



Christianity and Islam: What Shared Values for Enhanced Religious Harmony and Global Stability

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Abstract

Violent activities of extremist groups like ISIS, Al Shabab and Boko Haram are at the center of contemporary threat to global peace and religious harmony. They put Christian populations under tension. These activities help to sustain the impression that Islam is a violent religion especially against Christianity. Erroneous as this image is, it is difficult to erase it from the minds of many Christians and even moderate Muslims especially those that have been victims of religiously instigated violence. This paper seeks to identify enduring and shared values of both religions such as charity and love of neighbor at the heart of a shared humanity accepted and propagated by both religions. It is argued therefore that projected as core values of both religions, inter-religious dialogue and harmony are achievable in the interest of global peace and stability.

Keywords: *Christianity, Islam, religious harmony, shared values*

Introduction

At the heart of Islam and Christianity is the reality of one *Great* God, all powerful ‘father’, Omniscience, Omnipresent; one God that is absolute, infinite and merciful; greater than all mankind can imagine. To acknowledge and give credence to this greatness is expected of God's creation of which humankind is the highest expression of that creativity involving God himself as proclaimed by the Holy Bible: ‘man is made in the image and likeness of the creator’ (Genesis 1:14). This is the source of human divinity with all the powers, knowledge and wisdom above other creatures to be used to oversee the rest of creation.

This shared unity in the acknowledgement of the One True God permeates all religions, the plurality of which does not diminish the supremacy of God the ‘Father’. In this lies the essence of religion as a transcendent relationship between man and God; the unseen power with control over man's destiny deserving obedience, reverence and worship (Ikenga-Metuh, 1992). Man, thus owes total submission and absolute obedience to God. In an attempt to observe these elements of responsibility to God, man had inadvertently often reached beyond limit to again erroneously assume control of others by deciding on the basis of ‘monopoly of truth’ in relation to any issue. It is here that religious bigotry and spiritual arrogance erupt and find expression as key causes of conflicts and disharmony (Ikenga - Metuh, 1992). The grand illusion is that some religionists claim to have the prerogative to uphold the divine truth while others have limited knowledge of God's revelation. Put differently, enforcement of the supreme will of God is their responsibility even when they have scant understanding of that will.

The pernicious presumption of knowing the position of the One God on all issues by extremists is at the root of inter-faith disruptions and the concomitant upheavals being witnessed around the world. The central premise of Islam and Christianity is embedded in the Golden Rule. It is privileged as a salient religious value from which all other morally sound values that uphold the divinity of mankind derives. While it is accepted universally that religious values are relative and never absolute, the end of those values are absolute; the preservation and protection of the human divinity. Islam and Christianity teach appreciation of values in a progressive manner and are seen as basic principles of daily existence and are in complete harmony. This harmonious unity is derived from the Golden Rule that radiates values of justice, mercy, compassion, love, and includes virtues of beneficence, charity, truthfulness, trustworthiness, courtesy, self- sacrifice, the defense of others and piety (Effendi, 1980).

Overlooking these shared values or an extreme interpretation of these has led to extremism or fanaticism creating inter- and intra- religious upheavals seen around the world. The Middle East demonstrates an exemplar of this extremism with several intolerant or very hostile groups even within Islam. Other parts of the world have witnessed similar violent uprisings such as the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria that evolved from the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s to the Kafanchan religious violence in Kaduna in 1987 (Bako, 1992; Genyi, 2016). Again, in the 2000s had arisen series of clashes between adherents of the two religions on the implementation of Sharia law in northern states in Nigeria. The Arab World has and remains the hot bed of religious extremism that seems to endanger other religions in Syria, Iraq and Iran. The presence of Al Qaeda, ISIL in Afghanistan and Syria, and Al Qaeda in Yemen tell the extremist story more loudly. Somalia and

Kenya have had a fair share of this extremism through the activities of Al Shabab (Genyi, 2016). September 11, 2001 appears to have heralded their reach of religious hatred to all parts of the world when the USA played host to Al Qaeda led attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.

