Engaging Religious Communities in Human Rights

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Abstract

There is an urgent need for methods by which people and communities of faith peacebuilding and human rights development. This paper argues for a holistic understanding of peacebuilding that includes security of life, a guarantee of subsistence, and the pursuit of other fundamental human rights. This need is especially acute in countries of rising instability or post-conflict rebuilding. More and more countries face a downward spiral of instability even though many leaders and bodies seek to reverse this trend. Sadly, even among those countries that emerge from conflict, one-half revert to conflict within five years. Hence the question this paper addresses is, "How shall people and communities of religious conviction be effectively engaged in a peacebuilding and human rights process?"

This people factor is too little understood, even though the role of citizens in transitional states has long been acknowledged as essential for just and sustainable change. For peace accords and international conventions, in and of themselves, do not make peace or deliver human rights. Neither does the arrival of international peacekeepers nor the speeches of clerics and political leaders. While these developments are helpful stimuli, real human peace and security derives from community-based initiatives that create a "positive deviance" for peaceable, rights-oriented living vis-à-vis governments and other forces.

Thus this paper will hypothesize a methodology whereby citizens engage religious institutions, governments (local and national), and international change agents to transform conflict into promising peace and rights. It will identify common peacebuilding principles operating across sectors of human development, security, and rights-oriented work. These sectors may include at least the following: health, conservation, education, security, labor, spirituality, and corporate social responsibility.

This paper also seeks to hone a typology of human rights and peacebuilding challenges facing countries of instability and post-conflict rebuilding. Categories may include at least the following: stages and types of conflict, fragile and failed states, overlooked populations, ethnic and racial discrimination, transnational politics and justice, natural resource and wealth distribution, and social capital.

Keywords: Religious Communities; Peacemaking process; Partnership; Religious organizations; Countries in crisis.

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How shall religious communities engage human rights, just development, and peacebuilding? Academically and religiously motivated students pose this question in the two milieux where I teach and learn. Their question begs an age-old theodicy: "Can God be just and merciful yet condone abuse of human rights? Where is God when both society and state heap pain upon vulnerable populations?" Drawing on shared religious traditions, there is promise in the ancient wisdom literature of Job, whose understanding of humanity and God is severely tested. His theodicy turns on empathy – the ability to identify with the experience and perspective of people situated differently than oneself. Job models empathy that may motivate our present-day religious human rights endeavors.

If religious communities are to further human rights, they need transcendent humility and empathy, but there is a paradox. Rather than seeking relations and understanding among others, many religious communities define themselves and God's grace in exclusive terms. They differentiate themselves in opposition to others. They shy from outside critique. And they limit "community" to being nothing larger or more promising than what they presume to know of themselves and others.

Religious communities, therefore, must bridge beyond their bonded definitions of self if they are to plumb the truth claims of their own faith. Social capital – "the norms and social relations embedded in the social structures of society that enable people to coordinate action and to achieve desired goals" – causes some societies to function well, which a lack of social capital causes others to face rising instability or failure.[1] Bonded communities based on religion, ethnicity, nationalism, or culturally-bound knowledge tend to reinforce boundaries and fears of unknown others. There is some positive gain to this, for social capital enables a well-bonded community to nurture its own constructs of mutual assistance, association, and a common good. If a well-bonded group can, however, engage other bonded communities, it has the potential to bridge social capital toward a new framework for learning and perhaps a greater common good. Bridging communities may thereby attain *metanoia* – fresh normative thinking and behavior.

While members within a bonded community have the potential to build association and democratization for the sake of a given group, the

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1. See: Field 2003; Narayan, 2003.

flip side is that this shared knowledge and relations may become exclusivist and communitarian. Alternatively, bonded communities that seek to bridge with others may enjoy evolutionary learning that unites diverse peoples. Political philosophers, human ecologists, and botanists see this happening in borderlands or "ecotones." These are regions where two diverse ecological communities meet, be they a wood and a meadow, or two different cultures, two religions, black and white, male and female, oneself and another. New speciation occurs because of interaction at such ecotones. Standing in proximity to new cultures, one observes and digests new learning and thought processes. One may take that new knowledge back into his or her bonded community to inform perceptions and broaden knowledge. Although western civilization "has a long and dark history with respect to edges" where the unknown is to be "thrust back and ultimately eliminated," this alternative is to explore the fecundity born of inter-cultural, inter-religious borderlands.[1]

Such *metanoia* or new ideas and critique from borderlands/ecotones must reframe the dominant post-9/11 discourse of powerful (even fundamentalist) state and non-state actors that beat the drums of fear and battle against "the other." In so doing, religious communities have the capacity to organize around a loving, just, and humble vocation. They can transcend the bonds of exclusivity and self-interest. As at this conference sponsored by the Center for Human Rights Studies at Mofid University, bridging religious communities may seek *metanoia* in their faithful response to human rights needs today.

Teaching/learning context:

I engage two diverse learning communities, and each shows me the potential for bridging communities of learning. One setting is undergraduate life at Eastern Mennonite University, a Virginia campus where liberal arts studies are rooted in Protestant Christian Anabaptist principles of service, peace and justice, and global consciousness.[2] These young students pursue various disciplines but share a Global Village Curriculum, community learning requirements, and a cross-cultural experience that immerses them in an "alien" culture near or far. In the international, political, and legal classes that I teach, these students

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1. See: Coles, 1992; Dula, 2006; Lopez, 1986.
2. See: www.emu.edu.

resonate with the above theodicy but puzzle over these questions: "*why* should we engage; and *why* empathize across cultural, religious, and international borders when faithful living is complex enough in the context of home?

Another setting for my teaching and learning is an experimental Master's program, Future Generations.[1] Here fifteen students from as many cultures form a cohort. Their campus is the world. Their blended learning has three components: interactive online work, applied research in their community, and study tours of "best practices" for delivering human rights in India, the United States, Peru, Nepal, and Tibet/China. Each student is a community change agent. In the present cohort, their communities follow Shi'a and Sunni Islam, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, socialism, a local tribal belief of Donyi Polo, and post-Communist agnosticism. They have witnessed both hope and resilience. Their work in medicine, social work, conservation, and development causes them to see the plight of others. They have been challenged to develop at least a community-wide empathy. Some have defeated colonizers. Others have survived genocide. Still if they are asked to consider human rights and peace beyond their immediate community, most ask *why* and by *whose* instigation?

