



**Peace and Reconciliation in the Abrahamic
Religions: Sources, History and Future Prospects**

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Abstract

This paper examines three basic questions: First, the historical experience of the Abrahamic faiths and the role of peace and reconciliation in their evolution; Second, the resources in these religions for peace and reconciliation, by which we mean to refer to traditional beliefs and texts that encourage peace and coexistence; Third, what we need to do today, in terms of deepening peace and reconciliation among religions and how religious teachings can play a central role in resolving conflicts between nations.

***Keywords:** Judaism, Christianity, Islam, history, conflict, conflict resolution, peace, reconciliation, justice, resources*

Introduction

Our subject is extremely important in light of a widespread fiction that seems to underlie much diplomatic activity. This fiction holds that religion really has nothing to do with either the conflicts going on in our world or with the possible solutions to these conflicts. In a certain sense, what we are describing here is a result of the process of secularization that denies the role of religion in modern times. People seem to think that religious wars are a thing of the past. A further assumption is that when the actors in the given conflict claim that religious issues motivate them, they are in fact masking underlying social, economic or political factors that must be the real cause, since it cannot be religion.

The danger of this approach should be obvious. The reality is that numerous conflicts in our world actually are religious in nature, some completely so, and others partially so. The failure to consider religious issues in seeking solutions to these problems may often be the cause of failure to bring about reconciliation. Put simply, if a conflict really is religious, the easiest way to bring about reconciliation will be through dealing directly with the religious issues. This approach seems to elude peacemakers in virtually all such situations. Instead, interreligious dialogue is generally consigned to those of us who already get along and who seek to cement positive relationships through this medium. While this is certainly a worthwhile activity, it would seem apparent that religion actually does lie at the base of many conflicts and, therefore, that mediation and reconciliation could be sought through addressing the underlying religious issues.

Moreover, there is often a confusion of the ideas of peace and reconciliation with absolute justice. Peace and reconciliation usually can be attained through a willingness to accept compromise. Compromise, as taught to us by the ancient Talmudic sages, is not the same as absolute justice. Reconciliation may mean a willingness to accept the fact that injustices occurred in the past from one or another party and that, despite this injustice, we are willing to go forward in the spirit of peace and even friendship. Further, often reconciliation and even peace may be achieved even without the resolution of the problem. A simple example may be taken from modern day Jewish-Christian relations. Judaism and Christianity have fundamental disagreements and yet, even so, an amazing reconciliation is taking place in which, at least in most parts of the world, antagonism has been set aside despite past wrongs. Further, there are conflicts in which justice may never be achievable. Often, the victims of conflicts are long since dead and we can only hope that our descendants will be able to achieve reconciliation. My point here is that those who seek absolute justice as a means to the ending of conflicts will never succeed.

In accord with these assumptions, we will be devoting our time to three basic questions: we will first deal with the historical experience of the Abrahamic faiths and the role of peace and reconciliation in their evolution. We will then discuss the resources in these religions for peace and reconciliation, by which we mean to refer to traditional beliefs and texts that encourage peace and coexistence. Finally, we will discuss what we need to do today, in terms of deepening peace and reconciliation among religions and explore how religious teachings can play a central role in resolving conflicts between nations.

Historical Reflections

In order to understand the potential for peace and reconciliation among the monotheistic faiths, it will be necessary first to look at something of their history to understand the problems faced. We will consider the three faiths in the order of their historical development, that is, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Judaism

The Hebrew people begin essentially as nomads who in the 13th century BCE conquered and took control of the land of Canaan. Clearly, this conquest was an act of war, but very soon the prophets of the Hebrew Bible began to speak of peace, not only for Israel but for humanity as a whole, as an ideal closely linked to the messianic era. However, with the destruction of Northern Israel in 722 BCE and that of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE, these dreams became part of the everyday, here and now hopes and aspirations of the Jewish people. One cannot underestimate the impact of these events on molding the fundamental character of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. In the aftermath of these terrible catastrophes, peace and reconciliation, whether between family members, neighbors--Jews and non-Jews--or nations, became a fundamental norm of the Jewish religion.