These exemplars of religious intolerance have overshadowed the possibility of religious harmony in an overarching religiously plural world. The extent of this global religious diversity suggests that it cannot be eliminated. What is reasonable is to live with it in the best possible way. One way to do so is to identify shared values that have endured centuries of religious practices by Islam and Christianity, two of the world's dominant religions. It is argued here that the shared values of charity and love, the cornerstone of the Golden Rule offers the pragmatic platform for interfaith dialogue for religious harmony for enhanced peace and stability on a global scale.

Value as a Concept in Religion

It is pertinent to explore the meaning of value in order to come to a clear perspective on the relevance and impact of the concept in a religious context. Value is indisputably a complex concept in terms of its relativity and a shy away from absoluteness (Mazrui, 2005). Values are simply rules by which we make decisions about right or wrong, should and shouldn't, good or bad. These decisions on the basis of values inform us about which is "more or less important, which is useful, when we have to" (Mazrui, 2005) trade off meeting one value over another. Put broadly, values can be taken as beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment in favor of or against something. To the extent of perceiving values as the basis of decisions and belief, Inlow (1956) conceives values as 'the determiners in man that influence his choices in life and that thus decide his behavior'. Human behavior is therefore entirely shaped by a value system well often informed by life experiences, which in turn constitutes general guides to behavior (Raths, Harmin and Simon (1966). Informed human experiences therefore influence preferences in life which suggest that value in itself is a tendency to prefer (Rogers, 1969). These conceptions are utilitarian in nature (Manus, 1992). In making choices, human beings tend to be rational in considering the utility of a given activity or thing. In a functional sense, Kluckhohn (1961) has noted that "a value is a selective orientation toward experience, implying deep commitment or repudiation, which influence the ordering of choices between possible alternatives in action." From a religious perspective, values are hierarchically stratified and dichotomized between material and spiritual existence. The latter is considered superior and the former to be absolutely subordinated to the latter at all given times. Spiritual values are designed to assist human beings in attaining the ultimate aim in creation. Religious authorities therefore believe that given the primacy of this ultimate goal of unity with the spiritual order of reality, religious values must be considered superior to natural values (Manus, 1992, p.41).

Values are central in religion and constitute the cornerstone of any. They shape and guide behavior of adherents. They constitute things that are considered important and order preferences shared among members of a given social group at any given time or the other in favor of other things. In all religions, values deal with what is good and bad, normal and abnormal or appropriate and unacceptable. Muslims and Christians hold tenaciously to values considered absolute and superior and hence must be adhered to and protected at all times in all circumstances. Their

observance reflects the true attitude of a believer in any of the faith. The absoluteness of these values constitutes inviolable beliefs in both religions. Justice, love and the divinity of humanity are some of these absolute values. These values are viewed as the means for the attainment of higher goals such as eternal bliss (Riukas, n.d). Strict observance of religious values is a necessary condition for the realization of eternal happiness promised by Christianity and Islam.

Shared Values in Islam and Christianity

A shared value is a notion that attempts to establish commonality of beliefs and preferences among the adherents of the world's most dominant religions. The idea of a commonality in values goes to the logical connectivity in the power of similarities which support likely behavior. This may be contagious and tend to reduce tension and anxiety that would likely result in adverse and harmful conduct against members of another group.

The belief in one supreme God the 'Father' creates a source of flow of shared values. For Christians, the Decalogue (ten commandments) points to two forms of behavior primed to appeal to God through love of Him and love of one another; all made in his image and likeness. The first three commandments of God address the servant - God relationship that upholds the supremacy of God the 'Father'. This supremacy detests any form of behavior or activity that undermines God in any way possible. Christians are told in no ambiguous terms about the place of God in their entire life. Exodus 20:1-6 states that "I am the Lord your God ... you shall have no other gods before me.... You shall not bow down to them nor serve them... you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." These commandments have established the supremacy of God and will not accept attempts to have rivals likely; even inappropriate use of His name is strongly forbidden. To worship him alone is the only prescribed activity to the extent of setting aside a full day for that purpose in honor of Him.

