good communication

1. One of the most important assets that you have in this work is that there is a large portion of religious humanity today who, in principle, agree with much of the agenda of human rights and democracy. It has always been the case, furthermore, that constructive or transformational conflict resolution, or peace and justice, have been ideals of many if not most religious traditions. On the other hand, there is a deep-seated suspicion today in many parts of the world of any Western or "developed" institutions. It is beyond our task here to explain why, but what is clear is that it is vital for you and the parties to the conflict to be able to frame the ideas and values of human rights and democracy in deeply religious terms. It is vital that this then become the basis for how gestures are made, agreements are framed, and even how education is pursued in these cultures. It is important that you help elicit this from the local communities, and that you yourself model this in how you frame your gestures and con

2. It is important for the creative processes of aligning shared values to go beyond education, dialogue, and the framing of formal agreements. Ritual and symbol enter

into the heart of a culture in ways that nothing else accomplishes. It is part of your task to maximize the possibility of this occurring, both by eliciting it from the parties, and by sharing knowledge with them about how this has been done in other places. It is certainly the case that some in each culture are more prone to this form of human communication than others. The more intellectual and Westernized, generally speaking, the more prone a religious person is to fall back on texts and dialogue, and also to be somewhat embarrassed by the deep ritual spaces of his or her culture. But, in order for peace processes to maximally inclusive, you should try to stretch the limits of inclusion by seeking out those religious people who want to pursue the peace ritually, mythically, or artistically.

3. Ethics and righteous deeds are the most important building blocks of deep peacemaking. Fortunately, religious traditions are rich in these areas. But they are often poor at the extension of good deeds to the "unfaithful", the "infidel", the "enemies of God" (who always happen to be my enemies), and the "agents of the Devil". The list of those excluded from ethical deeds goes on. Your job is to help each community engage in interpretative processes that allow for an expansion of the scope of ethical concern and commitment. This is no easy task, and it is often best engaged in not in front of one's adversaries. After all, for many people this is the most embarrassing part of their religious tradition. They are both embarrassed by the co-religionists who emphasize these texts and traditions, and by the traditions themselves. The latter is a direct challenge to faith in some instances. This is very delicate but very crucial. Immerse yourself in the details of this challenge, and help elicit what changes you

4. Dialogue is a problematic moment of human engagement for many reasons. In some ways it has to be for it is a re-creation of the conflict without the violence. It

also can lead to more harm than good from time to time, especially if it is poorly facilitated. Find out how dialogue for the sake of reconciliation has been done in each culture. Find out what religious frames, laws and guidelines around the use of the word have improved the chances of the word leading to reconciliation, or at the very least good communication. If you are dealing with more than one religious tradition you will have to find ways to honor these traditions simultaneously or consecutively. The more comfortable and familiar the dialogic process, and the more that it emanates out of a familiar spiritual form of reconciliation, the better the chance that the hard talk of negotiation will be softened by spiritual and moral values and goals.