Why care about basic human rights?

Both groups – one Anabaptist/Mennonite Christian and the other inter-religious – value human rights. Both groups of students are familiar with the International Bill of Rights[2] and constructs of basic human rights.[3] Relying on Henry Shue's definition of a "human right," it is that for which one has a rational basis for justifying a demand to enjoy the substance of a socially guaranteed right against certain threats.[4] Human rights, therefore, are not gifts or favors, nor charity or love, nor a guarantee for some but not all people. There is no reason to celebrate or parade these rights, which are indeed inherent to human livelihood and liveliness.[5]

My students concur that universal concepts of subsistence and security rights apply in their respective communities and faiths. A human

1. See: www.future.org.
2. See: Donnelly, 2003: 24.
3. See: Shue, 1996.
4. See: Shue, 1996: 13.
5. See: Shue, 1996: 15.

right to basic security is a shield of defensiveness against being subject to murder, torture, mayhem, rape, or assault. Shue posits, "A right to full physical security belongs … among the most basic rights – not because the enjoyment of it would be more satisfying to someone who was also enjoying a full range of other rights, but because its absence would leave available extremely effective means for others, including the government, to interfere with or prevent the actual exercise of any other rights that were supposedly protected." (Shue, 1996: 21)

The full complement of this basic security right is one of minimum subsistence, including a guaranteed enjoyment of "unpolluted air, unpolluted water, adequate food, adequate clothing, adequate shelter, and minimal preventive public health care." (Shue, 1996: 23) People who lack these essentials, according to Shue, are worse off than those who must fight for their basic security rights, for those without "basic subsistence" are "utterly hopeless." (Shue, 1996: 25) He argues that the enjoyment of both security and subsistence rights is essential to the enjoyment of all other human rights.

Still my students ask *why* engage "the other" in protecting basic human rights, *why* empathize across borders when managing one's own life is hard enough, and by *whose* instigation ought we change our behavior to ensure others' basic human rights to subsistence and security? In sum, *why engage, empathize, or change*?

In these two learning milieux, students and I have examined a wide spectrum of factors that might motivate engagement, empathy, or change. These factors include instrumental and intrinsic valuation, religious faith, experience, and physical/relational immediacy. *Instrumentalist* factors could include one's job, sense of power, the profitability of working international development and relief services, and an understanding of reciprocal obligations to help another. *Intrinsic* factors might be one's valuation of friendships and relations, a sense of self-esteem, the power of principled ideas, or an underlying philosophy of life. *Religious and spiritual* reasons could include love for others, justice and peace, truth-seeking, an understanding of duty and obedience to God, guilt or shame for enjoying God's abundance while seeing other's deprivation, beliefs about sacrifice and penitence, stewardship, or doctrinal instruction. *Experiential* factors might be the need to prove oneself, the satisfaction or happiness of problem-solving and fixing things, or the wanderlust of quest.

Lastly, my students and I considered the motivating factor of *physical or relational immediacy*. Foremost, they were certain that they would aid a family member for there is intrinsic worth in a loving family bond. Second, aiding a fellow citizen or member of one's religion carries a broader sense of intimacy, but it is tinged with the self-interested instrumentalism of the Golden Rule – helping others as you'd expect them to help you in times of need. Here, one considers the degree to which the "community" enjoys "bonded" identity and reciprocal support. Third, my students felt that if they were to experience directly another's suffering, they would extend immediate help … maybe.

This conditionality is complex. On the one hand, experiential intimacy includes a global appeal to help strangers a world away when they suffer from a tsunami wave that comes ashore at Christmas time. On the other hand, there are calculations as to whether experiential immediacy is enough in times of accident, emergency, and dire straits, for even in the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan, priestly and social leaders can rationalize *not* helping a dying stranger just beside oneself. And in times of war, distinguishing friend from foe trumps other calculations.

In sum, these motivating factors of instrumentalism, intrinsic value, religious community, experience, and immediacy are subservient to one ingredient: whether or not we relate *empathetically* to another who is suffering or in need of protected human rights. If empathy is the capacity to identify with the experience and perspective of another, there are very few automatic instances of empathy beyond family members and loved ones. My students at Eastern Mennonite University and Future Generations honestly reflect the norms of modern state and society. Countless media, political, ideological, fundamentalist, and religious variables reinforce this norm. This bodes poorly for victims of human rights abuse since it is relatively easy to know or conjure up reasons to avoid the worries of particularly vulnerable populations.

Religion, however, obstinately reframes state-societal norms. It calls people of a bonded community to think, pray and worship in a special time and place with regularity and accountability so as to live apart from mainstream politics, markets, and media. Religion calls us to think of the numinous, not simply the material; of tolerance and love, not simply fear and hate; of humility, not simply pride and hubris; of confession and repentance, not simply defensive righteousness; and of conflict enabling

creative and possibly transformative action, not simply as an object to be controlled or resolved. Religion provides historic evidence and narrative of legions of transcendent community members who model the faith and courage to live by alternative values and ethics. In my own tradition – Mennonite/Anabaptist Christianity – those scriptural people who bridged the exclusivist bonded interests of religious community to forge relations among strangers and enemies; these are the transcendent pillars of faith – Job, Esau, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, and Jesus.