Similarly, Islam upholds Allah in Surah: 1a, as "Beneficent", "Merciful", "Lord of the Worlds", "Owner of the Day of Judgment" and one who points to "the straight path", and shows favor or anger. To further demonstrates the supremacy of Allah, Surah 5:18 states that "Allah is the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them." Saleeb and Geslen (2011) have recollected the supremacy of Allah as an absolute, independent, unique and sovereign, and hold that:

He is the first and the last. He is unique, and nothing resembles Him in any respect. He is One and the One. He *is* self-sustained *and* does not need anything, but everything needs Him... He is the Willer of existing things and the things that will exist, and nothing happens apart from his will. He is the knower of all that can be known. His knowledge encompasses the whole universe that he has created, and he alone sustains. God is completely sovereign over all creation. (p. 41)

This powerful, all-encompassing picture of Allah without any equivocation depicts humans as finite inconsequential beings totally incapable of doing anything worthy for God especially to the extent of adding anything for or seeking to protect God's interest in any form. This means that the use of violence by extremists to protect Allah's name or so-called interest is unnecessary. If the entire humanity depends on God for survival, then it is rather absurd that a helpless humanity would turn against itself in defense of God! For both Christians and Muslims,

the supremacy of God's belief as a value should humble adherents of the two religions to learn to be submissive to the will of the creator and appreciate their common divinity in a harmonious and peaceful co-existence.

Another basis of an interfaith accord between Muslims and Christians is the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is sharply at point as a shared value. It further radiates other values as justice, mercy, compassion and love (Buck, 2013). By upholding virtues such as truthfulness or, trustworthiness as elements of integrity, it underscores the essential quality of interpersonal relations in a mutually reinforcing manner. The Golden Rule is ultimately taken as a fundamental shared value. In Christendom, the Golden Rule is a summation of the latter six pieces of the Decalogue. "You shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness against your neighbor, covet your neighbor's house, wife, male servant, female servant, ox, donkey... anything that is your neighbor (Exodus 20:13-17) invoke the feeling of doing unto others what you would love them to do unto you. This is the Golden Rule widely accepted and preached to all adherents as the basis of the entire summation of one's religious life. This underscores the peaceful, cordial and harmless relations with one another in deference to God. The common tenet in faith traditions, least Islam and Christianity, is that "we should treat others as we would have them treat us" (Buck, 2013, p.3). As a shared value, religious adherents would take from it a capacity of service for the common good. Religious leaders would therefore find in its invocation fulfilling a standard of mutual and reciprocal care. The Rule is neutral without distinction among humanity. The reciprocal care is devoid of relativity of faith. Muslims would not fail to treat Christians with respect and love because they are not Muslims and vice versa. The common denominator in the Golden Rule philosophy is humanity accepted by both religions as divine.

The holy books of the Bible and Quran are abounding with exhortations in respect of the Golden Rule. For instance, in Matthew 7:12, Jesus Christ affirms: "therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the prophets." Also, Matthew 22:39 clearly underscores the importance of love: "thou shall love your neighbor as yourself; on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

In a similar way, renowned Islamic leaders have invoked this rule copiously. Sahih Muslim Mohammad states that "whoever wishes to be delivered from the fire and enter the garden should die with faith in Allah... and should treat the people as he wishes to be treated by them." Also, An-Nawawi states that "None of you (truly) believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself." The law of reciprocity is the bedrock of interpersonal relation lubricated by faith through respect for God. It is in humans that we find opportunities for attesting to our belief in God through acts of love for one another.

Discussions about shared values point to the ultimate goal of achieving harmony between the Christian and Muslim communities around the world. Put differently, the absence of peace between adherents of these faiths hurts the world as it affects every progress towards a prosperous society. But peace is founded instrumentally on love and justice; surprisingly both Islam and Christianity invoke peace as an essential ingredient in their dogma (Manus, 1992).