After this dual destruction, the Jewish people were dominated in turn by the Persians, Hellenistic Empires, and Rome. The Greco-Roman era was punctuated by a series of three armed revolts, one to successfully establish the Hasmonean Empire and two unsuccessful attempts to assert independence against the might of the Roman Empire. The lesson of the two failed revolts was for the Jews a sign to accept domination by foreign powers. They then lived in the Middle Ages as second-class minorities under Christian and Muslim domination. Throughout this period, they were victims of various kinds of legal, economic and religious discrimination and even of anti-Jewish violence as anti-Semitism became more and more a regular part of their lives. The modern period was expected to bring with it equal status and religious freedom. However, in Europe, beginning in the eighteenth century, the Jews faced the new racial anti-Semitism that eventually culminated in the Holocaust. Muslim modernization and the rise of the Zionist movement led to an increase in *dhimmi* anti-Semitism and eventually, in the aftermath of the establishment of the State of Israel, to the largely complete expulsion of Jews from the Arab countries.

While unbelievably reconciliation is taking place between the Jewish people, the Jewish state and those countries and peoples that slaughtered them during the Holocaust, the same cannot be said for the Jewish and Israeli relationship with Muslims and Muslim countries. Israel and the Arab states fought a series of wars that further deepened their hostility. Nonetheless, the futility of war led some Arab nations to enter into peace agreements with Israel. The current state of long-term conflict with and rule over the Palestinians remains an enormous obstacle to reconciliation. Attempts at reconciliation have worked partially with some other countries, but this reconciliation is not for public consumption and many of the citizens of these countries remain openly hostile to Jews and to Israel. At the same time, attempts of Jews and Muslims to reconcile and to cooperate outside of the Middle East have had only limited success, and that primarily around

fighting against the prohibition of circumcision and ritual slaughter in European countries.

Christianity

Christianity began as a peaceful religion seeking to establish the kingdom of God here on earth, that is, to create a world in which love, peace and reconciliation would be the dominant values. The attempt to spread this message in the ancient land of Israel in the first century resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans and the persecution of his followers. These followers, however, against great opposition, eventually succeeded in spreading Christianity, that had been accepted by very few Jews, throughout the Roman Empire. Christians continued to suffer religious persecution until Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 325 CE. However, it was not long until the now politically dominant Christians, primarily in the guise of the Byzantine Empire, undertook violent efforts to force pagans and sometimes Jews to accept Christianity. In between such excesses, Jews were exposed to persecution and treated as second-class citizens. Synagogues were often vandalized and at times Jewish practice and the study of Torah were prohibited by Christians.

One would have expected that the successful spreading of Christianity would have led to a toning down of these anti-Semitic persecutions, but this did not happen. Christian Europe was the scene over and over again of efforts to relegate the Jews to second-class citizenship, to limit their religious freedom and to despoil them economically. Further, occasional blood libels and other such accusations, such as poisoning the wells, led to large-scale outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence and murder. Religious violence was indeed marshaled by Christians to force the conversion of others. From the era of the Church Fathers through the Middle Ages, the Crusades, and the Inquisition, Christians put Jews to death for their unwillingness to accept Christianity. Muslims were also attacked by Christians in the Middle Ages during the Crusades when Christian armies from Europe, inspired by the Pope, attempted to wrest Jerusalem's holy places from Muslim control. The first Crusade of 1096, for example, led to the Rhineland massacres in which entire Jewish communities were destroyed. The Crusades brought about massive destruction in the Land of Israel where Muslims and even Eastern Christians were slaughtered.

Initially, Jews were welcomed in Eastern Europe where much less violence was initially perpetrated. However, with the rise of the massive Jewish communities in those areas, both Roman Catholic and Orthodox clergy continued to preach anti-Semitic teachings and Jews continued to suffer terribly, even when physical violence was lacking. The Protestant Reformation led to extensive warfare between Catholics and Protestants and, as we know, this horrendous destruction only came to an end recently in Northern Ireland. It seems, however, that happily we have seen the last of intra-Christian religious battling. As the modern period dawned at the turn of the twentieth century, peace and security became the norm in Christian Europe. However, only a short time later, under the secularized guise of national socialist and totalitarian communist ideologies, Europeans continued the persecution and sometimes violent destruction of Jews and Muslims. The Nazis and their allies in World War II, even though secularized in their ideology, transformed classical anti-Semitism into the basis for murdering six million Jews, thousands of Catholic clergy and other religious minorities, not to mention another twenty-five million people in the course of the war.