Job's theodicy and basic human rights:

As in the story of Job, our religious stance on justice, mercy, pain, vulnerability, and conflict may well depend a great deal on where we sit. In the story's first scene on earth, we meet Job, who is blameless, upright, God-fearing, religious, and rich in terms of family and abundant herds. Given where he stands in terms of comfort, he can scarcely imagine life without privilege. So in the opening scene, Job sits as do most of us attending this human rights and religion conference. Who among us can imagine living without food and security as in an Indonesian slum; or fleeing marauding troops as in Darfur; or testifying against state torture as in the Guatemalan dirty war; or finding hope as in the occupation and firestorm of Baghdad; or planning a crop as a family subsisting amidst floods or draught; or enjoying life as one absorbed in the comforts of consumer culture? Whether or not we engage, empathize or change our behavior to address suffering, is religion apt to hold us to honest reflection and action? Or must we first know suffering or live among those who do suffer?

This question presents the second scene of Job's story, where in heaven Satan and God debate the cause of Job's religious obedience. Is he upright simply because his life is abundant? Would he bless God were he made to suffer? Is he faithful to enjoy the fruits of God's reward? God and Satan place this stark reality before him. Like suffering populations facing natural disaster or man-induced war, like those who must engage human rights as a matter of course, Satan and God deprive Job of his wealth, flocks, herds, servants and children, and then afflict him with a horrible skin disease; eventually, Job's wife encourages him to just curse God and die. And like suffering populations who absorb the structural adjustment plans and democratic prognostics of leading states and market institutions, Job endures platitudes and condemnation from friends

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and then the inquisition of Elihu. So, too, do we choose to address human rights in order to correct the errors of others, or do we choose human rights to minister with costly empathy?

The story's underlying theodicy – "how can God be just and loving yet allow good people to suffer" – offers two responses, one superficial and another that is puzzling. First, the easy response: Job suffers because Satan and God have a bet as to whether Job will curse God were he to suffer. The second response is harder but revealing. Although Job in the end "repents in dust and ashes," this is not because he has figured things out. He admits freely that he understands very little. He is unmoved by the accepted wisdom that the righteous shall rest well in the confidence of their heavenly reward. He is unconvinced by the logic that suffering is the result of offence, only to be rectified by repentance. His pain and disillusionment are so profound that he wishes never to have been born. But even as he wishes to die, he wants his story to be told truthfully before God and others. And at odds with himself, he pleads to be left alone while at the same time talking non-stop to God. He demands an advocate in heaven. (Ironically, God has been Job's advocate all along, ever since the bet with Satan.) Exhausted and knowing well what it means to suffer, Job finally repents: "I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose is beyond thee. But I have spoken of great things which I have not understood, things too wonderful for me to know. I knew of thee then only by report, but now I see thee with my own eyes. Therefore I despise myself; I repent in dust and ashes."[1] In the end, Job does not serve God for reward, but it is precisely for his human obedience and repentance that God rewards Job. His family and fortune are restored. Job, moreover, has gained empathy and wisdom. He is a model of empathy humility in the face of human suffering.

Religions, of course, struggle with this theodicy. Their honest theological inquiry leads to our diverse ways of explaining how humans – by grace, or mercy, or enlightenment – may sojourn from suffering to hope. Whether we are citizens of hegemonic empires or failed states, Muslim or Christian, male or female, community leaders or young students, we all find ourselves somewhere along this sojourn. And we are

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1. The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), Job 42:5-6, p. 553.

all facing significant change – both that which is natural and that exacerbated by the whipsaw effects of globalization, industrialization, climate change, and many theaters of war. If these forces rage unabated, we are sure to witness increased suffering and consequent loss of basic rights to human security and subsistence. Our modern-day plight beckons searching theodicy and potential *metanoia*, helping us understand our relations to God and humanity, and providing a moral and pragmatic compass to guide faith-based human rights, development, and peacebuilding.

Social capital and conflict transformation:

Bonded communities may become bridging communities, learning from the borderlands/ecotones, and engaging in strategic peacebuilding. This outcome, though, requires faith and reframing for there are both social capital benefits and hazards in community life. As argued above, a broader, more relational perspective on peacebuilding emphasizes "bridging" communities of diverse identities.[1] Here, peacebuilding has the task of stimulating cross-cutting ties of interdependence, trust, and co-existence among otherwise separate, even conflicted social groups that likely speak a different language, are deeply embedded in their respective religious and cultural constructs, and are thus hampered in understanding others.[2]

Lisa Schirch suggests this possibility in her analysis of strategic peacebuilding, which aims to build bridging and linking social capital in communities that are mapping complex processes at today's borderlands of inter-cultural peacebuilding.[3] First, she defines peacebuilding as that which "seeks to prevent, reduce, transform and help people recover from violence in all its forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time, it empowers people to foster relationships at all levels that sustain them and their environment." (Schirch, 2004: 9) She posits four interlinked objectives: building capacity, transforming relationships, reducing direct violence, and waging conflict nonviolently. If there is to be conflict transformation, strategic peacebuilding must explicitly fit the dynamics of contended states and societies, as well as the vision of what peace means to contending groups.

1. See: Woolcock, 2001.
2. See: Savage, Tampubolon & Warde, 2004.
3. See: Schirch, 2004.

It is likely to occur on many tracks and across sectors with the integrated goal to create or enhance healthy and sustainable interactions, relationships, and structures that tolerate and respond to root causes of conflict over the long term.[1] This augments John Paul Lederach's process of "middle-out" strategic peacebuilding, which depends on evolving inter-cultural relationships across horizontal and vertical sectors of society and state. For dealing with today's inter-cultural challenges and needs, the most pertinent horizontal relationships are those that cut across the fault lines of identity (religion, ethnicity, sect, clan, nation, regional affiliation) along which societies fracture and fight. Vertical relations are those that exist along an axis of asymmetrical power between people, communities, and leaders.[2] While states codify and police vertical and horizontal relationships, conflict transformation ultimately depends on bridging communities that value wisdom and praxis wrought of inter-cultural collaboration.

It is imperative that religious communities understand their capacity to bridge horizontal networks of co-learners. In this way, they can maintain a broad alliance of spiritual and religious collaborators who can, as needed, reframe the dominant discourse of power, fear, and division. Since modern nation-states seek to affect the bonding and bridging social capital, religious groups must study how to link vertically with state and international governance to promote a broader public good for diverse communities.[3] Together, bonding and bridging social capital across multiple levels may create social cohesion.

