

COMMISSION 1

Welcoming the Other through

Conflict Prevention and Transformation





“Welcoming the Other” means coming as equals to address a common problem

INTRODUCTION¹

Major faith traditions around the world assert both the potential negative consequences, individually and collectively, of untransformed conflict and the potential positive consequences of utilizing conflict-ridden experience to grow in faith and tolerance. Does the conflict stimulate dialogue, discovery, generate just solutions to problems, stronger relationships and better communication? Or does it lead to separation, hostility, civil strife, terrorism, and war? The important question is how to handle conflict in ways that are more likely to produce constructive, rather than destructive, outcomes.²

How can faith communities “Welcome the Other” as partners in reconciliation? Such a common mission necessitates recognition of, and respect for, religious diversity, as well as formation, mobilization and equipping of multi-faith networks that can serve as effective agents of coexistence and cooperation.

The purpose of this paper is to design a roadmap for effective conflict prevention and transformation that can be applied by religious communities acting as effective interveners. It proposes a model that can be used by religious actors from any faith tradition, in particular one that can be implemented collaboratively, uniting and expanding the conflict transformation assets contributed by each religious group.

This paper addresses the characteristics of modern conflict, religious identity and religious values as drivers of conflict and provides a conflict transformation framework for faith-based actors.

¹ This paper is an excerpt of a much longer piece.

² Steele, *Overview of Basic Conflict Resolution*, 2008.

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN CONFLICT

The following is a brief description of the components of conflict, an overview of contemporary actors, the nature of contemporary war/violence and emerging paradigms regarding security.

COMPONENTS OF CONFLICT

- › *Relationships*: Building healthy relationships between individuals, groups and societies is critical for successful conflict prevention and transformation. Dealing effectively with emotions, attitudes and behavior patterns can build ties across the divides.
- › *Disputes*: Finding mutually acceptable solutions to specific disputes is critical.
- › *Structures*: Structures can serve to heighten or resolve conflict, depending on how they are constituted and managed. It is important to facilitate reform in social systems to maintain stable peace.

ACTORS IN CONFLICT³

- › *State power*: Although still a major factor to a great extent, national governments have lost the nearly exclusive control they used to exert over the flow of money, ideas, technology, goods, people, and even legal jurisdiction.
- › *Pan-governmental*: Some aspects of state sovereignty have been relinquished to pan-governmental organizations which, with international norms and laws, can constrain and judge individual citizens and determine what states can do within their own territory.
- › *Sub-state and non-state*: In many cases, power has shifted to a wide variety of non-state actors. These include: government sub-contractors, private security forces (security guards, warlords, or terrorist cells that often thrive in failed or failing states), social media, financial and trade institutions (private philanthropy and big business), and NGOs (including faith-based and the ones working on conflict transformation).

Violence in the modern world takes many forms. Although state-sponsored violence and organized crime remain important, contemporary violence is increasingly manifest in insurgency and terrorism. Religion tends to play an exacerbating role in each.

The new types of violence and war have generated dialogue regarding security sector reforms, including an expansion in the scope of security needs, a new security paradigm that emphasizes people, not states and a new commitment to shared security and the need for “global connectivity”.⁴

³ Steele, 2013.

⁴ A term proposed by Canadian diplomat Rob McRae in 2001.



II. DRIVERS OF CONFLICT: IDENTITY AND VALUES

Specialists in conflict analysis have frequently been divided between those who view conflicts as caused by *substantive drivers* such as territory, resources, economy, or politics and those who emphasize *identity drivers*, group memberships such as ethnicity, tribe, race, or religion. Yet all conflicts involve interplay between both kinds of drivers.

The priorities given to specific identity groups tend to form the major boundary markers that distinguish in-groups and out-groups, “us” vs. “them.” Such designations enable groups to differentiate themselves from others, or to be distinguished by others.

Many social scientists, however, insist that an “us/them” distinction could too play an important role in healthy identity formation. They point to the necessity of a “bonding process” with one’s own group, especially for minority or low status peoples. If this is the case, then how does one avoid the tendency for this inclusion/exclusion process to degenerate into attack on all who belong to a “demonized” identity?

Faith communities are well placed to reframe identity formation when it has become destructive.

How can an intervener help begin the process of moving away from a fixed, entrenched single identity without denying the importance of bonding with one’s own group? Here are three possibilities to consider. In each case, it could be suggested that people initially consider reframing only for a particular moment or interaction:

CHOOSE TO EMPHASIZE A DIFFERENT IDENTITY

- › A secondary one (e.g. professional identity – bring together medical people, educators, engineers, farmers, etc. from different ethnicities, religions, nations, or other groups).
- › One not previously considered (e.g. grandmothers from adversarial groups sharing about their families; youth from rival groups playing football or another sport).