The epitomic place of love in Christianity reveals the contradiction among early Christians between authentic worship of God and mistreatment of others. In this practice was a violation of the principle of justice and fairness. Justice is seen as "a moral virtue that consists in the constant

and firm will to give one's due to God and neighbor" (Catechism of the Catholic Church). To God, the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls justice "virtue of Religion." Justice toward men disposes one to respect the right of everyone and "to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regards to persons and to the common good." To be just means one has to be habitually right in thinking and acts that are upright towards one's neighbor. Love and justice thus flow together and especially acts that clearly favor others in an impartial manner seal the synergy. Christian love is true reflection of sacrifice of oneself in love of God for humanity that Jesus exemplified. Adherents of Christianity are enjoined to express their faith in volitional, respectful and unconditional love for God with one another as Paul records in 1Corinthians 10:24 (Kunkle, n.d). Paul notes: "Be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." In practicalizing this, it is expected to permeate all social platforms of interaction including friendship, marriage and family. Love of God is expressed in human response to God's love through the love of neighbor.

Christian teaching portrays love of neighbor irrespective of religion or tribe or race or any other form of identity. Indeed, one is taught to care for one's enemies through charitable acts of prayer and to refrain from revenge. This principle is elaborated thus:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners', expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful and just as your father is merciful. (Luke 6: 32 – 36)

These tendencies are to enhance peace and had been clearly reinforced by the strong admonition to refrain from revenge. Christ condemned the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Matthew 5:38-41). Paul exhorts the Romans to bless those who persecute them and never pay evil for evil. To live peaceably he advises:

Beloved, never revenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. No, If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:18-21)

These teachings sought to eliminate violence as an alternative form of behavior in the interest of peace through love and justice. To furnish the acts of love, charity, through generous sharing with the needy, is taught by Christianity as a very high virtue. Christians are enjoined to share their wealth with the poor to check the vices of greed, covetousness, pride and gluttony. Luke 6:38 urges Christians: "give and it will be given to you." Rich people like Zachaeus heeded the teaching on wealth sharing and redistributed his riches with the poor (Luke 19:8-10). Jesus urged the Christian community to be generous and charitable with their resources, time, talent and treasure to the benefit of the poor, sick, prisoners and indeed the needy (Matthew 25:7). Christ

invited the generous and charitable and said unto them:

Come, you that are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you... I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you gave me clothing, I was sick, and you took care of me.... (Matthew 25:34)

These acts of generosity and charity are at the very heart of Christianity and by extension Islamic practice. These acts demonstrate in no uncertain terms worship and love of God expressed through love of the needy and poor fellow human beings. In these acts, love and justice are activated for the sake of peace. These acts know no religion or tribe or race.

In Islam, a true Muslim is required to believe in the one God, Angels, the Prophets, the Scripture and the Day of Judgment (Nazeer, 2000). These beliefs have to be translated into actions of faith, indicative of religious practice. The most important Islamic social values are articulated in the Quran and reinforced by the life-style of the Prophet. In Medina where the first Muslim community was founded, it was characterized by an affirmation of human dignity and social justice (Kunkle, n.d). All Islamic values have therefore been derived from the Quran, the personal examples of the Prophet and the writings that followed his teaching. The *Hadiths* are a compendium of the Prophets personal examples and the *Sunnah*, the Muslim way of life. In these documents including the Quran are found fundamental issues of social justice. The whole essence is to bring the individual closer to God by creating a just society.

Justice is the cornerstone of Islamic faith. It informs Islamic theology and social values. The Quran affirms that justice is a command from God (16:90, 5:8). It enjoins believers to adhere to what is just and kind and forbidding that which is unjust (72:15, 60:8). Justice is expected to permeate all actions, speech and thoughts of Muslims. For example, "when you speak, speak with justice, even if it is against someone close, to you... (6:152). The practice of justice is not restricted to familiar persons and must be extended to strangers as well. This form of justice is laced with the principle of equality as a basis for peace. The Quran asserts that the only basis for differentiation is piety (*Taqwa*) or righteousness (*Birr*). It states:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honored in the sight of Allah is (who is) the most righteous of you... (49:13)

Verses like these from the Holy Quran demonstrate shared historical similarities between Christianity and Islam with a common root in the faith of Abraham and Isaac. In this sense both religions "tend to be universalistic in their outlook" (Blankenhorn, 2009, p.1).

