



# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT *with* RELIGION *and* FAITH *in the* 21ST CENTURY

## Youth Engagement with Religion and Faith in the 21st Century

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### INTRODUCTION

The similarities and causes of conflict around many parts of the world have seemingly been characterized by religious conflict, or rather by tensions that are justified as religious (Uergensmeyer, 2003). The 9/11 attacks in the US simply globalized awareness of such reality (Smock, 2002b). Historically, rooted strife between religions is evident within Africa, Asia, most recently in the news, the on-going reeducation of Muslim in Xinjiang internment camps. China, in the ideology of “Peace by any means necessary” engages with tools like “vocational education” training centers that has sought to indoctrinate Uygur Muslims since 2017.<sup>1</sup> This indoctrination of youth and the associated traumas of it could possibly trigger retaliation. While Huntington (1996) purports that contemporary conflicts are between geographic civilizations along religious lines, the epistemology is that tensions do originate within everyday local contexts as well. Such normative of locality are often centralized by an

ideology orchestrated by the statistical misappropriate pool of groups in formative years, who are often marginalized and empowered disingenuously for the selfish and myopic agenda via religious context to inflict harm and escalate hostilities.

The interconnectedness between religion and violence can be demystified by understanding how religious ideas are often employed to instill religious commitment, categorize resistance, or even provoke martyrdom (Hall, 2003). Some scholars would pose that religion projects its inherent social boundaries and could be used to inflict violence on groups who differ from perceived ideology. Adherents of such violence often justify retaliation if their identity is threatened or intimidated. According to Wellman and Tokuno’s (2004, p. 380) view, conflict is necessary to create and nurture a religion’s identity, therefore it is reckless to assert that religion seeks peace. Such context can be monitored and investigated, rethinking its morality and ethics of engagement.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT

### *Advocacy and the escalation/ de-escalation tool for peacebuilding through religion*

Lexical hypotheses argue that the dimension at which individuals engage and interact within often influences the overall treatment of others. The psychology of such a case is a prerequisite for total transformative change and the psychology of engagement.

Engagement as a tool for peace advocacy isn't limited to character of its novel. Rather it seeks the facilitation process of engagement and intricacies which exposes the complexities and realities of such an approach.

Foundation and reason need to adhere to boundaries and social context of instigators and seek level-ground and pessimism in adoption of construct and morals. The approach of peacebuilding seemingly develops neutral atmospheres that often doesn't demonize the agenda of stakeholders within the context of war, peacebuilders conscientiousness and sensitivity of possible provocation and exaction of approach the context of religion with complexities taboos to dialogue upon. The psychology of engagement and advocacy for peacebuilding through religion cannot be singular as it seeks the approval and acceptance of groups and parties to a structure of violence. The latter is solely dependent on the psychosocial structure of its ethics and morals, of which formative years are strategically transformed and observe as a channel to escalate hostilities at the expense of humanitarian action. Driven by thinkers and practitioners involved in interfaith efforts who usually employ religion as an advocacy tool has in recent years increased, due to the emergence of religious conflict around the world. These developments often influence the psychology of formative years and indoctrinate people and ideologies that inflict harm and escalate hostilities. In this sense, recent efforts to understand other religious

traditions are a continuation of this ethos, which is the core of peace-building, environmentalism and humanitarianism.

At one level, this article contributes to the symposium's thematic focus on youth studies by looking at interfaith dialogue as a means of non-violence. This article argues that interfaith dialogue does not have to begin and end in theological discussions. In the case of critics, the significance of interfaith dialogue revolves around the *person* (and not his or her religion), *friendships*, and *collective participation in the community*. In view of these three aspects, this article adheres to the argument that interfaith is both a "living dialogue" and a "dialogue of cooperation" (Haney, 2009).

Faith and religion can be engaged to either escalate or de-escalate violence, as it is prerequisite for morality which often justifies and demonizes violence. It is vital to debate how interfaith dialogue can reshape pervading stereotypes about other religions and the changing of societies in the context of youth, formation and morality.

Peace-building concepts in interfaith dialogue can contribute to transforming certain misconceptions about religion and faith. According to Watanabe (2008) who estimates that the religious perception of worldviews could be dynamic. Such claims are dauntingly reflective in the narrative that forms morals and actions, misinterpreting the value of religion and faith by engaging in confrontation that exercises certain ideologies, such complexities inform violence and possibly influence perceptions as they migrate and interact.

The norms and ideologies that often were considered provocative in previous generations are becoming fluid in thought and often tagged by liberals and radicals alike, naïve of the margins that should build upon the gap of understanding and inequalities amongst us.

## MODELS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Revisiting the basics as it may be, woke literature demonstrates that interfaith dialogue has taken on different approaches and reflections, which are seemingly contingent on the needs of local contexts of “ownership.” Thus, interfaith dialogue has been conceptualized in various forms and experimentations including facilitating workshops, community organizing, and even political peace-building (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Tyagananda, 2011).