REDEFINE THEIR PRIMARY IDENTITY IN MORE FLEXIBLE (& ACCURATE?) TERMS

- › Define one’s self as part of a larger unit (e.g., as a member of an Abrahamic religion, instead of just one of those traditions – emphasizing what they have in common).
- › Shift the goals associated with the identity. (What does it mean to be Israeli? Are Biblically-based borders required? Or can it be negotiated? Must one be a religious Jew? Or can one be a secular Jew, non-Jew, or from another religious tradition?)

AFFIRM IDENTITY OF “THE OTHER” AND ALLOW IT TO INFLUENCE HOW ONE SEES ONESELF

- › Tie groups together (e.g., marriage between people from different tribes, ethnicities, races, religions, social classes, etc. has often built bonds between antagonistic groups).

- › Provide ritual space between identities (e.g., shared artistic, musical or theatrical expression, and engagement in common religious or tribal rituals of healing can often break barriers, change stereotypes, and help move from in-group bonding to bridging).

HUMAN FALLIBILITY AND TRANSFORMATION

One point of commonality among religious traditions is agreement regarding human fallibility. Every tradition has an analysis of “what is wrong with humanity” – what causes tragedy, suffering and failure. This is expressed in terms like ignorance, refusal to submit to God, and committing sin. All of these concepts are fundamental to religious explanations for human susceptibility to destructive conflict. These negative assessments of the human condition are, in turn, directly linked to each religion’s prescribed remedy for transformation, be it insight, revelation, salvation, or redemption.

Yet, religious communities also struggle with their own complicity in human fallibility as well as their desire to be agents of reconciling change. There is a tension within all faith traditions between the call to “truth” (to affirm the importance of one’s own spiritual tradition) and the call to “love” (to embrace the “other”). One fundamental challenge in “*Welcoming the Other*,” then, is to find a creative way for each religious tradition to affirm its role as both the custodian of their tradition and a channel of compassion for those who appear to embrace at least some cherished, but incompatible, values.

The way in which religious traditions approach this task will determine whether or not they contribute to religion as a driver/exacerbator, or a mitigator/resolver, of conflict.⁵ Any assessment by religious leaders of the characteristics of conflict must evaluate situations when religion serves as an influential identity marker. Religion as a driver of conflict takes many forms. Religious communities need to recognize this and know how best to respond.

- › *Ethno-religious*: When religion and ethnicity are united as one identity marker;
- › *Religio-racial*: When purity of faith is equated with racial supremacy and dominance;
- › *Religious nationalism*: When religion is seen as central to the nation’s identity;
- › *Religious globalization*: When pan-national religious identity is paramount;
- › *Religious liberation*: When religion is tied to class struggle and violence is justified as a means to achieve freedom from oppression.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTREMIST ELEMENTS AND THEIR WIDER FAITH TRADITIONS⁶

“*Welcoming the Other*” as partners in conflict prevention and transformation can only be done successfully when religious communities are fully aware of the darker side that some elements within all faith traditions do play. Sometimes these elements only represent small fragments (such as independent, though lethal, terrorist cells) that operate without any political or social base and are vehemently disowned by the major religious tradition which they purport to represent.

5 Ayindo, Isolio and Steele, 2010.

6 Steele, 2013, Steele, Cha. 33 in Petersen and Simion, 2010, and Appleby, 2000.



However, sustainable movements of any kind usually require a broader base. Often extremist religious groups find this base within the wider faith tradition of which they are a part, increasing their destructive reach and capability. Since religious extremists often do gain significant influence by embedding themselves within a wider, like-minded faith community, it is important to ask: When does this tend to happen and why? What makes committed believers elevate what they share with extremists above what they have previously questioned or even strongly opposed?

When fear levels grow within the wider community during mass violence, it is easy for even the nominally religious to fear a loss of their identity and value system. At such a point of vulnerability, extremists may appear to be the only ones with a credible answer and the ability to speak a language the community understands. Often, the result is at least some attachment to (or acceptance of) an extremist presence.

Three types of linkages are utilized by extremists in order to embed themselves within their wider faith community: Ideological, Relational and Functional. How do they operate and what can religious interveners do?

Ideological Linkage: Based on the role of religion as an underlying world view, it is important to determine what the characteristics of extremist religious ideology are and how are they are linked to the identity, values, and beliefs of the wider faith community. These characteristics include:

- › *Aversion to secularization;*
- › *Belief in absolute truth embodied in one's own tradition;*
- › *Purification of one's own tradition;*
- › *Ingrained sense of suffering and victimization, combined with belief in ultimate victory/redemption;⁷*
- › *Identity as a chosen people with a divine mission;*
- › *Dualistic perspective – a "Good vs. Evil" Crusade.⁸*

Relational Linkage: How are contacts made that enable extremists to promulgate their perceptions of the situation and their vision/mission within the wider faith tradition and even the wider society in general?