This universalism takes bearing from the five pillars of Islam: The Creed (*Shahada*); Prayer (*Salat*), Almsgiving (*Zakat*), Ramadan: Fast (*Sawm*) and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) (Ritcher, 2001). At the apex of these pillars is God while the individual is at the base linked inextricably through these pillars that are manifested in the activities of the individual within the social setting of the community. Without activating these pillars in concrete actions to be felt by the community, the individual would have no vital link with God. Hence of the five pillars only the *Shahada* can be

accomplished alone, the profession of faith (Kunkle, n.d). The other pillars are accomplished only by the participation in community life. The community is instituted by God to serve as a true example of fraternity and social justice (2:143). This does not confer superiority but rather a commonality of shared humanity. All believers are "brothers in religion and must not oppress one another, nor abandon assisting each other, nor hold one another in contempt." This *Hadith* teaching intones that the seat of righteousness is the heart which the righteous does not discriminate nor demean a fellow Muslim.

The Golden Rule is found elaborately expressed in Islam underscoring fraternity and care for one another. The Prophet had said "No man is a believer until he wishes for his brother that which he wishes for himself" (*Hadith* No. 12). The Prophet affirmed this by asserting that the most important aspect of faith (Imam) in addition to worshipping God is "To do unto all men as you would wish to have done unto you, and to reject for others what you would reject for yourself" (*Hadith* No. 12).

The Prophet's teaching reflected great compassion as an ideal way of pursuing social justice. The needs of the weak and the poor were to be taken care of. The Prophet taught that "He who helps his fellow creature in the hour of need, and he who helps the oppressed, him will God help in the Day of Travail." The Prophet identified compassionate acts as the most excellent form of behavior before the creator. He stated that:

To gladden the heart of a human being; to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured. Feed the hungry and visit the sick, and free the captive if he is unjustly confined, assist any person oppressed ... whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

These compassionate acts are further simplified in the third pillar of Islam - compulsory charity - almsgiving (*Zakat*). It is not just recommended, it is required of every financially stable Muslim. *Zakat* is viewed as "compulsory charity." It is an obligation for those who have received their wealth from God to respond to those members of the community in need (Mufti, 2006, p.1). *Zakat* is designed to meet the needs of the poor and is also a means to cleanse the Muslim of greed and selfishness while exacting the equitable distribution of goods to the entire community. It is intended to bring unity and betterment to the society as a whole (Caner & Caner, 2001, p.123-124).

Shared community life is the hallmark of both Christianity and Islam. The value is gainfully and widely disaggregated into socially justified acts of love that emphasize compassion for the less privileged. Both the Quran and the Bible have ample theological and scriptural recommendations amplified by the personal examples of the Prophet and Christ.

Tolerance: Means for Interreligious Dialogue, Harmony and Peace

Sufficient evidence has been established so far about the shared values of Islam and Christianity. Muslims and Christians exhorted by Holy Scripture are obliged to activate religious faith through community engagement in demonstrating worship and love for God through acts of human kindness. On charity, fraternity, social justice and love of neighbor, Christians and Muslims all agree. In broader terms, the two religions are in agreement on the oneness of God, Prophecy, Sacred Scripture and much of sacred history. On ethical norms too are shared agreement

on the sanctity of life, humane treatment of others, honesty in all human dealings, kindness towards a neighbor and application of justice (Pell, 2006; Nasr, 2004,).

Despite the permeation of these common values, adherents of the two religions have had cause to rise against each other. In the cause of history, violent outburst has characterized Muslim-Christian relationship. With higher and widespread level of education, easy access to information, courtesy of technology, rather than enhance inter-religious harmony, the 21st Century has witnessed more intra- and inter- religious schisms resulting in open expression of violence. From Iraq to Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan, intra-religious schisms have dominated world headlines. ISIL and Al Qaeda in the Middle East, Al Shabaab in the horn of Africa and Boko Haram in Nigeria have taken to violence to establish or enforce their own presumed version of Islamic values considered 'pure'. In Nigeria since 2001, when Sharia law was introduced in selected states in the North, both Muslims and Christians have violently clashed on different occasions. The cities of Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi and Jos have played host to several occasions of carnage. The lynching of Christians for blasphemy occurred in Kano, Gusau and Abuja in 2016. These and many more instances are sufficient evidence of inter-religious disharmony being experienced in other parts of the world.

