ETHICS IN ACTION

Positive peace and its pillars

The world's religions are based in peace, call for peace, promote peace. Religious leaders since the time of the prophets have been urging that we "beat swords into ploughshares." "Blessed are the peacemakers," declares Jesus in the Beatitudes. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Indigenous and other religions' believers understand—each in their own ways—that peace is the true "name" of their religion. Across the diverse religions, the injunction not to kill and to respect life is deeply shared. The obligation to advance peace is a foundational moral and spiritual imperative across different religious traditions. Accordingly, interpretations of religion that go against peace are self-contradictory.

For the world's religions, peace goes beyond the mere absence of war. These traditions increasingly share a vision of "positive peace" rooted in the dignity of each and the unity of all, grounded in each religion's experience of the transcendent. This vision of positive peace is built on four essential pillars, stated explicitly in Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth, 1963) but also acknowledged by the other religions in their own terms as reflecting the deepest desires of the human spirit—truth, justice, charity, and liberty. So understood, positive peace calls for the unfolding of human dignity in a way that is linked directly to honoring rights and executing reciprocal responsibilities. This is also directly related to our common obligation to seek the good of the other and avoid evil by advancing shared well-being, which includes living in harmony with nature.

The diverse religions affirm that this positive vision of peace calls for the patient and resolute cultivation of personal virtues and value-oriented institutions. Indeed, the pillars of positive peace must be supported by virtues like mutual respect, trust, and non-violence. Tolerance, while necessary, must be strengthened with genuine solidarity. Likewise, justice must always be twinned with mercy, as otherwise human justice would be an imperfect grounding for peace. Also, the cultivation of personal virtues is not enough—these virtues must also find institutional expression in a way that challenges and transforms structures of violence and injustice into those that nurture peace. As Pope Francis noted, peace is an "active virtue" that calls for the engagement and cooperation of each individual and society as a whole. Peace is our true human destiny, which makes it our responsibility to pursue and our right to attain.

Challenges to peace

Peace is jeopardized whenever truth, justice, charity and liberty—the pillars of positive peace—are undermined; whenever their related virtues of mutual respect, trust, solidarity and mercy are denied; and whenever institutions offend human dignity and fail to serve the common good.

There are many proximate causes of war. Some wars are rooted in fear, desperation, perceived threats, and real deprivations and injustices. A particular problem today is the risk of conflict exacerbated by extreme poverty and inequality, persistent marginalization and social exclusion, and the alarming pace of environmental degradation. In this light, climate change can be seen as a silent war on the planet, and the Paris Climate Agreement as a treaty of peace. Other wars have more ignoble underpinnings— motivated by a quest for profits, land, resources, glory, revenge, revenue, or geopolitical advantage.

Whatever the underlying causes, wars violate human dignity and rend the fabric of the common good. They provide fertile ground for demagogues to spread fear and hate. Wars represent the failure of politics and are typically based on lies rather than the truth. It must also be acknowledged that this is a particularly perilous time for peace, with tensions brewing all across the globe. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock now stands at 2½ minutes to midnight, signaling the greatest risk of apocalypse since 1953.

Many traditions have recognized that some wars can be considered in a very limited sense "just," because they are defensive, a last resort, legal, spare non-combatants and advance strictly limited military violence that is "proportional" to the offending cause. Today, in an era when indiscriminate weapons are used in areas co-inhabited by civilians and the military, the bar for a technically "just" war must be set extremely high. And even when a war can be deemed "just," it remains a profound failure in terms of the ideal of non-violence.

While wars often occur despite the ardent efforts of many religious leaders and communities to prevent them, religions, tragically, are too often implicated in wars. Demagogic leaders may proclaim that the local or national community is endangered in its core religious identity and seek to mobilize religion to justify violence or to gain political power. Promoters of violence may appeal selectively to religious texts and traditions in the defense of violence. Working together in mutual respect, the world's religions have courageously begun to reject violence in the name of religion—and they must do so ever more firmly.