The extent to which this should be seen as religious violence is a matter of debate but it is clear that religion played a part in bringing it about.

The lessons of the Holocaust have brought first the Catholic Church and then numerous Protestant and Orthodox denominations to seek reconciliation with one another and with Jews and Muslims. In general, one can say of Christianity that it is almost impossible to find support for religious violence today, and that toleration of various religions and ideas has become the norm for virtually all Christians. This increased tolerance represents a major accomplishment, a result of consistent enormous efforts on both sides. The Catholic Church is to be given great credit for leading, and, in fact, continuing to lead in this important area.

Islam

The initial period of Muslim history in the seventh century CE was one in which Muhammad and his followers initially sought to take control of Yathrib / Medina and a variety of other parts of the Arabian Peninsula, in the process slaughtering Jews and Christians. The Muslim conquest of the Middle East was, of course, one involving great violence. However, as the conquest proceeded, the idea of the protected minority, namely the peoples of the book, Jews, Christians and sometimes Zoroastrians, became enshrined in the beliefs of Islam. This new category allowed Muslims to spare Jews and Christians where they did not militarily resist the Arab armies and were willing to accept protected second-class status and pay the poll tax. Nonetheless, conquest by Arab armies often led to widespread destruction affecting Jews and Christians, not only remaining pagans. The concept of jihad, the obligation of waging holy war, led to the continued violent expansion of Muslim domination even into parts of Europe.

Punctuating the peace of the Arab world, however, was the ongoing strengthening of the Sunni-Shiite split which continues to be a major factor in world affairs today. Violence of one group against the other was continuous, although it more or less came to a stop during the Ottoman period. Further, already in the Middle Ages, various extremist groups within the Muslim faith turned to violence against others but it remained a marginal phenomenon.

When the period of conquest came to a close, in most places the Jewish and Christian communities settled into the protected minority status in which they were able to flourish in a variety of professions. Further, with time Judaism and Christianity benefited from the intellectual cross-fertilization of the eighth to thirteenth centuries when many classical philosophical and scientific works were translated into Arabic. This period, indeed, was the golden age of interaction of Muslims, Christians and Jews within the wider areas of the *dar el-Islam*. Organized, governmentally sponsored violence against Jews and Christians seems to have been rare, although in many places *dhimmi* status effectively morphed into persecution.

Toward the end of the premodern period, it appeared that the Ottoman Empire would bring peace, security and the end of religious violence and persecution to the Muslim world. However, after the first hundred and fifty years or so of the Ottoman Empire a period of decline set in in which security deteriorated and all kinds of cruel and despotic rulers grew up. The situation of the minorities began to decline. There were exceptions, however, such as the development of the Jewish communities of the Land of Israel during this period where Christian religious shrines as well continued to thrive.

The onset of modernity brought about great changes in the Arab / Muslim world. Among those changes, as we mentioned, was the rise of Zionism and the State of Israel which had a major negative impact on the status of Jews in the Arab world, eventually leading to their wholesale expulsion or emigration, depending on the country. However, Christian communities continued to hold on as minorities in the Muslim world, even being treated well in many places. As we know, these communities are today gradually being destroyed as a result of violence and persecution. The Christian population, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic or other, has been decreasing constantly in the Middle East, except in Israel where it has increased.

As modernization proceeded, a variety of economic, political and religious factors have led as we all know to massive unrest in the Arab world. Beginning in the 1920's Islamism, a movement to establish through violence either a central caliphate or individual political entities to be ruled by narrow interpretations of Islamic law, has brought religious violence to horrible heights. It remains to see how such groups can be brought to reconciliation even in an atmosphere in which more normative Muslim groups could be brought into better relations with Christians and Jews. Needless to say, closely connected to this phenomenon, although politically motivated as well, is Arab terrorism directed at Israel.

