

PROMOTING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: BEST PRACTICES
BEING A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE THIRD DIVERSITY FORUM
ORGANIZED BY AUSTRALIAN MULTI-CULTURAL FOUNDATION
IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE COMMON WEALTH FOUNDATION
IN KOLKATA, INDIA 28TH FEBRUARY – 3RD MARCH 2005
BY IMAM MUHAMMAD NURAYN ASHAF
OF INTERFAITH MEDIATION CENTRE (MCDF), KADUNA-NIGERIA

“No World Peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the believers of different religious traditions”⁽¹⁾

“Hans Kung at Declaration of World Parliament of Religion 1990^s”

The above declaration by Hans Kung of the world parliament of religion made the subject of discussion much more significant and relevant at this material time.

Today’s world is seriously divided with higher level of tension, insecurity, pandemonium, state of fear and of unfathomable horror between the secularists and spiritualists, between Asian and Western values; between Islamic fundamentalists and Judeo Christian fundamentalist; between the U.S. led democrats and theocratic states; between informal terrorism and state sponsored terrorism; between those who killed in the name of God Almighty and those who killed in the name of state; and between the faithful and infidel.

3. The Middle East conflict between Dialogue of Abrahamic faith of recent from 1948 to date
4. The Dalai Lama Buddhist spiritual leader in exile versus the military that take over the leadership control of their nation
5. The Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army and Burundi/Rwandan rebel fight in the name of God since 1990s to date
6. The Sept 11, 2001 event between the alleged Al-Qaeda networks versus the U.S. government led allied forces.
7. Hindu versus Muslim conflict at the state of Gujarat India 2002 to date
8. Muslim versus Christian conflict at Mindanao, Philippines of recent 1946 to date

The reality is that the perceived rebel, freedom fighter or protector of H/R and dignity are in possession of sophisticated destructive weapons.

Therefore, the need for Interfaith Dialogue is highly imperative.

The paper would focus on six thematic areas.

1. The significance and role of Interfaith Dialogue
2. The theological basis across religions scriptures
3. History and typology/lobules of Interfaith Dialogue

thus “Interfaith Dialogue is about conversation among people of different faiths with the purpose of understanding the others opposition and worldview as precisely as possible in order to facilitate changes and growth”

1. Leonard Swindler asserts “Interfaith Dialogues operates in three major areas, the practical, where we collaborate to help humanity, the depth or ‘Spiritual’ dimension, where we attempt to experience the partners religion or ideology from within, the cognitive, where we seek understanding of the truth”.

THE SIGNIFICANT AND ROLE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: -

Prof. Muhammad Abu-Nimer on the importance of Interfaith Dialogue assert that it has; “deeper spiritual connection; it becomes the main source for the individual’s commitment to social change, peace work and taking risk to confront ones evil. i.e. affirming his position that deep sense of motivation that originates from religious identity distinguishes Interfaith Dialogue from secular or Inter-ethnic encounter. Abu Nimer in his place on miracle of Transformation through Interfaith Dialogue revealed some participant testimony as regard its role in bringing about an enduring transformation thus: -

“Moral and spiritual forces of religion can encourage people to act and change”

If participants change their attitude in Interfaith Dialogue such change will be deeper than if the change occurred in a non-religious context”. (Pg. 17 David Smock 2002)

Marc Gopin in his book: *Between Education and Armageddon* re-assert the position of religion in shopping the world thus.

“As religion becomes more important in the lives of hundreds of millions of people, the political power generated by this commitment will either lead a more peaceful world or to a more violent world, depending on how that power is utilized.”

Distinguish participants the fury behind the passions of religion is much more dreadful than Nuclear and Atomic bomb very few have discovered this synergy. What matter is how positive or negative we use them.

Rev. Sam Kujiyat attested to this fact thus:

“Important religious leaders who have power to fire this passion in either nation

Buddhism: -King Ashoka the Great (Late) Mahagosananda of Cambodia and Dhala Lama in USA.