- › *Use of religious mythology to legitimize the call for in-group loyalty;*
- › *Use of religious and tribal leaders to persuade, mandate and legitimize an extremist agenda;*
- › *Connection with people's sense of victimization and grievance.*

Functional linkage: This involves addressing and fulfilling any of the basic needs of the population. Who is it that is providing basic services, such as: shelter, health, food, education, employment, security, access to communication, transportation, etc.?

- › *Gap in basic services left by failure of governments and moderate civil society to provide;*
- › *Gap often filled by extremist religious sects.*

7 Gopin, 2003.

8 Appleby, 2000 and Aslan, 2010.

DEALING WITH THE LINKAGES: HOW RELIGIOUS INTERVENERS MIGHT RESPOND⁹

It is critically important for any faith-based efforts at conflict prevention and transformation, by one community or multi-faith efforts, to examine this relationship and ask how best to deal with these linkages. What can be done to assist vulnerable religious communities in conflict zones to become agents of conflict prevention, if extremism is not yet embedded, or to become agents of conflict transformation if extremism has already infiltrated the social and religious fabric?

In the first case, the task is to prevent the consummation of the linkage. In the second case, it is to replace the linkage with beneficial relationships that foster the best indigenous values and provide the services essential to well-being. This linkage transformation must, then, find ways to bridge the ideological divide, practice reconciliation and address basic needs of the community.

GUIDELINES FOR BRIDGE BUILDING THE IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE¹⁰

Whether dealing with extremist groups or the wider community in which they are (or intend to be) embedded, faith-based interveners (even indigenous ones) need to examine their own fundamental mentalities and behavior patterns.

The key is to realize one is engaged in conflicts of worldviews and learn how to handle conflicts of values. The following guidelines, for bridge building with extremists or communities that embed them, also provide useful principles for dealing with any relationship involving differences in values, including partnerships among multi-faith actors desiring to collaborate.

- › *Understand their perspective as they see it*; not as an outsider who views them as “using” or “distorting” religion.” The issue is not agreement, but accurate perception of perspectives, assumptions, motivations, rationalizations and conclusions which are part of the worldview of those with whom we are dealing. It will be important to remember that, even among those who may be categorized as extremist, there is likely to be a spectrum of perspectives. When we include the broader communities in which extremists embed themselves, this will be the case even more of the time. In other words, the whole spectrum of diversity is important to understand and great care should be taken before making judgments.
- › *Correctly understand the limitations of one’s own perspective*: Conflict interveners need to realize that they are not above the ideological fray. Pretending one does not bring one’s own ultimate values is a delusion, whether one is religious or secular. For many religious interveners, the challenge may be that one comes with a recognized different belief system, but must know how to remain true to one’s own worldview without imposing it on the other. No intervener can be effective when coming with an attitude of superiority. “*Welcoming the Other*” means coming as equals to address a common problem. As committed multi-faith conflict transformers, we must enter any encounter, with extremists or their co-religionists, asking how to dialogue constructively over fundamental issues arising out of differing worldviews.

9 Steele, 2013.

10 Ibid.



- › *The potential added value of a faith perspective:* Often forgotten, in this debate, is the fact that religious understandings of truth are primarily experiential and relational, not rational or ideological. Most religious traditions affirm that truth is fundamentally understood to be found in relationship; only secondarily is it framed in abstract conception (what we call theology or doctrine). This puts the emphasis on values of faithfulness, reliability, and fidelity, rather than on accuracy of knowledge. Furthermore, each religious tradition does include an understanding of relational truth that is rooted beyond an exclusive human community. Can this oneness with the divine, or with humanity, help to inform a given community's perspective on truth and enmity, even in the context of violent conflict?
- › *Building solidarity on the "other's" terms:* Utilizing wisdom from their own traditions to affirm common values, when possible, or to raise questions and pose alternative viewpoints. The challenge is to use their own frame of reference to stimulate creative exploration regarding faith-based peacebuilding. How do they understand justice? Hospitality? Apology? Reconciliation? What do they believe their faith requires them to do as a religious community? What religious assets does their faith provide for peacebuilding? Within all religious traditions, there are elements of the tradition that can be used to stretch believer's perceptions. If done with sensitivity, it is possible to help believers of all kinds to assess the degree to which their current attitudes or behavior is consistent with their espoused values.

If religious interveners can bridge the ideological divide by facilitating understanding of another's perspective, holding one's own in check, reaffirming a faith-based focus on "relational truth," building solidarity using the wisdom of "others" traditions, and stimulating evaluation of the congruence between values and behavior, then one has begun to handle a values conflict effectively. One will, then, be better able to assist parties in conflict to re-perceive the situation, re-conceptualize possibilities, re-align primary commitments, reframe identity, and begin the process of reconciliation.