There is, however, no guarantee that greater horizontal (bridging, inclusive, trustworthy) and vertical (linking, multi-track, partnering) social capital is good. One hazard is the establishment of deeply embedded group interests – elitism, classism, and doctrines of ethno-racial hatred. Such exclusivist agenda can gain widespread support. They can diminish potential learning between communities. Among the most virulent forms of exclusivist bonded social capital is religio-political fundamentalism.

The next two sections of this article, first, describe this phenomenon in U.S. evangelical political circles and the current Bush Administration.

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1. See: Fast and Neufeldt, 2005.
2. See: Lederach, 2005: 78-81.
3. See: Halpern, 2005.

Recognizing that colleagues at Mofid University have greater understanding of how this phenomenon unfolds in Muslim contexts, I here only sketch how one may discern parallel developments of exclusively hazardous bonded religio-political behavior in both Christianity and Islam. I do, however, offer in the following section constructive examples of how bridging religious communities are succeeding in collaborative human rights development.

Religio-political Fundamentalist Juggernaut

In the latter part of the nineteenth century (and apart from any perceived threat from Islam),[1] protestant evangelical fundamentalism was born in America. It reacted against modernist methods of historical criticism, insisted upon scriptural inerrancy, preached a dispensationalist picture of divine rapture, and opposed secularist responses to social welfare and gendered norms. Only in recent years has this variant on fundamentalism increasingly focused on Islam. It achieved surprising influence in global affairs through its ardent support of the "clash of civilizations" and "end of history" arguments. These concepts align neatly with an apocalyptic expectation of doing battle against the Antichrist at Megiddo, a hill in Israel. Engaging this "evil other" in the Battle of Armageddon is said to usher in the thousand-year reign of Christ. In the 1970s to 1990s, this form of fundamentalism grew impatient with the U.S. government. From abortion clinics to the White House, a fundamentalist "chosen elect" politicked to take back the Supreme Court, the Congress, the public schools, textbook publishing houses, foreign affairs, and the Executive branch. This crusade is evident in the words and deeds of the current Bush Administration.

There are at least nine fundamentalist factors that are dangerously uncompromising, especially as they fan the flames of intolerance and threaten basic human rights.

1.   Fundamentalism is an ideology both shaped by and constitutive of a tortured interpretation of history. An idealized past is based on a narrow spectrum of readings and facts. It may be factual, but is more likely an elitist manipulation of events. It can choose the traumatic history of victimhood, humiliation, scorn, and persecution.

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1. See: *Cf.* thesis of Reza Aslan, "The Future of Islam: Toward the Islamic Reformation," Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, VA (28 March 2007), in which Aslan argues that Bush Administration religio-political fundamentalism is a reaction against Islamic *jihad.*

2.   Fundamentalism includes the well-orchestrated study, preaching, and cultural re-enactment of this constitutive history. This re-enactment blends worship, patriotism, and nationalism. It melds the private sphere of family life with the public affairs of state and religious defense.

3.   Fundamentalism is a high-stakes discourse of dualism. This storyline prescribes a life-or-death drama whereby one upholds the righteous or is duped by the evil other. One is expected to choose the solace of disciplined faith over eternal damnation. These stark options are presented with "radical simplicity." (Said, 2002: 2) A Manichaean construct of private and public life stokes intolerance of others' thought or experience.

4.   Fundamentalism combines secular and sacred evidence in a transcendent narrative. This storyline shuns the complexity of counter-evidence, self-scrutiny, or another's compelling argument.

5.   While fundamentalists shy away from others' interpretations of events, they may be very attentive to unfolding global and political events. Their level of interest, though, is to shore up a received doctrine and worldview.

6.   Moreover, fundamentalism is messianic. Often reiterated is the belief in one's own deliverance from pain and evil, just as surely as one's anticipation of a righteous person's receipt of just deserts *versus* another's just damnation. This apocalyptic vision proclaims a triumphal end to the timeless struggle of good and evil. This victorious path is by definition exclusivist. It cannot permit the contamination of unworthy, unclean others unless they wholly convert to the fundamentalist's path.

7.   With a strategy of such magnitude, violence is justified in the cause of a higher, ordained, fundamentalist end. This violence may be defensive or pre-emptive as one fights for a better social, political, and spiritual world.

8.   One's predilection to view the world (and treat the world) as described above reinforces all of these constitutive elements. It rises to hubris. It becomes an embedded ideology that keeps both adherents and apostates "in their place."

9.   Fundamentalism seeks to change state and ecclesial laws to conform to a particular interpretation of doctrine.

These nine common factors of fundamentalism show how faith can become a juggernaut of political unilateralism. They can feed the

unilateralism of a hegemonic power or further the terrorist threats of a cell group or subaltern state. There are, for example, in Hinduism the virulently anti-Muslim Shiv Sena and the nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party, and in Judaism the ultra-Orthodox Haredi and Zionist Gush Emunim, and in Buddhism and Roman Catholicism the strict limitations on women's leadership roles. In any of these settings, fundamentalist factors can fortify a unilateralist agenda.

How then can religious human rights discourse moderate fundamentalism? If the post-Cold War era allowed some space for postmodern discourse, today's post-9/11 world may be more prepared to revert to a past that muted alternative perspectives. Al Qaeda and the Bush Administration, alike, call upon fundamentalism to assert local and global might. Both focus on asymmetrical, lethal forces. Both pit *realpolitik* against populist empowerment. Their posturing is more coercive and militarist than persuasively political, diplomatic, or spiritual. Nonetheless, civil society may still feel emboldened by the gains of non-state, non-powerful voices of the 1990s. Just one example of this is that leading up to the March 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, an estimated 30 million citizens pounded city pavements worldwide in a concerted anti-hegemonic, anti-war protest.