Judaism: - Rabbi Mare Athenaeum (late) Rabbi Melchior of the Knasset. Rabbi Menachem Forman and Dr. Yehezkel Landau who are focal person in various religiously motivated initiatives between Arab-Israel relations.

Christianity: - Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Mrorewa of Zimbabwe, Rev. Martin Luther King and Rev. Jessy Jackson of U.S.A. Pope John Paul II Vartican Rome.

ISLAM: - Imam EL. Mustapha Grand Mufbi of Bosina Herzegovina, HRH. Prince El-Hasam Bin Talal of Jordan, Sheikh Ahmed Hussani Deedat of South Africa Sheikh Ahmed and Khan Indis, and president Muhammed Khatami of Islamic Republic of Iran that proposed to the UN. General Assembly September 1998 among civilization. He denounced the glorification of violence in his presentation all the UN thus: - “The establishment and continued functioning of the United Nations is a testimony to the progressive path of the world and human society,..Let us hope that, in the coming century resort of force and violence shall not be glorified and that the essence of political power shall be

subjected to above by those who choose the mean of confrontation and violence to achieve set objectives.

The reality is that there are more texts that support the part of promoting inter-faith dialogue than those text that seems to oppose its. And there are more religiously motivated role model for dialogue than those who serve as confrontationist/role model of negative forces.

Some of the motivating scriptural text and messages from unknown religion leaders are as follows: -

HINDUISM AND JAINISM: - They have a coded message called AHIMSA. It symbolizes non-violence engagement with others. Secondly. Hinduism had a unique coded message for promoting dialogue (a) both personal and interpersonal level coded: SATYAGRAHA- it literally mean: “holding on to truth”. Mahatma Gandhi translated it as a method of non-violent passive resistance in Hinduism.

Gandhi assert that what make people resist to follow the path of peace Is the negative forces he to the real devil inside us as follow: - The only real devils are those running around inside our heads and hearts”. He concludes by saying “I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religion of the world”.

INDIGENOUS GRADATION OF AFRICA: -

I will be quoting from Ubuntu message, the key word mean Humanhood. In South Africa, there is a rhyming according of Januie Malan, of Accord in Durba which is read Umntu Ngumtu Ngabantu” which means. “A human being is a human being through human beings or we may paraphrase it as follows. Every single human being only becomes a truly human being by means of relationship with other human beings”.

The above is a theological framework from Africa Spirituality for promoting interfaith dialogues.

JUDAISM: - In its tradition there are several texts and messages that relate to promoting the culture of peace and dialogue keep the tongue from evil and they lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace and pursue it”. (Psalm 34:14-19).

CHRISTIANITY: - In the spirit of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the New Testament gives a strong backing to its believes thus.

“Let us than pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up-building. Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God...Truly I perceive that God shows

“To each among you have we presented a law and way of life. If Allah had so willed. He would have made you a simple people, but His plan is to test you in what he hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues, the goal of you all is to Allah. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute”.

(The Qu’ran 5:48).

Islam-finally enjoined all Muslim to pursue the course of promoting inter-religion dialogue thus: - “say, o people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you. That we worship None but Allah: that we associate No partners with Him: that are erect not, from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back, say ye: Bear witness that we at least. are Muslim (Bowling to Allah’s will).”

(The Qu’ran 3:64)

Finally, Islam insists on enclosure approach and cooperation in good virtue to the benefit/common good of all thus: -

“To each is a goal to which Allah turns him, than strive together (as in a race). Towards all that is good. Wherever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah Hath power over all things.

(The Qu’ran 2:143)

“A frustrating and exhilarating process..”

(The Balkam Paul Mojzes)

“The true spiritual adventure of our time.”

(Israel Author: Yassi: Klein Haleri)

“Interfaith dialogue carries with it, the benefits of secular dialogue but also the potential for deeper and more meaningful engagement because of the possibility for spiritual encounter.”