Role of religions

Working together, the religious communities advance peace in three main ways. First, they provide a shared ethical basis for peace, rooted in their understandings of human dignity, the common good, and the golden rule. Second, they are uniquely well-positioned and equipped for "strategic peacebuilding"— coordinating local, national, and transnational resources for ending violent conflict, striving for social justice, and building bonds of cooperation and solidarity. Third, they can deploy their deepest experiences of unlimited mercy, compassion, and capacity for loving self-giving to absorb the grave sufferings caused by human cruelty, thereby advancing healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness of one's enemies.

Many inter-religious initiatives have made decisive contributions to peace; for example, different configurations of Indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Yazidi, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other religious representatives (including women and youth) have helped to mediate between conflicted

groups and advanced reconciliation, justice, and mercy in their communities. As a result, their conflict-ridden communities were helped to reimagine their futures, re-claim hope, address their burdened pasts, heal and move forward together.

There are also numerous examples of profound, world-changing interventions by religious leaders in nudging political leaders to pursue peace. *Pacem in Terris* played a historic role following the Cuban Missile Crisis to help the United States and Soviet Union find a path towards arms control, notably the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968. The 1989 *Taif Agreement* ended the Lebanon Civil War, disarmed militias, and created political power sharing among the various national communities. The Vatican has also played a pivotal role in ending conflict between Argentina and Chile, Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as the civil war in the Central African Republic. Most recently, the Catholic Church played a direct and enormously fruitful role in bringing the conflicting parties in Colombia to the negotiating table and reaching a peace agreement, ending the longest-running military conflict on the planet.

Role of Ethics in Action

The challenge facing Ethics in Action is to find practical steps so that the unique wisdom, beauty, and shared moral convictions of the world's great religious traditions can help guide the world back from the brink and reality of war—and toward a vision of positive peace rooted in the unbreakable link between unfolding human dignity and advancing shared well-being.

Ethics in Action is therefore resolved to do whatever it can to help the world's religious leaders promote peace. We aim to mobilize the scientific, academic, and international community to spread the message that religion should not be instrumentalized and manipulated in the name of political agendas. Rather, the religious leaders are committed to reducing the fear in their communities, combating the lies that accompany the drumbeats of war, and actively promoting the virtues of positive peace and the institutions in their communities that embody and enact these virtues. This must include tackling the spread of hatred and violence via the internet and social media.

In this regard, we specifically propose the following measures, both in terms of advocacy and our own engagement:

Advocacy

- Request the UN Secretary General to put the issue of religion and peace on the UN Security Council agenda during 2017 in support of global peace and sustainable development.

- Recommend the creation of an Inter-Religious Contact Group for the UN Secretary-General and UN Security Council.

- Devise and implement a media-savvy, cross-cultural, inclusive strategy to change the narrative about Islam in the United States and Europe, and minority communities in Islamic-majority countries.

- Push for the establishment of a fund to reduce military spending and divert resources to finance sustainable development (the "Isaiah Fund" or the "Pope Paul VI Fund").

- Push for a world free of nuclear weapons (following the call of many religious leaders, including Pope Paul VI's plea for multilateral disarmament at the United Nations in 1965 and Pope Francis' moral condemnation of nuclear weapons in his 2017 World Day of Peace Message).

- Push for full implementation of the Paris Agreement, and raise awareness of the links between climate change and conflict.

Engagement

- Produce a joint public statement by religious leaders, that represents a collective call to action for reawakening morality and ethics to underpin the promotion of positive peace.

- Widely promote the virtue of non-violent conflict resolution.

- Ensure wide participation by religious leaders and communities in the worldwide climate march on April 29.

- Organize an Ethics in Action/Religions for Peace campaign for healing and reconciliation in Syria.

- Develop and disseminate through religious networks an Ethics in Action education curriculum to promote the culture of peace.

- Work with foundations to support grassroots inter-religious initiatives in conflict-ridden multi-religious communities.

- Reach out to leaders of nuclear disarmament groups to offer the support of religious leaders and communities.

- Use and deepen the channels of communications of peace, in the pulpits, the congregations, and through social media.