U.S. Evangelical Fundamentalism

While I recognize that more than a single ideology or religious belief informs the thought process of the Bush Administration, it is clear that protestant evangelicalism is a guiding variable. The above-mentioned elements of fundamentalism have unabashedly become common word and deed for the current Bush Administration. First, the president's tortured interpretation of personal and world history is constitutive of an evangelical fundamentalism that is re-enacted regularly for public consumption. Second, this civil religion reinforces a high stakes dualism that conflates complex state-societal identities, international relations, and the historical record. Third, this struggle is transformed into a transcendent picture of benign American hegemony and messianism. Fourth, the end result of this Pax Americana is that the righteous and unrighteous shall gain their just deserts.

President Bush's biographer, David Frum, contends that a "culture of modern Evangelicalism" is the "predominant creed" in White House policymaking, its Executive branch Bible studies, and the President's oft-

mentioned time spent in prayer.[1] David Gergen observes that Bush is confident that he is a key actor in this creed. The president believes that he is a powerful instrument of God whose providence has already saved him from alcoholism, and whose guiding hand is behind every political act, decision, and step toward war or peace—"behind all of life, and all of history." (Goodstein, 2003: 4) This is why, according to Newt Gingrich, the president during his campaign argued that Jesus Christ was "a political philosopher" of immense influence.[2] This confident belief is re-enacted often on diverse public political stages. So from the presidential campaign trail, to the National Prayer Breakfast, to State of the Union addresses, the story of Bush's divinely inspired victory over alcoholism conflates with others' struggles, be they Afghani women chafing under Taliban rule, Baghdad civilians post-Saddam Hussein's regime, or mourning family members after the September 11th terrorism, or those American injured in its present wars.

Bush unreservedly applies this personal sense of religio-political certainty to domestic and foreign affairs. At home, he demonstrates unwavering stewardship of the religious right's position on tax reform, abortion, delivery of social welfare, and private-public education issues. I focus here on his fundamentalist approach to international affairs. The president's firm evangelical convictions allow him to target an "axis of evil" or any other citizen, leader, or country standing in God's way. So Kim Jong Il is flippantly called a "pygmy" whom the president "loathes," Arafat is routinely denied an audience, role, and compound in the Israeli-American-Palestinian debacle, Sharon is the most frequent visitor to the White House of all foreign heads of state, and those not with the president are for terrorism and the forces of evil.[3]

This harmonizing of Executive branch and public propagation of an increasingly fundamentalist civil religion is an example of bonded community that creates divisive ends. It unites one portion of the American public, while excluding other sectors of the U.S. populace committed both to spirituality and good governance. All the while, this propaganda incites general outrage and distrust among Muslims and non-Americans worldwide. The president underscored this division and

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1. See: *The Progressive,* 2003: 8.
2. See: Brookhiser, 2003: 63.
3. See: Goodstein, 2003: 4; *The Progressive,* 2003: 8.

self-righteous identity in his 2003 State of the Union Address. He looked directly into the camera and intoned, "'There's power, wonder-working power' in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people." The actual words of this standard refrain sung during the altar call of many evangelical revivals are that this wonder-working power is "in the blood of the Lamb." By analogy, the inference to be taken from the president's tortured read of hymnology is that Christ's passion is realized in the righteousness of certain American people. In the hours leading up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Bush further equated his own spiritual quest with Christ's suffering and the narrow path of righteous decision making. "And I, on bended knee to the good Lord, asked him to help me to do my job in a way that's wise." (Bumiller, 2003: 11)

Michael Klare among others has noted there are blended strains of apocalyptic messianism, control of world oil resources, and militant fervor in this self-righteous proclamation of U.S. intentions. Chalmers Johnson contends that the president's fundamentalist ideology "is there to cover the militarism." (*The Progressive,* 2003: 10) Either way, Bush's particular read of personal and world history allows the president to believe he is the key figure in a pivotal struggle between the forces of good and evil. This confrontationalism permits a level of risk-taking that is wholly inappropriate to fragile international and inter-religious relations.

Elaine Pagels argues that the president's fundamentalist language is "enormously divisive and dangerous. If there is an axis of evil, that obviously places him in the axis of good, and also means that anyone who disagrees with the policies he is advocating is placed on the other side.[1] This dualism denigrates individuals trying to decipher world events, and simultaneously creates a high stakes geopolitical gamble. Bush intentionally conflates his personal story with complex state-societal identities, international relations, and the historical record. Take, for example, the conflation of September 11th terrorism and his later pronouncement of imminent threats from an "axis of evil," and especially the government of Saddam Hussein. On 7 October 2002, Mr. Bush articulated in Cincinnati his reasons for war against Iraq. President Bush posited unilateralist "might makes right" calculations of power and merit. Although his rhetoric spoke of securing freedom, his stress of the word

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1. See: Goodstein 2003: 4.

"terrorism" – thirty times in thirty minutes – was meant to produce fear and loathing. He intoned:

> America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud…
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> … [W]e have every reason to assume the worst, and we have an urgent duty to prevent the worst from occurring.
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> … Failure to act would embolden other tyrants, allow terrorists access to new weapons and new resources, and make blackmail a permanent feature of world events. The United Nations would betray the purpose of its founding, and prove irrelevant to the problems of our time. And through its inaction, the United States would resign itself to a future of fear.
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> … We refuse to live in fear. This nation, in world war and in Cold War, has never permitted the brutal and lawless to set history's course. Now, as before, we will secure our nation, protect our freedom, and help others to find freedom of their own. (Bush, 2002)