The failure of the impact of shared values on adherents of both religions, particularly, the failure to work together through dialogue for harmony and peace is partly due to how often believers of the faiths are blind, arrogant and narrow in their thinking and worldview (Blankenhorn, n.d). Practitioners of these religions have often demonstrated ignorance of the very tenets of their faith. This has the tendency to lead to contemporary extremism or fanaticism of the kind being witnessed around the world. This may seem that we may be notoriously religious but less pious. For instance, Nigerians have been ranked as highly religious, but inter-religious fracas have continued to occur in the country.

Closely related to lack of understanding is the effect of misinterpretation of Holy Scripture. Kenny (1992) notes that there is a significant number of passages in Holy Scriptures that are both hostile and unfriendly to other religions. The misinterpretation of these by teachers and adherents creates tension and may result in violence hurting any form of harmony between Christianity and Islam. Dialogue is at issue here when creating a consensus on grey areas in both religions. But dialogue is not possible without religious liberty to stimulate engagement. It is only in an atmosphere of freedom that meaningful discussions can flow towards a desirable consensus. This further requires utmost caution in proselytizing and the need to emphasize more on the areas of similarities between the two religions. Far more important is for religious leaders to demonstrate vigilance in identifying excesses and refrain from abuse of religious power and its misuse.

Accomplishment of these tasks depends on the level of tolerance to be exercised or observed by adherents of both religions. Islam for instance evokes its teaching as part of a peace package. Quran 2:30 requires that man should maintain peace with Allah, his creator and sustainer, fellow men as well as other creatures he comes in contact with. This is presented as the core responsibility of man. This duty is essential within the context of religious pluralism that must be embraced within the belief in the fundamentality of humanity. Differentiation in humanity and religion is God's creation and was designed to promote the virtue of tolerance. The Quran (2:213) draws out this pluralism when it states that God sent off different Prophets to different people at

different times to teach the same truth of the Oneness of God. Diversity must be tolerated because it is at the heart of achieving harmonious community life. The Quran states:

Had God willed, He would have made you into one community; but (it was His will) to test you in what He gave you. So, compete with each other in doing good works. To God you are all returning, and He will inform you about how you differed. (5:48)

As noted succinctly by Sachedina (2001), religious pluralism is a prerequisite for a peaceful accommodation of differences in the individual and the communal sense of the highest good. Rejection of pluralism is challenging the wisdom of the Almighty God in promoting tolerance. The notion of tolerance is therefore ineluctable in managing diversity and promoting and preserving pluralism. Muslims are encouraged to interact respectfully and gently with non-Muslims through dialogue on religion. This is possible only in the activation of tolerance.

Conclusion

Islam and Christianity, two of the world's dominant religions have enduring and shared values rooted in their fundamental dogmatics and principles. These values are relative and progressive in nature. They are divine in origin and are in complete harmony. Christianity and Islam subscribe to a one God, Prophecy, sacred history and basic ethical standards of sanctity of life, compassionate treatment of others and the application of justice for the sake of love of God.

These teachings are summed up in the Golden Rule as the basis for sharing the same values. The Golden Rule acknowledges our human divinity and diversity which is impossible to eliminate. To live with it and achieve peace and harmony, religious leaders must develop concerted efforts to reorient adherents on the essence of tolerance to achieve religious liberty that would enhance meaningful dialogue. Both adherents need to increase the tempo and avenues of interaction to promote understanding and check misinterpretation of religious passages.

It is this abuse of interpretation and wrongful exercise of religious power that is expanding the arena for fanaticism and bigotry. Growing economic inequality is raising a pool of religious entrepreneurs hence the commercialization of religious movements is fanning schism and intolerance globally.

Political and religious leaders must step back and reflect creatively on our common humanity in the midst of its pluralism and divinity in relation to the universality of the Golden Rule as a fundamental shared value for the realization of religious harmony through dialogue. Human understanding of the truth may never be perfect and disagreement on values should be treated with restraint by being open to other views.

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