III. A CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK FOR RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Conflict transformation is a means of reconciling people and relationships, who then work together non-violently to resolve problems and disputes, and facilitate systemic changes in unjust and violence-inducing social structures.¹¹

There are numerous peacebuilding roles which have been identified and used by a variety of conflict interveners, including faith-based actors. Identifying the typical stages and enumerating the variety of roles are important starting points in the effort to assess which exactly is the best approach to conflict transformation in a given context. However, we must still recognize that the stages through which particular conflicts progress will be influenced by the specific type of conflict, the exact security needs,

¹¹ Adaptation of Lederach, John Paul, 1997.

the actors involved, the identity formation process, and the role played by all the conflict drivers. Similarly, each peacebuilding role must be assessed in terms of the relevant function it can play (depending on the goal deemed appropriate) in a given stage of the conflict, which components of the conflict it can best address, and what adaptations need to be considered due to geographic location and specific culture and values of a given society or faith tradition.

Designing a clear roadmap for effective conflict transformation that can be applicable around the world requires an easily understood framework that still recognizes all this complexity. The conflict transformation assessment strategy will address the question of determining the appropriate expression of a given peacebuilding role within a particular stage of conflict.

TYPICAL STAGES IN THE LIFE-CYCLE OF A CONFLICT

No two conflicts progress in the same way, yet there are identifiable stages through which most social conflicts progress.¹² Describing these stages helps to identify appropriate conflict transformation roles and related strategies to fulfill these roles.

The first stage in the life-cycle of conflict is *latent conflict*, or *stable and unstable peace*¹³ where injustices and gross imbalances of power are present but have not yet surfaced. The second stage is confrontation or *unstable peace*. If confrontations are not stopped immediately they tend to escalate and become intractable. Confrontation may be followed by *escalation* or *crisis/war*, which can become very destructive. Escalation, however, cannot continue indefinitely. De-escalation can be temporary or can be part of a broader trend toward settlement or resolution. Or escalation may lead to a stalemate, a situation in which neither side can win. But which often presents an ideal opportunity for negotiation and a potential settlement.¹⁴ The final stage is the post-conflict stage or *unstable and stable peace*, when violence has ceased.

THE BROAD SPECTRUM OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND PEACEBUILDING ROLES

In the interest of designing an easily understood framework for conflict transformation, we will examine six fairly broad categories of peacebuilding roles: (1) observation and witness, (2) education and formation, (3) advocacy and empowerment, (4) facilitated dialogue and reconciliation, (5) arbitration, mediation and facilitated problem solving, and (6) social construction and maintenance.¹⁵

1. **Observation and witness** entail being a vigilant presence in a conflict situation, one that is designed to prevent, report violence and other forms of injustice, to reduce the likelihood of violence, and transform unjust situations. Far from being a passive role, the observer is frequently called upon to be physically present, at least temporarily, amidst people who face possible or actual

¹² This brief analysis is drawn from the Preparatory Document for the Conflict Transformation Commission of the Seventh World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* (1999) drafted by Cynthia Sampson.

¹³ Michael Lund depicts the life cycle of ethno-religious conflict using a similar bell-shaped curve in which the intensity of a conflict (the vertical axis) is traced in relation to its duration (the horizontal axis). He proposes that the cycle starts with durable peace, goes up to stable peace, then unstable peace, crisis and war at the top of the curve. The cycle then continues down the curve in reverse order – crisis, unstable peace, stable peace and durable peace.

¹⁴ Kriesberg, Louis. 2003. "Escalation and Institutionalization Stages."

¹⁵ Ayindo, Isolio and Steele, 2010; Steele, 2008, "Reconciliation Strategies in Iraq;" Steele, 2008 "An Introductory Overview to Faith-Based Peacebuilding;" and Steele, 2013.



danger. Observer activities can include: conflict assessment efforts, fact-finding missions, early warning mechanisms, accompaniment of people in danger, monitoring of conflict/cease-fires, human rights abuses, and election processes, being a supporting presence during formal negotiations, silent meditation, standing with people in grief, artistic expressions that bridge cultural/religious divides and rituals of healing.

2. **Education and formation** involve laying the foundation for transforming an unjust and violent conflict into a just peace. It requires internalizing the peace-related values and inculcation of ethical behavior inherent within one's spiritual tradition. This requires knowledge of the specific tradition as well as a methodology that emerges from the faith experience of the believers and applies to all peoples in the conflict context. In order to adequately prepare a society for peacebuilding, faith-based actors can provide educational activities that will:

- › *Raise the conscience* of the population regarding inequities or perceptions of parties to the conflict;
- › *Develop the skills* necessary to perform other conflict intervention roles and train people in peace-building efforts (such as mediation, conciliation, facilitated dialogue, advocacy, nonviolent action, etc.);
- › *Nourish the growth of spiritual values* that can provide moral direction for the society;
- › *Increase awareness and understanding* of other faith traditions;
- › *Promote healing* through proclamations, rituals of worship, prayer, confession, forgiveness, and other faith practices.