What this brief survey shows is that among Jews and Christians, organized religious violence and persecution of others has basically been replaced by tolerance and mutual respect. Further, an unbelievably successful process of reconciliation has taken place. Regarding Islam, a combination of political affairs and a strong and violent minority refusing to follow a path of reconciliation has ensured that hostility will remain. Christian communities essentially are abandoning the Middle East, and Jews and Christians in the United States and Europe still are unable to reconcile with their Muslim neighbors.

In the next section we will turn to those resources that exist to make possible full reconciliation between the monotheistic faiths.

Resources for Peace and Reconciliation

Each one of the three monotheistic faiths includes in its foundation text and later traditions concepts of peace and reconciliation. It has to be admitted up front that these often coexist in the same sacred texts with sanctioned or permitted violence, and certainly with the concept of "just war." We will examine them now one by one, commenting to some extent as well on attitudes toward violence. We will also look at attitudes to the dignity of the human being, relation with God, relations between human beings, and prophetic visions of peace and the perfected world.

Judaism

We begin with Judaism at the origins of the monotheistic religions. We start with a concept of a single, all-powerful and all-knowing creator God who formed all human beings. Rabbinic tradition teaches that God initially created one human being in order to emphasize the sanctity of every human life and to show that all human beings are related since they share a common ancestor. The Bible emphasizes that people were created in the image of God. While it is difficult to

define exactly what this means, since it does not refer to his physical appearance, it certainly teaches the intrinsic value of each human being as a representative of God on earth as well as the obligation of each person to imitate the goodness of God in our world, later termed *imitatio dei*. Cain's murder of Abel, the first act of violence, is clearly condemned, although we know that under certain circumstances violence was permitted by the Hebrew Bible, namely self-defense, just war and punishment of criminals. Numerous biblical passages condemn wanton violence.

That the human being is a social animal intended to live with others, male and female, is clear from the earliest accounts of the book of Genesis where we learn of the difficulties in human relations both within and outside of the family. These stories as well as the laws regulating human interaction clearly intend to bring about a society that respects the persons, families, property and dignity of others. Jewish tradition understands the creation as indicating that men and women are joined together with God in a covenantal community. This concept essentially endows human relations with an extra factor, the role of the divine in the construction of every relationship. Such a notion, in turn, calls on all humanity to relate to one another as if relating to God. Reconciliation, from the Jewish point of view, is effectively the restoration of this covenantal community—the reinvolved of God in human affairs.

While many of these laws are aimed at Israelites, we are told specifically that not only must one “love your neighbor as yourself,” but that it is obligatory as well to love the stranger. The Bible emphasizes that God is concerned about how the weakest among us—orphans, widows, and foreigners—are treated. While the Bible speaks of the destruction of the non-Jewish inhabitants of the land of Canaan, this vision never actually came to fruition as the land was conquered. Later rabbinic tradition understood that non-Jews who accepted belief in God and a basic moral code known as the Seven Noahide Laws were to be treated like members of the Jewish people for most purposes. That is, the ethical and legal requirements for relating to Jews and non-Jews were effectively rendered equivalent. Further, Judaism believes that the righteous of the nations will inherit the world to come, often identified with reward after death. Neither the world to come nor the messianic era is in any way limited to members of the Jewish people.

The biblical prophets speak of an ideal of peace, admittedly after the forcible destruction of the wicked by human and divine forces for good. In this ideal situation, all nations will share in worship of the true God. Visions of peace and reconciliation of the Hebrew prophets are so well known that the words of Isaiah (“nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more—Isa 2:4) have been inscribed right here at the UN. The prophets looked way beyond the life of ancient Israel and the difficulties of navigating the complex international relations of the ancient Near East. They looked forward to a world of perfect peace and harmony, of not only human but even animal reconciliation. This vision was closely associated with the prophetic expectation of the coming of the messiah who would bring about the final redemption. This strongly held belief was a cornerstone of later Judaism that expressed hope for the future and fueled the Jewish people's aspirations for a world of peace and goodness, and for their return to their ancient homeland in the Land of Israel.

