

Heart, Word, Deed: Pillars of Dialogue

THANKFULLY, interfaith insights and impulses continue to mature into our present era.

The relentless torrent of religiously driven violence together with subtle power and dominance pursuits perpetrated by established religious bodies lead the cynic and critic (often legitimately) to suspect “interfaith” as so much talk, the hobby of a frequent-flier elite. Serious peaceseekers working in the realm of religion and interfaith relations have as one important mission the responsibility to dissolve this criticism.

Fact is the young life of interreligious dialogue (stirring first at the turn of the 20th century) is not in fact as it is seen by its detractors. Not only has dialogue matured in key quarters among religious and interreligious professionals, but the general populace has been buoyed by these advances as well. In a time of rapid secularization, it is very demanding to generate a form of religious tolerance that is not grounded in non-interest in religion or even hostility to religion. The person who pridefully says, “I accept you no matter *what* your religion” because he or she considers religion unimportant, achieves little at best. On the other hand, to know religion, its necessity and benefits for being human, and to know that religion is *always particular*, and then to say, “I fully respect and embrace you no matter *what* your religion” is much harder to achieve. These growing attitudes come on the basis of persistence and determination of interfaith pioneers. As these latter attitudes become widespread, they quietly give testimony to those who are called to serve in this vital area.

One of the ways interfaith life has matured is in its own increasing complexity and differentiation. In its early times (in the modern period) even the notion of mutual approval among religions was suspect. Over time a critical mass of professionals and peaceseekers held interfaith as a good, no longer debated, but its elements and particular strains had not yet been identified nor had they evolved into distinct bodies. As different forms of genuinely spiritual and religious interfaith

emerged, factions began to form in the community. Mystical types and institutions sprung up, as did philosophical/theological types and institutions, also “doers,” “cause-driven” types, and so forth. As is a human habit (for some debilitating reason), the I am right, other’s wrong impulses took hold of these very different interfaith people and initiatives as well.

Of course I am not right and all others wrong. Rather, I am this way, and others are other ways. This awakening to accept and embrace the value and importance of multiple interfaith approaches is yet another positive growth in interfaith as a whole. The seasoned and long time laborers in interfaith should recognize that all points of contact and harmonization among religions, be they mystical, philosophical, practical, or moral are vital for religion to transcend its negative, divisive history and contribute positively to peace and cooperation. This recognition among peace-seekers of the need for greater collaboration, mutual support and integration is promising and desperately needed in this world ablaze in rage.

This present issue of *Dialogue and Alliance* reflects this increasing maturity on its pages. We are proud to have in this issue six indispensable articles that together range from philosophical through practical.

The first essay, “Philosophical Pathways of Thought for Peace,” by Golam Dastgir, examines and delineates elements of conflict in the world including interreligious tensions from the perspective of ideological responses to contemporary developments. As a result of this approach, Dastgir recommends that “philosophy foster the intellectual, moral solidarity of humankind.... I propose” writes Dastgir, “a public philosophy that should address the major contemporary public issues, such as terrorism, globalization, the future of technological development, and the problems of morality and spirituality.” Malcolm Hollick in his essay “Worldview and Peace,” calls for a Science enlightened spirituality that functions to cure Western addiction or unreflected upon adherence to what we have been lulled to believe are: “1. The belief in Truth, 2. Individualism, and 3. The meaning and purpose of life.” These, notes Hollick, have the potential to lead to violence. He concludes with a series of recommendations as well as holism (much of it derived from science) that participate in and recommend a worldview of peace.

Bertil Persson similarly approaches the pursuit of peace from a conceptual standpoint. Persson is concerned particularly about rigorous definitions for important terms that define and direct the pursuit of peace, thus in his essay entitled, “The Key Concepts of Humanity,” Persson calls for focussed attention to how we define major concepts vital to the foundation for the realization of a peaceful world. (These include religion, God, spirituality, human dignity and others.)

With Dr. Abduljalil Sajid’s “Islam in relation to other religions: Jewish-Muslim dialogue, challenges and prospects,” we step away from inquiry into the impact of concepts and philosophical terms, to religious, scriptural, practical, as well as requirements of heart and attitude requisite to promote and generate human embrace among believers who love the same true God. There is much to be learned in this essay. People in the traditions of Abraham who involve themselves in peace dialogue, can take away many valuable and useful insights and knowledge by studying this comprehensive contribution of Imam Dr. Sajid.

George Olusola Abijade’s work is a valuable and creative sociological contribution. “Religious Orientation, Space Transformation and Power Relations among the Southwestern Yorubal of Nigeria,” is a far-ranging work, with strong and significant implications for a vital point of interfaith inquiry, namely the relationship among indigenous religion (in this case Yoruba), and what he calls “domesticated religions,” (in this case Christianity and Islam). This type of essay is very important for the future of interreligious relations. It engages an avant garde that will become increasingly vital as informing interreligious pursuits. The fluidity of religious life and identity will uplift and transform the tendency toward stiff legalism that often define classical forms of interfaith bound to questions of institutional relations.

Abe Ata of the Australian Catholic University offers a careful, sociologically rendered study of lived interfaith in his essay, “Adjustment and Complications of Catholic and Inter-faith, Intermarriages.” One of the many benefits from the study of this essay is that, unlike many similar reflections, Ata provides valuable insights and research into what interfaith marriage means for the religious community, for the society as a whole, for the relation of the community to the greater society, for the future of religion, interreligious, and

intercultural relations, and even for global and globalization directions and developments. This breadth of consideration departs from the habit of many such essays to focus on personal, experiential, and purely family implications of religiously-mixed marriages. It is especially helpful that Ata has taken what ordinarily swims in anecdote and processed it through a methodology that starts to quantify the ground for analysis and interpretation.

As always we thank you for your support for *Dialogue and Alliance*. We trust and count on your devotion to the cause of peace, and that you will always guide and help forge the best future for *Dialogue and Alliance*.

Frank Kaufmann
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