3. **Advocacy and empowerment** involve a commitment to promote, support or defend the cause of a just peace in the eyes of the wider community and/or one or more of the parties in conflict. But in many religious traditions, the advocate is also called to empower these groups to achieve a just peace.

- › *Party advocacy* exists when one takes the side of a particular party to the conflict. Frequently this is done on behalf of the perceived weaker party in order to create a more equitable balance of power.
- › *Outcome advocacy* exists when one selects a particular outcome to the conflict as the most desirable and attempts to create an environment in which this solution will be adopted. This form of advocacy is often used to pursue justice, but can also be used to promote the reduction of violence. One can support a disarmament campaign as well as human rights.
- › *Process advocacy* exists when one presses for acceptance of a particular procedure for resolving a conflict. One could advocate mediation or arbitration; one could focus on the particular crisis or try to address the underlying structural inequities within the society.

The methodology used by any actors for each type of advocacy can include a variety of confrontational activities such as protests, petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, and other acts of civil disobedience, as well as less confrontational methods like public statements, speeches/ preaching, letters, lobbying, fasting, and engaging in personal conversation. Also many religious groups issue statements. And some of these activities are the outcome when faith-based actors, performing other roles, engage in activities like prayer meetings or faith-based educational events.

Within many religious traditions, there is also:

- › *Nonviolent advocacy* that includes
 - › *Non-resistance* – where justice is requested, but not demanded;
 - › *Non-coercive resistance* – where justice is demanded, but moral persuasion rather than coercion is the approved means (central to notable faith-based conflict transformers such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and others);
 - › *Coercive resistance* – which involves a limited show of non-violent force (e.g., support for sanctions, indictments by courts/tribunals, or calling for nonviolent police protection). Such activities are used and justified by some faith-based actors, especially when power is concentrated on one side of the conflict in order to balance the power relationship before a just solution can be achieved.

4. **Facilitated dialogue and reconciliation** are intermediary roles focused on relationship building. Reconciliation involves bringing together people or groups of people who have been alienated from one another due to distrust, animosity, and sometimes hostility and aggression. The goal is to build trust and confidence which will help parties in conflict to overcome barriers and experience healing. It involves providing a channel of communication, one that sometimes has to begin by carrying messages between parties that are either unwilling or unable to meet. When possible, however, it is advantageous to create some kind of dialogue process. Building effective dialogue requires facilitating a “learning conversation,” the kind of story-telling in which each party has something to offer and each party has something to learn. It requires active and empathetic listening, handling emotions constructively, clarifying and correcting perceptions in order to facilitate the sharing of narratives.

The journey of reconciliation requires an encounter with oneself as well as with the “other.” It begins by dealing with all the grievances of the past, but then must shift the participants’ focus to creating a better future. In a context where there has been excessive violence, the facilitator must start by empathizing with the suffering of all parties, then assist hurt and victimized people to acknowledge their own prejudices, stereotypes and misperceptions, and help all parties to overcome a revenge mentality. Such a reconciliation process involves a number of steps.

5. **Arbitration, mediation and facilitated problem solving** are intermediary roles focused on dispute resolution and, sometimes, structural change. These roles are listed in order of the degree of influence the third party has over the outcome.
 - › *Arbitration* gives the third party complete control over the outcome. The arbitrator is very involved with the parties, going through many of the steps a mediator will take, but commitment to a final decision is in the hands of the arbitrator.
 - › *Mediation* places the third party in charge of a process designed to help the conflicted parties come to a decision. Effective mediation will assist the parties to come to a decision themselves. Successful mediation usually begins with some form of relationship building, with the mediator ensuring a safe environment and encouraging the sharing of narratives.



- › *Facilitated problem solving*¹⁶ is a role in which the third party leads a brainstorming process which is designed to generate a number of good options for the parties in conflict to consider, but stops short of any decision to commit. It is often private, confidential, off-the-record, and non-binding, therefore increasing the likelihood of creativity and risk-taking. The participants in the process are often not the official representatives of the conflicted parties, but are usually well respected people of influence.

6. **Social construction and maintenance** involves focusing on structural social and political conditions throughout all the stages of conflict.¹⁷ Meeting such needs necessitates interaction with a broad spectrum of social institutions, including those responsible for *security, social and economic well-being, and governance and civic participation*.

Faith-based actors are in a primary position to fulfill all these roles. The mandates of most religious communities include a call to serve those most vulnerable. In the developing world, they already constitute the first line of response, have the most established and locally-led social infrastructure, are present throughout societies, and are committed long-term. For these reasons, they have unparalleled capacity to function as comprehensive and adaptable service providers, especially if they are part of a network of multi-faith and secular partners. Therefore, it is critically important to empower faith-based working groups to work with community mobilization efforts or existing community based organizations. The groups could be formed around specific concerns, or within specific localities, or to include specific identity groups. Examples of faith-based groups involved in such activity are numerous – refugee/IDP return, emergency aid distribution, business corruption, role of religion in schools, election monitoring, unbiased media, disarmament/demobilization/reintegration, community policing, early warning/early response mechanisms, rebuilding/repairing places of worship, prison reform – the list of possibilities is as infinite as people’s imaginations.