Rabbinic tradition greatly emphasized the need for reconciliation among people. Aaron the Priest was praised for his role in what we would call mediation, bringing together those who were in conflict. The prophets spoke of such reconciliation both within the Jewish people and between

the Jewish people and its various ancient enemies. Numerous narratives emphasize this obligation and it is enshrined in Jewish law as Jews are required to ask for forgiveness and to grant forgiveness to one another and to their non-Jewish neighbors in the context of restitution. From the Jewish point of view, relations between humans must be conducted according to a moral pattern that, when violated, calls for restitution and repentance. Here we see the Jewish emphasis on individual responsibility for one's actions and, hence also, collective communal responsibility. These obligations again confirm a vision of human relations that is intended to create harmony among Jews and between Jews and their neighbors.

While the Hebrew Bible called on the Jews to attack and destroy the Canaanites in an effort to extirpate their pagan, idolatrous practices, later Jewish tradition effectively forbade all such actions. Essentially, then, religious violence is totally proscribed by Judaism, and when it occurs, usually in connection with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is roundly condemned by religious and political leaders.

Christianity

Christianity began in the first century Jewish milieu of the Land of Israel. It accepts the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Old Testament, so that many of its beliefs are in fundamental agreement with Judaism. Most of them are expressed directly in the teachings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Fundamental to Christian teaching is the notion that love of God and love of humanity are intrinsically bound up. The primacy of the command to "love your neighbor," is understood to be directly parallel to love of God. This tenet is basically an echo of Pharisaic-rabbinic ethics, based on the Hebrew Bible. In rabbinic literature it was often expressed as "that which is hateful to you do not do to others." The shared Golden Rule was taught to much of the world through the spread of Christianity. The Hebrew Bible had forbidden hatred in one's heart, and instructed that one must even help one's enemy to unload and reload his animal or return a lost animal to his enemy. The rabbis emphasize that although merciful treatment of animals is also at stake here, the requirement to help even one's enemy lies behind this law. The New Testament explicitly taught love of one's enemies. Famous to the teachings of Jesus is the idea of turning the other cheek even when one is attacked. In addition, Jesus told his followers to suffer being reviled and persecuted with humility. Forgiveness is constantly stressed, as it is as well in Jewish tradition. Both traditions express greatly the need to help those who are less fortunate. Jesus's emphasis on healing of the sick certainly sets an example for concern with the health of other nations.

Much of Jesus's teaching concerns the notion of the kingdom of God. This idea was widespread also among the Talmudic rabbis and is connected with the notion of the Messiah, who when he appears, will establish a peaceful, just and free society even within the present historical age. This belief becomes more prominent, of course, in the New Testament. Both Judaism and Christianity stressed extensively the notion that there can be a better and more perfect world in consonance with God's will.

The theme of peace is stressed in the New Testament. Jesus is said to praise the peacemakers as well as calling on people to be at peace with one another. The Messiah is expected to bring the ultimate peace. Indeed, peace is intimately connected with the kingdom of God and is expected

to ensue after the Second Coming. Peter refers specifically to Jesus's preaching of peace. Some of these passages echo various sources in the Hebrew Bible. Paul speaks of the God of peace, correctly identifying peace as a major demand of the God of Israel. Believers are expected to live in peace. James connects peace and peacemaking with righteousness. In Hebrews, Jesus is the king of peace, also associated with righteousness. Further, believers are expected to pursue peace, echoing also passages in the Hebrew Bible. In this way they are said to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Islam

Islam includes in its teachings extensive material that can serve as the basis for peace and reconciliation. What follows assembles a number of these teachings even while noting that numerous other teachings encourage violence and jihad. We will argue below that the challenge facing the peaceful Islamic majority is to develop a hermeneutic whereby the teachings we survey in this section can overcome the force of those Quranic teachings appearing to advocate violent confrontation with non-Muslims.

Muslims are required to believe in one God, his scripture, the Quran, and the prophets he sent to guide them. All of these describe a clearly defined code of moral and ethical conduct, stressing the relations of all people by virtue of their universal brotherhood and the requirement to carry out their obligations to uphold justice. The Quran speaks of the creation of humanity as a single soul, and of all people from a single couple. They are admonished to see the divine aspect of all human relations.