### *Literature conceptions*

An important collection of writings, informed by the Institute of Peace in Washington (Smock, 2002) mainly written by practitioners reflects on case-studies of interfaith efforts around the world. Collaborating for example, with religious stakeholders in the former Yugoslavia, suggests that peace-building stakeholders can take on the different roles of the observer, educator, advocate, and intermediary, without engaging youths, is key to fostering its sustainability and development. Peacebuilding as an effort aims to prevent war, resolve existing conflicts, and help in postwar reconstruction. Such literature disagrees with the architecture of peacebuilding, undermining the role of youth in neutralizing hostilities, such debates are perceptual and cannot inform narratives.

Liechty (2002) proposes mitigation as an approach to temper the existing proclivities between generations that expose certain vulnerabilities as to the exclusion in structural transformation and resentment of youths during programs that influence their environment without inclusivity. To Liechty (2002, p. 94), mitigation is the “capacity to lessen or eliminate possible negative outcomes of a belief, commitment, or action while still upholding it.” Changes in how religious activities are carried out, for example, can be introduced to avoid offending the sensibilities of other religious individuals.

**Religion for Peace Initiative (RPI):** Global reach lies in being able to partner with grassroots organizations in order to facilitate dialogue through the methodology of appreciative inquiry (AI). Instead of focusing on problems that need to be resolved, AI first invites participants to value personal experiences and diverse religious traditions as a way of building lasting interpersonal relationships. That these writings have been written by practitioners and engage academics is a possible explanation for the emphasis on models or guidelines that, while descriptive in literature, are also prescriptive in the end. In such psychology, Interfaith, as a field of inquiry marries both empirical and applied research.

### *Limitations*

Although the literature on youth engaging in interfaith dialogue has been extensive, emphasis has mainly been on possible models that could be effectively based on the experiences of different thinkers and practitioners who seek alternatively to unify and build relationships. This has two underpinning considerations, at one level, the discussions primarily deal with an advocacy approach and how they can be used, negotiated or mitigated.

### *Psychology*

Single lateral of the discussion calls for a change to psychological whereas the other assumes that differences will always be present, and so the attitudes toward interfaith need to be properly addressed.

Encoding and decoding of intelligence is enabled through listening and assimilation, either good or faulty content. It is the mind that provokes actions and perceptions are independent opinions which are inherently demystified by narrative inculcated over time, religion can influence the psychology of faith from teachings and ideology, tools implored by extremist and fanatics, such trauma disrupt the dogma of faithful’s and often justifies the use of

coercion. Perchance this emphasis on psychology reshaping is explained by the fact that the typical interfaith activist has a religious background. In addition, religion, from a rationale point of view, is to understand in these contexts as a set of beliefs. Asad (1993) has taken note of this inadequacy in the sociology and anthropology of religion. Reflecting on our background as youth in society, we contend that religion needs to be understood also in terms of social relationships (Davie, 2007).

From this point of view, interfaith dialogue becomes a process of forging friendships first and foremost. The tenants for peacebuilding cannot be exhausted neither have it been over-flocked, interfaith dialogue gives room for alternative thinking, believing in the adherence of thought should be tailored in aligning to the context of relationship, to understand what is being accepted, using a framework that facilitates peace in a 'perpetual approach' which fosters transformation and sensitizes on humanitarian, should reflect in proactive cautions to validate and disrupt violence.

### **Peace-building Humanitarianism and Environment, conscious connectivity**

According to Johan Galtung, conceptualizing peace-building as the process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict, through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation (Galtung 1992) An agenda for Peace 1992, the principle of peace emphasis on building and acknowledging the essence of the foundation, roots, and walls, concepts to transformation, and peace. This does not annihilate groups or shelter parties only. It approaches latent root-causes from a normative, ethical and moral point of subjection.

It is not predicated on the approval of egos and identity. Neither does it conform to the standards of societal norms, rather it develops a divergent approach; alternative to address deep-rooted issues which often

stir up agitations and violence seeks a non-violent facilitative approach to resolve misunderstandings amicably. It is reflective, anticipative, neutral, seeking equity in its approach and respect for all parties and groups embedded in peace-and truth-telling. Often emotionally intelligent with the perception free, which doesn't seek to contend nor intimidate, it yearns for love, harmony, and kindness, it is the intricacies by which the architecture of the global index for humanitarian need be restructured.

Alternatives peace-building prerequisites persist based on simple principle such as compromise, tolerance, accommodation, dialogue, mediation, which should be, non-adversarial meditative in process and approach. It is holistic and applicable to all professions, philosophies and psychologies of the mind that is interconnected to environment and humanness seeking the welfare of each other as we sojourn in a conundrum of moving sands. Youth must learn to identify and sympathize with struggles, break-barriers and form forums to dialogue and transform our indulgence in the escalation and de-escalation of war, that our perception and ideology be tolerable and compromising to the era of signs desirable for the growth and change of the global village.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As contemporaries, we are the fabrics of the social and cultural dynamics of global politics. As we observe, write, and deliberate, one must make covenants to protect those after us, that we leave the world at least better than we met it; through education, love, and justice.

Religion is a personal relationship, which need not complicate the beauty of our diversity; it is not religion that is biased but the practitioners and interpreters of the gospel. What can we give that is infinite and not finite should be the question, how can we as youth align to a unification of direction and purpose?

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## ENDNOTES

1 “China: Free Xinjiang ‘Political Education’ Detainees”. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved 10 September 2017.

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