16 Faith-based actors are more likely to function in the problem solving role when dealing with high-level national and international disputes. In these cases, the religious groups or individuals function in what is called “track 2” diplomacy which parallels and supports the official “track 1” negotiations. Ecumenical and inter-religious roundtables that produce joint statements can potentially function in this capacity, depending on the quality of their relationships with “track 1” decision makers, as well as the quality of their recommendations and their strategy to promote their acceptance. Occasionally this problem solving process gains enough prominence that it contributes directly to official diplomacy and is then referred to as “track 1 ½.” Very occasionally, faith-based actors have actually functioned as the official mediators in hi-level, “track 1” negotiation. It is much more common, however, for faith-based actors to mediate more local conflicts, including ethnic, tribal, religious, organizational, family, etc. In some cultures, especially those in which religious leaders carry great authority, this mediation role, as well as arbitration, are very common.

17 Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2002. For more extensive treatment of this role, see the web link available in the listing of sources, rather than appendices to this paper.

IV. A ROADMAP FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The task now is to construct a framework that can assist religious communities and their leaders from any faith tradition, anywhere in the world, to evaluate the complexity of all the considerations presented thus far and gain insight into the best approach to conflict transformation in a particular setting. To accomplish this, we will introduce a table comparing the two major factors – peacebuilding roles and stages of conflict (*see pages 38–39*).

In each box within the table, examples of concrete suggestions are presented regarding which particular functions of a given role (vertical axis) might best fit a particular stage (horizontal axis). Note that some formulation of every role can be useful at any stage. For example, reconciliation efforts can be effective throughout the life cycle of a conflict, though assessment of the best approach must consider the current life experience of participants. In the context of war or post-violence, the levels of trauma and grievance will likely affect both aims and process. Even some functions of one role are mentioned in more than one box, indicating that even specific tasks within roles might be adapted to be used in more than one stage.

Many tasks listed in the table are only suggested and do not represent an exhaustive list.

V. MOBILIZING MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS ASSETS

The last part of this section suggests a process by which faith-based actor(s) might assess their own resources in order to effectively perform their roles or functions at a given stage of a particular conflict. We will look in general at the types of specific assets religious actors bring to the task of peacebuilding, examine the assets brought and the role that the *RfP* network can play in mobilizing and equipping the membership of its affiliates for conflict prevention and transformation. Throughout, we must address this through the collaborative lens of “*Welcoming the Other*.”

RELIGIOUS ASSETS

Religious actors can function as effective peacebuilders in a variety of roles due to important spiritual, moral, and social assets many hold in common. Through their spiritual perspective, faith communities provide many with a sense of meaning and belonging, a vision for society that includes the well-being of all, norms and practices that promise and promote healing and restoration, and the motivation and encouragement that can come with a sense of calling. Religious leaders, in particular, can use these assets to provide and interpret a faith-based value system that can undergird attitudinal and behavioral transformation. The moral assets of religious communities flow from this spiritual grounding. The faith-based value system provides the believers with a moral code which members of the faith community can apply to their own lives, articulate publically and, thereby, encourage moral responsibility on the part of others – from public authorities to those who have violated the well-being of others.



PEACEBUILDING ROLES AND STAGES OF CONFLICT

Roles	Stable & Unstable Peace / Latent Conflict	Crisis & War / Conflict Escalation	Unstable & Stable Peace / Dispute Settlement or Post-conflict Peacebuilding
Observation & Witness	Creating early warning mechanisms; accompanying people in danger and protecting property; monitoring elections; conflict assessment to help prevent future violence; leading peace prayers & other religious rituals.	Creating early warning mechanisms; reporting violence; accompanying people in danger; participating in rituals of grief and healing; providing trauma counseling and a supportive presence during negotiations; monitoring elections; leading peace prayers & other religious rituals.	Monitoring ceasefires; Fact-finding missions to collect information about previous incidents of violence; conflict assessment to help prevent reoccurrence of violence.
Education & Formation	Provide joint cultural activities; create established training programs that help develop other peacebuilding skills, especially faith-based conflict prevention; raise consciousness of people regarding injustices in society; develop education programs that encourage religious communities to examine values from a faith-based perspective; find ways to get information & perspectives shared.	Lead short training sessions that assist people to develop other peacebuilding skills, especially faith-based conflict transformation; find ways to get information & perspectives shared when there is not easy access to the other side; preaching at critical moments in negotiations or amidst tensions; education of population about consequences of war.	Create /distribute documents that assist in post-war rebuilding; educate about peace agreements and provide information that informs people about issues at stake in public referenda; provide joint cultural activities; create training programs that help develop the skills to perform other roles, especially faith-based conflict transformation.
Advocacy & Empowerment	Participate in petitions, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, to advocate for social and political change; advocate for constructive intervention by outside actors; formulate peace declarations & gain acceptance by all stakeholders.	Advocate for, and empower, leaders from the parties in conflict to begin negotiations; advocate for constructive intervention by outside actors; participate in fasting by faith-based-group to call attention to victimized people; formulate peace declarations & gain acceptance by all stakeholders; advocate for specific issues of transparency and justice, e.g., release of child soldiers; engage in media advocacy.	Advocate for either retributive justice (arrest of war criminals) or restorative justice – (establishment of truth and reconciliation commission); empower a working group, commission, task force, etc. to implement programs that address specific social justice issue; formulate peace declarations & gain acceptance by all stakeholders; advocate for constructive intervention by outside actors.