These beliefs are translated into action by the creation of a just society. The Muslim way of life is preoccupied with issues of social justice and social ethics as delineated in the Quran and the life of the Prophet Mohammad. The purpose of Islam is to bring society on earth into harmony with the will of God.

In the Quran God himself commands justice and requires that Muslims act with justice and kindness while forbidding that which is unjust. The Quran states that a person must stand up for the right under all circumstances, for justice may not be distorted by considerations of those who hate him, who is rich and powerful or poor and unable to protect himself, even if the judgment may likely affect oneself, one's parents or one's relatives. "When you speak, speak with justice, even if it is against someone close to you..." (6:152). The pursuit of justice even applies to those with whom one is in conflict or estranged.

Later traditions attributed to Muhammed social teachings that could be instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation of Islam with Judaism and Christianity. According to some versions of a later Hadith tradition, the Prophet Muhammed taught in his final sermon that "All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor has a non-Arab superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor has a black any superiority over a white, except by piety and good action..." Likewise, even slaves should be treated with fairness by not overburdening them with tasks they cannot accomplish, giving them adequate food and clothing, and allowing them to earn money to buy their freedom. Freeing slaves was considered the highest form of charity and caused sins to be erased.

The fundamental equality of humanity and the divine gifts of free will and reason were

understood to lead to a vision of pluralism in the Quran. God set out the various diverse communities that exist in the world, and different prophets at different times came to deliver his message of the one God and his moral commandments. Muhammed, however, was understood to be the seal of the prophets, whose teachings effectively supplemented those of Jewish and Christian teachers. In a sort of Muslim version of the Golden Rule, Muhammed is reported to have said that “no man is a believer until he wishes for his brother that which he wishes for himself” and one must “do to all men as you would wish to have done to you, and ... reject for others what you would reject for yourself.” Muhammed further declared that the actions that endear men most to God are to “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.” In the Hadith God extols the poor and vulnerable. Allah does not ask to be fed by sacrifice, but rather asks that the poor be fed which is understood essentially as an offering to God.

The Prophet frequently mentioned the poor, orphans, and widows for special care. The duty of society is to care for the destitute. As it was the community’s responsibility to oversee the giving of alms, it was the right of the underprivileged to receive aid. Included in this category were parents, kin, orphans, the needy, and wayfarers. While a certain amount of charity was required, voluntary charity above that amount was praiseworthy and rewarded by God.

Another trait that Muslims believe God rewards is self-control that manifests itself in the suppression of anger, the withholding of retribution and the practice of forgiveness. Of forgiveness the Quran states: “The reward of the evil is the evil thereof, but whosoever forgives and makes amends, his reward is with God” (42:40). Since God is both gracious and merciful, he is ready to forgive those who sincerely repent of their faults. “Those who do ill deeds and afterward repent and believe—lo! For them afterward, Allah is forgiving, merciful” (7:153). The opposite of this submission to God is pride that causes a Muslim to turn away from God and reject the truth and God’s guidance.

Thus, Islam seeks to provide moral guidance through the Quran and the example of Muhammed and to create a just and peaceful society. The Quran expresses this concept in its suggestion that believers follow the path of Abraham: “And who better in faith than the one who willingly surrenders his being to God, and is a doer of good, and follows the way of Abraham, the rightly oriented? For God took Abraham as a friend.” (4:125). Many of the passages we have surveyed here can serve as the basis for bringing about peace and reconciliation of the Jewish and Christian communities with Islam.

Paths to Reconciliation

In trying to establish possible paths towards reconciliation, we need to consider two separate questions. On the one hand, one can ask how the resources that we have cited, in view of the history that we surveyed in the first part, can be utilized to bring about reconciliation among the three monotheistic faiths. On the other hand, one can ask how these resources can enable those who believe in and practice these faiths to serve as agents of reconciliation among others, even in cases where conflict is not related to religious issues.