Paul Krugman is chagrined that the American populace so blithely accepted Bush's case for war on the basis of a manufactured threat—the "mushroom cloud." Clearly, the U.N. inspection regime and the post-war sweep of Iraq have not supported this bold and undocumented assertion, whether for nuclear or other forms of weapons of mass destruction. Krugman asks, therefore, whether or not "the leaders of a democratic nation [are] supposed to tell their citizens the truth." (Krugman, 2003) He begs the question as to why the mainline media and citizenry expect so much less. In this case, the fundamentalist bent of the president's mission allows him to cow the public into quiet observance while he reconfigures current events and history to suit the dualism he is prosecuting. Nonetheless, if Bush were demanded by a democracy to defend more cogently the post-World War II record of the U.S. "securing" itself and "finding freedom" for others through its overt and covert wars, there would either be a humbling truth-telling or an egregious redressing of history in the stories of U.S. operations in Afghanistan, Belgian Congo, Cambodia, Chile, China, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Grenada, Indonesia, Iraq, Korea, Laos, Libya, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Sudan, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia. The U.S. "contribution

to freedom" in these states is remarkable for its extensive reliance on disproportionate military intervention. In the present Middle East and Central-South Asian context, the U.S. is making forward deployment of its troops, planes, munitions, bases, and military advisors in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Diego Garcia, Djibouti, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.[1] Krugman's comment on Bush's Cincinnati speech only scratches the surface of the depth to which cathartic truth-telling might draw the American citizenship and leadership. U.S. (humanitarian) intervention for the sake of freedom actually means that "freedom" and grass roots movements that differ from the desires of U.S. government policy makers will be suppressed, often violently.

Mr. Bush's Cincinnati speech was also problematic in that he demonstrated contempt for international legal constraint on the use or threat of force. His Administration's policy to preempt, prevent, and eliminate unsavory governments runs roughshod over the Charter of the United Nations, whose underlying principles are pacific, deliberative, collective, defensive, and self-determinative so as to preserve state, group, and individual fundamental freedoms and human rights.

The emerging Bush Doctrine and its apocalyptic pictures of impending threats did not arise from a pre-September 11th vacuum. Rather, it is based squarely on three pre-existing and largely fundamentalist policy papers that argue for pre-emptive, preventive strikes against any entity that threatens the security of U.S. values, beliefs about benign global leadership, profligate consumption, and unparalleled power. These three plans buttress limitless pursuit of oil, promise the growth of the American consumer culture, and project a dominant U.S. military-economic presence. As the first piece of the Bush Doctrine, the White House released the May 2001 "National Energy Policy Report," also known as the Cheney Plan. Vice President Cheney's plan takes for granted the growing dependence of the U.S. and world economies on the Iraqi and Caspian Sea states' oil reserves over the next two decades. Combined, both proven and anticipated Iraqi reserves likely overshadow Saudi, Russian, and U.S. petroleum resources. The Cheney Plan posits that U.S. economic (hence national) interests must seek to control, if not

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1. See: Hartung, 2002: 21-24.

possess, these Middle Eastern and South-Central Asian regions. This expanded sphere of U.S. influence stretches from Iraq and Iran, through Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, and through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the Arabian Sea. The deployment of U.S. forces after September 11th covers this terrain, and begins to project unprecedented U.S. influence over European, Middle Eastern, and Asian economies dependent on these oil reserves. Simultaneously, the U.S. is positioned to secure its own growing demand for foreign oil.

The second piece of the Bush Doctrine comes from a policy paper called "Defense Planning Guidance," drafted in 1992 by Paul D. Wolfowitz for the first Bush Administration. More than a decade ago in the early post-Cold War years, Wolfowitz sought to guarantee that no counter-hegemonic superpower could threaten U.S. domination of geopolitics and global economics. Bill Keller reports that this Pax Americana imagined:

> [W]ith the demise of the Soviet Union the United States doctrine should be to assure that no new superpower arose to rival America's benign domination of the globe. The U.S. would defend its unique status both by being militarily powerful beyond challenge and by being such a constructive force that no one would want to challenge us. We would participate in coalitions, but they would be 'ad hoc.' The U.S. would be 'postured to act independently when collective action cannot be orchestrated.' The guidance envisioned pre-emptive attacks against states bent on acquiring nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. It was accompanied by illustrative scenarios of hypothetical wars for which the military should be prepared. One of them was another war against Iraq. (Keller, 2002: 52)

Taken together, the Cheney and Wolfowitz plans are two of three pillars meant to secure the Bush Doctrine. It presumes the right to exercise military force globally, regardless of long-honored self-defense principles of international law, state necessity to survive immediate threats and secure fundamental interests, or humanitarian response to gross human rights violations.[1] This doctrine means either to manipulate or disregard U.N. principles in Chapters VI and VII of the Charter,

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1. See: Falk, 2003.

favoring collective pursuit of security, fundamental freedoms and human rights, and tolerance. It mutes provisions for regional peacebuilding, dialogue, and U.N. Security Council study, monitoring, decision making, and specified action in response to concrete threats to international peace and security.

A third pillar of the Bush Doctrine is the September 2000 "Rebuilding America's Defenses" document, published by the Project for the New American Century. Wolfowitz was one of the guiding participants in this project, which urged then-President Bill Clinton and the current President Bush to challenge unsavory regimes, shape circumstances preemptively, and remove from office "axis of evil" regimes in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. This document was circulated in the Executive Branch two years ahead of Mr. Bush's State of the Union Address that publicly identified this alleged axis. This document calls for preemptive strikes at an additional defense expenditure of $100 billion per year in a number of other continents and countries, including China, Southeast Asia, Europe, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.

In sum, the Bush Doctrine carries with it a level of fundamentalist hubris that belies forward- and backward-looking consciousness. This evangelical Pax Americana that divides the world into righteous and unrighteous actors projects a confidence of economic-military security. It rests, however, upon very uncertain knowledge of "the other." This gaze into the unknown, though, is transformed into a more definite future because of profound faith in an American God and American policymakers, who can by this God's grace control others' responses. Richard Brookhiser concludes, "Bush's faith means that he does not tolerate, or even recognize, ambiguity: there is an all-knowing God who decrees certain behaviors, and leaders must obey." (Brookhiser, 2003: 63) Thus the president is certain when he proclaims, "I will seize the opportunity to achieve big goals," because "God is not neutral" with regard to the war on terrorism.[1]

These Bush Doctrine considerations raise a series of questions. Does this fundamentalist quest for absolute security actually diminish our own, not to mention others' justice, freedom, liberty, and equality? Does state-centered security increasingly take on an unabashed Machiavellian or Manichaean calculation of power and good-evil caricatures? Does it

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1. See: *The Progressive,* 2003: 8.

presume the right to coerce and subordinate regional and international economic and political interests of others to the immediate desires of U.S. policymakers? Does this current policy exceed the hegemonic reach of Cold War *realpolitik*?