Roles	Stable & Unstable Peace / Latent Conflict	Crisis & War / Conflict Escalation	Unstable & Stable Peace / Dispute Settlement or Post-conflict Peacebuilding
Facilitated Dialogue & Reconciliation	Encourage/lead sessions of dialogue so that people from different religions will be informed of one another and others' faith; assist factions within one party to discuss their difference in a way that promotes understanding and eases tensions; carry messages between two parties in conflict.	Establish dialogue processes that help people share their stories of suffering to create better understanding and acknowledgment of others' experience; assist factions within one party to discuss differences in a way that promotes understanding and eases tensions; carry messages between two parties in conflict.	Establishing local dialogue processes that help people share their stories of suffering in order to assist in healing and promote bonds between people from conflicted groups; create memorials and lead rituals that enable healing of the past and encourage future cooperation; help establish, lead or participate in a truth and reconciliation commissions at national, regional, or local levels.
Arbitration, Mediation & Facilitated Problem Solving	Mediate or arbitrate local conflicts that have not yet become violent; participate in problem solving sessions to address issues of injustice, unmet needs, non-violent disputes; facilitate roundtables at local, regional and national levels.	Set up, or participate in, "track 2" diplomacy process with brainstorming; share possible options to end the conflict, or at least deal effectively with some parts of it; mediate or arbitrate local disputes that arise due to a tense environment and unresolved larger issues.	Mediate or arbitrate local conflicts that are no longer violent; participate in problem solving sessions to address issues of injustice, unmet needs, or simmering, non-violent disputes; facilitate roundtables at local, regional and national levels.
Social Construction & Maintenance	Work on political reform to correct some injustices in society; form working groups, composed of persons from different identity groups, who agree to develop and implement action plans to address a specific social structure problem.	Assist in emergency relief efforts, such as providing basic services to refugees and IDPs; enhance protection for those who are most vulnerable; work on political reform to correct some of the injustices in society; form working groups, composed of persons from different identity groups, who agree to develop and implement action plans to address a specific social structure problem.	Assist in development projects that aid people in refugee and IDP camps to find more lasting, permanent solutions to meet their needs; work on political reform which will correct some of the injustices in society; form working groups, composed of persons from previously conflicted parties, who agree to develop and implement action plans to address a specific social structure problem; support neighborhood peace associations.



Religious leaders, especially, have the power and opportunity to share, instruct, and encourage the practice of this moral framework, drawn from their faith tradition, which delegitimizes violence, promotes non-violence and violence prevention, and provides resources with which whole communities can find and experience the right balance between accountability and acceptance.

Finally, it is the social assets of faith communities that provide the social infrastructure necessary to promote the spiritual vision and moral values within the larger society. Religious communities in most of the world are familiar and often trusted institutions that impact many lives and have the potential to provide space for social cohesion. They are at the center of communal life throughout all the stages of peace or conflict. The social assets, when combined with the other two, provide the leaders of faith communities with both the platform and the authority to be heard. Many of these leaders serve their communities for long periods of time. They are frequently closer to their people than many politicians and government personnel, giving them a wider and deeper reach into the hearts and lives of their communities. For this reason, they are in a unique position to listen and interpret, to encourage and challenge, to instruct and promote. Religious leaders have the vision, authority, and the tools to act as information processors who can dispel rumors, correct perception, and help their people to re-perceive the possibilities for peaceful coexistence.

While all of the assets listed above are, in some form, shared among the various faith communities, “*Welcoming the Other*” requires that we acknowledge that there are differences and look carefully and critically at the influence of the spiritual foundations and historical practices of each tradition. Understanding the lens used by other faiths is essential either when the other traditions are stakeholders in the conflict or partners in a peacebuilding intervention effort. Multi-faith collaboration requires such an inventory. Despite commonality of many overall values (e.g., charity, hospitality, or justice), it is often the distinctive perspectives, histories, and practices that inform and resonate with one’s own faith community and, at times, raise questions and even disagreements in the minds of others. Scott Thomas points out that appeals to moral values within religious traditions are not free-floating propositions. He contends that faith communities do not exert influence merely through generalized ethical frameworks that are proposed universally, but through the particular practices that demonstrate and give meaning to those frameworks. Instead of proposing “thin practices,” based on common, general values, he calls for “thick practices,” shaped by the particular meanings given to those values by specific faith communities and exemplified by its own framers and practitioners.¹⁸ For this reason, along with an acknowledgment that faith communities are not immune from universal human fallibility, we must examine both assets and challenges of each tradition.