It is clear that if religions are to serve as a catalyst for bringing about peace and reconcilia-

tion among others, they will first have to complete that process among themselves. Such a process would entail continued efforts to bring the three monotheistic religions together and to end the conflicts between them. One of the major obstacles to such an accomplishment remains the divisions within some of the religious groups, particularly regarding the types of issues that separate different faiths. I do not propose an attempt to bring the religions into some type of theological harmony in which each is required to modify its beliefs. Rather, each religion needs to harness the very resources we have talked about in the previous section to develop theological argumentation and justification for harmonious relations, even in the face of serious religious or political disagreement. Indeed, the trick in intergroup relations is to be able to say that we do not agree, but we wish to remain friendly. Such an approach would allow each religious tradition to confront the other with respect and tolerance but in full recognition of what separates us. In no way should anybody be asked to abandon his / her beliefs.

I suspect that the long track record of success in fostering Jewish-Christian relations, with Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant groups, would make it easy for these groups to prepare for effective dialogue and cooperation with Muslims. I think we have to admit that Islam here faces difficult challenges. To some extent, we are currently witnessing an internal struggle over the question of “What is Islam?” The vast majority of its adherents define it as a religion of peace and truly believe that their faith should bring them into peaceful relationships with fellow Muslims as well as with others. However, whether for political or religious reasons, significant numbers of Muslims continue to see violent jihad as a practical path for the future of Islam. It is not just that these groups are wreaking havoc in many parts of the world, threatening world peace. What is significant is that they are supported by some other Muslims who have not embraced violence. Furthermore, an atmosphere has been created in which those for whom Islam truly is a religion of peace have trouble in making that publicly clear. Effective interreligious cooperation will require major international and national Muslim groups to make very clear, first and foremost, to their own adherents and then to their non-Muslim neighbors, that they truly do believe in a religion of peace and that they totally condemn religious violence and violent jihad. Christians and Jews will have to make clear that they are willing to accept the honest beliefs of this group of Muslims as representative of the vast majority. That majority, however, at least in the Western countries, will not have the luxury of remaining silent.

There is no question that we would need a full-scale program with large-scale funding in order to move from hopes of such reconciliation to a new reality. The Saudis, the King of Morocco and a Jordanian prince have taken up this challenge, but not on a large enough scale. These goals are attainable with sufficient effort as we have seen in the case of Jewish-Christian dialogue and of the reconciliation of Israel and Germany, for example.

The second question is whether religious groups and their teachings can serve as a path for reconciliation in conflicts that extend into the political and social realms as well. If success can be attained on a large scale in Jewish, Christian and Muslim reconciliation, religious leaders could serve as mediators regarding long-standing international conflicts as well. It is clear that religious aspects lie behind many of the conflicts that are currently plaguing the world, and the example of full reconciliation of the monotheistic religions would no doubt lead to peaceful resolution of some of these conflicts. In many cases, and this is my view regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict, refusal of

political leaders to recognize the religious aspects of the conflict often bring about the failure even of the most extensive of peace initiatives. Unfortunately, many political leaders do not totally grasp the significance of religion in world affairs and, hence, refuse to take it into consideration in political processes. Anyone who reads the newspaper should know what a mistake this is.

We have explored above a variety of resources within each of the religious traditions that should make it possible for them to achieve peace and reconciliation among them. However, the same factors, and in particular, the ethical beliefs that we have surveyed, should make possible application of religious ideas to conflict resolution. It is not only a question of specific verses in the Scriptures. Rather, the religious traditions stress a kind of cosmic peace and harmony as a supreme value and the ideals of local peace and world peace with a much higher goal and purpose, namely fulfillment of the will of God. These religions teach personal responsibility and collective responsibility for the state of relationships between individuals, groups and nations. Such beliefs endow the quest for intergroup and international peace with a much greater imperative. Further, mediators imbued with the spirit of such traditions present the message of peace with a level of commitment that is indeed infectious.

We recently saw the role of the Vatican in bringing about a reconciliation between the United States and Cuba. There are many such challenges ahead in our world. If we were able to bring about the reconciliation we all would love to see among the three monotheistic faiths, they together could become an immense force for peace and reconciliation. I have tried here to explore the manner in which these religions have moved towards such a relationship as well as the limitations they face. We have cited the immense resources in theological and ethical terms that the three monotheistic faiths can bring to reconciliation among themselves and to the reconciliation of others. We can only end with the hope and prayer that we may see the day when religious authority can be brought to bear to end violence and enmity, and when religious leaders can take their rightful place as global peacemakers.