Moderating/Mentoring

It may well be easier to join a bonded, even a fundamentalist group, political party, or civil religion than to bridge across diverse interpretations, perspectives, and religious convictions in today's conflicted world. Richard Falk offers four positive and emancipatory reasons. Each helps to nurture a culture that hears the other, is self-ironic, commits to "politically engaged spirituality," and eagerly comes to terms with others who are "different." These commitments are to a culture of nonviolence and respect for all of life, a culture of solidarity and just economic order, a culture of tolerance and faithfulness, and a culture of equal human rights and partnership.[1] Altogether, this is clearly a less traveled post-September 11th path. It takes seriously various fundamentalisms' fears of modernity and a complex world. It studies their rhetorical claims and worldview, but then builds one's own faith ethic and approach to normative laws. It calls upon inter-religious inquiry and international legal constructs. It creates a forum of dialogue and venues for service. This closing section presents the possible scope of such a stage for politically engaged spirituality.

When surveying the mindset underlying the direction of the Bush Administration, there is clearly an awesome sense of self-importance and righteousness, but also a fundamentalism rooted in evangelical hope and empathy. Politically engaged spirituality asks that we call upon multiple disciplines, embrace service and learning among others situated differently than we, and insist that these various perspectives be held accountable for a more just world. This high expectation is not possible if fundamentalism is dismissed out of hand. It cannot be labeled as the enemy. Falk's proposed multilateral path means to contain the extremism of any state's, or any leader's, or any religion's claim to possess the sole truth. But to even begin to moderate such exclusivity, Falk's "citizen pilgrim" who embraces a politically engaged spirituality must learn how respective fundamentalisms come to believe that their sense of truth is absolute.

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1. See: Falk, 2001: 69, 130.

A religio-political approach to today's troubling domestic and international milieu is also humbling. It is daunting to consider the number of committed religious, academic, political, medical, non-governmental, and legal professionals who may be called upon to help rebuild conflict-ridden lands. So besides the essential discipline of quiet reflection, one must also consider "best case arguments" from diverse disciplines and perspectives. Arguably, this is a given in the practice of international law. For instance, rather than focus on the specific criminal accountability of a single leader or terrorist, one must examine simultaneously a sense of justice in systemic terms. One weighs diverse paths for the containment of threats to peace and security through truth commissions, war tribunals, criminal courts, and cross-civilizational, inter-religious dialogue and debate. Second, one must see that threats to home security and the earth's fragile ecology require two forms of investigation. One is to examine the possible security breaches of leaders, be they terrorists, totalitarians, or elected representatives. Another investigates populist and statist accountability for social, cultural, and economic rights alongside civil political rights. Third, one must discern and empower both indigenous and exogenous sources and experts in the process of rebuilding conflict-torn lands. The mosque and church are logical places to begin to gather and call upon the people to craft and own their personal and national needs and belongings.

I posit that "security" in our present domestic and global milieu is best served by examining our collective past – insuring that our read of history is not a tortured, victimized one as is commonly found and re-enacted in Islamism and evangelical fundamentalism. As a lawyer, professor and minister committed to faithful community, I propose a new "confessing church" whose vocation would be to secure good governance at a time when the Bush Administration's hegemony is insufficiently tested. A forum would hone a political, theological, legal and ethical perspective on whether today's wars strengthen or threaten the basic human security and subsistence of people. I draw upon my own pacifist theology, as well as the insights of reformed theology, an understanding of just war in the Abrahamic faith traditions, and diverse interpretations of realism.

A modern-day confessing church should demand the accountability of any Administration that is unleashing policies, troops, and armaments. I borrow from the template of theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and John C. Bennett, who in the early 1960s crafted a confessing and searching forum

in a journal they co-founded, *Christianity & Crisis*. They engaged inter-religious debate and international relations/legal concerns at a time when successive American administrations were launching American's longest war. The debacle in Southeast Asia cost nearly sixty thousand American battlefield deaths and over eighty thousand suicides among recently returned U.S. veterans.[1] Less often addressed was the troubling fact that more than three million Vietnamese soldiers and citizens died. Critical to a functioning democratic republic, according to Niebuhr and Bennett, was the vocation of theologians, lawyers and other professionals to press the right questions at the right time. One may call upon pacifist thinking, mainline just war doctrine, and Abrahamic faith traditions that share a historical and religious trek to hold presidents, fundamentalists, pastors, policymakers, and academics accountable in a lively and public forum. This community of speech and service would seek to minister to people generally as we recalibrate collectively our values and sense of security.

This challenge privileges no particular perspective. Islamism and evangelicalism, realism and pacifism, modernist and post-modern voices need to be heard. The religio-political imperative is to understand another's perspective at least as well as one's own. Falk posits that we need to be rooted in the "unfolding of the modern world, sensitive to the material needs of people and the concreteness of their suffering … Politically engaged spirituality implies both the will and the capability to intervene nonviolently yet with behavioral consequences in situations of conflict and oppression." (Falk, 2001: 107) Such a forum may further a collective response to presumptive, preventive "just war" against terrorism as much as *jihad* against western globalizing hegemony. This quest is not naïve, for those with powerful force – be they states or terrorist cells – are perhaps the least willing to join such a forum. Still a moderating and cooperative moral spirit among the diverse group of citizens and professionals mentioned above grounds a broader populace in theology, law, and political theory as a basis for responding to escalating militarist U.S. policies in the Middle East, Central Asia, Northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia.