MECHANISMS FOR MOBILIZING AND EQUIPPING THE *RELIGIONS FOR PEACE* NETWORK

While recognizing diversity and the challenges it brings, *RfP* operates with the firm belief that the efforts of individual religious communities are made vastly more effective through multi-religious cooperation. Religious communities working together can be powerful actors to prevent violence before it erupts, diffuse conflict when it occurs, and lead their communities to rebuild war-torn societies. This mission statement is rooted in the acceptance, by representatives from all the world’s major faith traditions, of a declaration of common values, as stated in the *Kyoto Declaration* made at the 8th World Assembly of *Religions for Peace* in 2006:

¹⁸ Thomas, 2005.

“ We share a conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, and the equality and dignity of all human beings. We affirm the sacredness of the individual person and the importance of his or her freedom of conscience. We are committed to the ethical values and attitudes commonly shared by our religious traditions. We uphold the value of life manifest in human community and in all creation. We acknowledge the importance of the environment to sustain life for the human family. We realize that human power is neither self-sufficient nor absolute, and that the spirit of love, compassion, selflessness, and the force of inner truthfulness ultimately have greater power than prejudice, hate, enmity or violence.

Though stated in general terms, with attention needed to the particularities of the various traditions, this statement can be used as a basis for developing multi-religious assets. Cooperation, based on shared values, even broadly defined ones, can motivate committed, diverse religious communities to align around common challenges to peace. Such a commitment offers a creative opportunity to take advantage of complimentary assets and face even daunting challenges. “*Welcoming the Other*” amidst diversity is potentially more powerful, both symbolically and substantively, than the efforts of individual religious groups acting alone.

RfP has an extensive network of global, regional, national and local affiliates with extensive reach into societies around the world, the capacity to equip and mobilize all these levels, and a history of significant success in building multi-religious platforms for conflict prevention and transformation. With its diversity of institutional forms, *RfP* can work discretely through local structures in tense situations or reach masses of people through its own network and its relationships with other actors. It can provide solidarity visits to local partners in zones of conflict and it can develop regional and global peacebuilding strategies. With this scope of capacity, the *RfP* network is well positioned to follow-up any initiatives begun at the 9th World Assembly. Such follow-up will be a critical component in supporting the ongoing analysis and implementation necessary to foster sustainable change. Only long-term, well-developed and resourced efforts will have lasting impact.

In particular, *RfP* can add its multi-religious assets to the task of performing each of the six peacebuilding roles described in this paper and portrayed in the Conflict Transformation Grid. A few suggestions are offered here, not as an exhaustive list, but as a stimulus for further discussion and brainstorming.



VI. CONCLUSIONS

The conflict transformation work of the RfP network is a collaborative work, a work that takes place where religious communities exist. It is a common labor that proceeds with respect for the ways that religious communities can organize themselves for common action on local, national, regional and international levels. Representatives of each religious community work together to take common action on common problems, but in ways that respect the different religious identities of one another. In cooperation, we surrender nothing of the deepest inner impulse of our beliefs and spiritualities, but we express our commitments in action together. Religious communities working together to transform conflict demonstrates the largely untapped power of multi-religious cooperation. The variety of concrete and practical methodologies presented here, and illustrated in the case studies, can serve to open the horizons of possibilities for this collaboration.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- › *Which security needs do you see as most important within the society where you live and/or work?*
- › *What values are of central importance to conflicted groups in your society? What happens when fundamental values and identities are threatened?*
- › *How would you propose to help vulnerable groups in your society to reframe their identities, taking initial steps toward building bridges?*
- › *What potential is there for the various religious communities to affirm their own tradition and values, yet still “Welcome the Other?”*
- › *How well does your faith community welcome the “other” that comes from a community in which extremism is embedded?*
- › *What added value can multi-religious collaboration bring to the task of conflict prevention or transformation in societies affected by extremist religion?*
- › *What do you think is most necessary in order to “Welcome the Other” as a partner in conflict prevention and transformation?*
- › *What universal religious assets would you emphasize?*
- › *How would you approach utilizing the assets and confronting the challenges inherent with specific faith traditions? Is there any one tradition that would be most difficult for you?*
- › *What do you think are the most important next steps in mobilizing and equipping the Religions for Peace Network? Work on a certain level? Support for implementing certain roles? Building institutional capacity?*
- › *What are the attitudes, assumptions, perceptions and biases that prevent one from being a welcoming ideological bridge builder?*

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