(David Smock)

“Dialogue is only one subset of the potential of human reconciliation”

(Mare Gopin).

“When deeper spiritual connection is made is the inter-faith dialogue, it becomes the main source for the individual commitment to social change, peace work and taking the risk to confront one’s own evil.”

(Prof. M. Abu Nimer).

Diana Eck asserts the significance of inter-faith dialogue in building one world thus: -

In the light of the aforementioned perception on interfaith dialogue, here are some of various modules of interfaith dialogues in operation across different part of our world: -

1. The moving spirit model: Its goal is to identify highly respected religious leaders for training as peace advocate.
2. The Elites Leadership model: by R. Scot applebyterm is a concept of identifying highly placed religious motivated celebrity to engage combatant toward peace agreement.
3. The Common Ground theology model: identifying scriptural similarities to ameliorate hostility that might be engendered by theological differences.
4. The Interfaith cooperation model: where faith-based CBO's/NGO's and the community are encouraged to carry out joint development Project together.
5. The Tent of Abraham Model: this is more particular to Abrahamic tradition adherents i.e. Jewish, Christian and Muslims especially in

7. **SPIRITUAL CLEANSING MODEL:** - It is a process of bringing back the honour and dignity of wounded victims of rape to the community.
8. **THE TURNING POINT MODEL:** - The turning point model is a process of drawing lesson from a victim/perpetrators of the violence who witnessed a true transformation.
9. **THE TOOLS FOR PEACE MODEL:** - This is mainly organized by Swedish Muslim and Christian Council. It has objective of discovering various religiously motivated peace tools that is working or have worked in conflict flash point around the world.
10. **FAITH BASED COMBAT KIT MODEL:** - It is a process of capacity building training for religiously motivated people in the art of dialogue mediation, and conflict.
11. **SULHA MODEL:** - It is a process of resolving dispute that had to do with rape or homicide among the Arabs and Jew tradition in the Middle East.

14. **THE EASTERN MENNONITES MODEL:** - It is about Pacifism and non-resistance.

THE BEST PRACTICES: -

One cannot say this is the best practices of promoting interfaith dialogue because of circumstance, cultural orientation, history and the types of actors determined which module is best suitable.

HRH Prince Hassan Bin Talal put it straight that. We live in a world where there is no law of peace as there is law of war”. He went further to assert the consequences of the use of militancy thus:

“The more we use the power of militancy to silent the foe, the more the foe justified terrorism to make the voice of the powerless be heard.” He concluded thus: “If we get it wrong Militarily we must not get it wrong culturally.”

Therefore, the need for us to enhance interfaith dialogue is much more desirable how than ever culturally. Since the first world conference of religions leaders at Washington D.C. a Century ago in the year 1873, and the second conference of World Parliament of Religion in 1993, the need for promoting interfaith dialogue is becoming more imminent in today’s world where Military might and power of shuttle diplomacy is failing the world political leaders. Major conflict

peace in the Middle East without a spiritual foundation reconciling Jews and Muslims.”

CONCLUSION: -

Promoting interfaith dialogue must be pragmatic it must contain frank diplomacy it must not be much of common ground but highly those areas of our differences. There is need for promoting a pluralistic society at the same time respecting the differences that make each and everyone unique.

Islam has come as a religion of social justice an inclusive approach yet respecting and affirming the right of others to live side by side in mutual coexistence. Indeed if we don't use the best means of promoting interfaith dialogue through a strong Commonwealth of Nations and the U.N various organs in the next decade our next generation of human beings will be Weapons of mass destruction. Special thanks goes to the organizers for given me the privilege to make this presentation at this prestigious and monumental Third Diversity Forum confab at Kolkata, India today 1st March 2005.

Muhammed Nurayn Ashafa (Imam)
Interfaith Mediation Centre of (MCDF)
#4 East Wing
4th Floor NRI Building