One critical lesson from Niebuhr here is how to address or contain the "unrestrained egoism" of leaders and ideologues.[2] He concedes that there is

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1. See: Viet Nam Veterans Foundation 1993, Pollock *et al.* 1990: 772-76, CBS News 1987, CBS News 1988, Spencer, 1986.
2. See: Niebuhr, 1960: xi-xii, 48-49, 83.

a political tendency toward international anarchy since people generally fail to observe how leaders abuse patriotism and altruism, and thus neglect their own duty to demand "moral restraint" on the exercise of power.[1] Hence we see a religio-political hedge on raw realism. There is a "grounded hope" that a thinking and gracious community of speech and praxis may, indeed, mitigate the destructive consequences of unchecked realpolitik. A first step is identifying and unmasking strenuously the self-righteous piety of any form of fundamentalism. The limitations and dangers of fundamentalist beliefs and illusions inform our critique of power at all levels. A forum for discourse, legal covenants, social democratizing forces, and a collective awareness of community-wide, class-oriented, and statist-nationalist interests may check the arrogance of any leader's economic, political, militarist, and priestly coercion. Second, this forum admits that all leaders rely on coercion. Their assertions of discursive power and police-military force are part of social cohesion. We must scrutinize how these forces may both guarantee peace and security, as well as make for injustice, "a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose." (Niebuhr, 1960: 6) Third, a democratic republic, such as that enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, embodies "the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself." (Niebuhr, 1949: 268) It bears constant repeating that citizens must question authority. For it is only so long as a democratic government remains mindful that its conception relies upon the criticism of leaders that it is able to form better instruments of government.

Thus we may accept no particular state-societal balancing of power, belief system, or concept of justice as normative. In both domestic and international arenas, people must reach tentative and tolerable adjustments between their competing interests and those of others, in order to achieve order and some common notions of justice that transcend partial interests. Here an inter-religious grounding informs our sense of history that stretches across millennia. If our initial task is to know history, know current events, and then elect officials for sake of present and future order and justice, then our second task is to prevent any leader—domestic or international—from becoming tyrannical. For American citizens, since the U.S. government projects such hegemonic weight globally, it is incumbent upon us to think as internationally as we do domestically when acting

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1. See: Niebuhr, 1944: 91.

within the U.S. political arena. Niebuhr posits that the "human capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but [human] inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." (Niebuhr, 1944: xi)

Two critical religio-political resources for this human effort to enhance our state-societal constructs are our collective sense of love and justice. Islam and Christianity – the religions underlying Islamist and evangelical fundamentalisms – hold these resources as their highest virtues. *Shari'a* law and western rule of law place different emphases on the role of these ethical resources in meting out political justice and security. But they do wrestle with the same balance of virtues and needs. Whereas *shari'a* law would hold that the religious ethic flowing from these virtues can deeply inform the ethic of the state, western legal constructs separate rational and ethical goals here. In the west, rule of law fuses the interest of others and oneself in an ideally equalized playing field, whereas the religious ideals place the needs of one's neighbor above one's own. Thus a Muslim state may consciously seek to blend reason and religion, while a western modernist state stresses that religious moralists and their fundamentalism should not qualify national policies. These concerns are highly relevant to the discourse within Islamism and the Bush Administration's fundamentalism. What is the source of justice? What is the source of service and compassion for the other? Is it to be secured in religious conviction and fervor, or in a just equilibrium of power? I argue that justice as dialogically discerned through a broad forum becomes a moderating and more secure check on the messianic, apocalyptic, and self-righteous illusions of leaders, moralists, and preachers who are certain they know what is best for others. A forum—rather than combat, terrorist cells or the unquestioned heights of Executive branch—is a better place to arbitrate differences, employ moral suasion, and address domestic and international human rights.

Thus we find ourselves at a crossroads. Are we to diminish the sense of religious and legal insights, while quietly accepting at face value the words and deeds of world leaders? Or are we to demand fresh thinking in Washington, in our places of worship, and in the media? Regardless of polls, approval ratings, and a fleckless U.S. Congress that demands little concrete evidence of threats to security, a religio-political forum of "pilgrim citizens" may press harder for factual, historical, legal, ethical, and theological points. We may embrace the wonderful complexity of this post-September 11th world. We may unabashedly shake up complacent

illusions about today's spreading wars. We may cultivate responsible thinking by staging this debate in public squares, online, in classes, in places of worship, through mainline and alternative media, and in interpersonal relations. We may ground our respective communities in a true and honest reading of history, for if we allow fundamentalists to co-opt and reshape our histories, then we "betray our own time-based faith, our belief in judgment and our need for repentance." (Harding, 1965: 216) Closer examination of our own historical understanding and those tortured historical constructs of fundamentalists reveals everyone's tendency toward fear and pride, lack of empathy for those who suffer, and general inclination to allow systemic injustice to continue.

At present, diverse religious bodies within Islam and Christianity are speaking to these truths of accountability. In the years of the American-Vietnam War, Vincent Harding, a civil rights activist and minister among Methodists and Mennonites, reminded his community that "the Christian churches cannot afford such arrogance. The Body of Christ cannot be so calloused to the suffering of innocent people. The universal family must not kill for national honor or die for a negative creed." (Harding, 1965: 217) Four decades later, looking back on the annals of that earlier war, we see that people of "all political persuasions and all generations and all walks of life must work to expand the sense of 'we' and to diminish the sense of 'they'. If we cannot humanize those whose destinies have impinged upon our own, if we cannot increase empathy and vanquish self-righteousness, if we cannot expand our moral imaginations to discern and accept the pattern that connects us all in a common human condition, then we shall all continue to have lost … to perpetuate a struggle in which there are no winners." (Jamieson, 1993: 376)

Are people and communities of faith more or less able to respond with empathy, strategy, and resources? If *yes*, it seems that a religiously-based political and inter-cultural *metanoia* of fresh thinking and praxis may yet answer the cries for genuine humanity and peace. If *no*, then arguably our many religious bodies are essentially insular, likely arrogant, and perhaps dangerous. Where we go with these questions is important, for the modern era stands at a crossroads. With the end of the bipolar Cold War and worsening responses to the terrorism of 9/11, this crossroads is uncertain. There are paths that lead to a divisive world full of pain, fragmentation and disorder. *And* there are religiously conscientized and humble paths toward peaceable order and enjoyment of human rights.

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