

34th WORLD RELIGIONS CONFERENCE



Abstracts of Proceedings
34th World Religions Conference

Held September 28, 2014
River Run Centre, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Representatives of
Islam, Humanism, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism,
Judaism, Aboriginal Spirituality and Sikhism

Organized by the
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at of Canada



www.WorldReligionsConference.org

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to the speakers representing various faiths and philosophical traditions, for participating and providing an abstract of their speech on the theme “Pathway to Peace” for the 34th World Religions Conference. These abstracts are compiled in this booklet for easy future reference.

In the staging of this conference, we have received support and help from numerous organizations and individuals. In addition to the speakers and guests that attended the event, we acknowledge the contributions of all our partner organizations; The City of Guelph, The City of Waterloo, The City of Kitchener, The City of Cambridge, The University of Waterloo and the Federation of Students, Ahmadiyya Muslim Students Association of UW, Sikh Students Association, Aboriginal Community of K-W, Brahmarishi Mission of Canada, K-W Council of Churches, Church of Saint Michael, Forest Hill United Church, St. Philip's Lutheran Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, The Church of Our Lady Immaculate Guelph, Guelph Sikh Society, Aboriginal Resource Centre at the University of Guelph, Multi-Faith Resource Team Ecumencial Campus Minister of the University of Guelph, Duff's Presbyterian Church of Guelph, Waterloo Riverview Dharma Centre, the Society of Ontario Freethinkers, WLU FreeThought Alliance, The Sacred Secular Sanctuary, The Waterloo Record and Guelph Mercury, CTV, CBC Radio, Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA), 570 News Talk Radio, Temple Shalom of Waterloo, Callture and the Cross Cultures magazine.

Moreover, we recognize the cooperation and volunteer services of the Conference moderator - Abigail Bimman, and the volunteer services of the entire WRC team, WRC Organizing Committee and approximately 120 other volunteers who worked with great enthusiasm for the organization of this conference.

Nabeel A. Rana
Chief Planning and Coordinating Officer
World Religions Conference,
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
September 28, 2014

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Introductory Remarks - 34th World Religions Conference

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada and all our partner organizations welcome you all to this magnificent celebration of mutual respect and harmony.

The theme of this year's conference, "Pathway to Peace", is particularly timely when we consider the turmoil, instability and religious persecution around the world. There is no doubt that some of the current crises amidst international headlines are embedded in religious conflicts. By engaging in dialogue between diverse faith groups, we hope to eliminate the prejudice and misconceptions that so often lead to such disharmony.

This conference, having been established for over 34 years now, has become a premier interfaith event of Canada and a beacon for the world to follow. It's not only buoyed by the so many faith communities and philosophical traditions that thrive in Canada, but is also supported by municipal, provincial and federal governments, academic institutions and the media.

From humble beginnings in Brantford and moving to Waterloo, Kitchener and since last year the City of Guelph, the World Religions Conference continues to sow the seed of love, understanding and respect among the follower of all religions and philosophies that participate. Through teaching, dialogue and social interaction, I am confident that this year's event will lead us all to develop a stronger understanding of Canada's diverse faith communities and a more peaceful future, in Canada and around the world.

The Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, envisioned such interfaith interaction over a century ago. Describing the basis of respect for others' faiths and respect for the founders of all religions he wrote:

".....One of the principles upon which I have been established is the following: God has informed me that of the religions, which have spread and are firmly established in the world through Prophets, holding sway over a part of the world and achieving survival and long life, none was false in its origin. Nor was any of those Prophets false Therefore, this principle lays down the foundation of love, peace and harmony, and supports moral values, in that we consider all those prophets true who appeared in the world..... In light of this principle, we honour all religious founders....."

Tohfa Qaisariyyah (A Gift for the Queen) page 4

The World Head and Fifth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, while delivering a keynote address at a similar World Religions Conference in London UK said:

"... all the major religions of the world taught the worship of God and love and compassion for mankind in their original form. If these original teachings were upheld today it would lead to a harmonious society, free from conflict and war..."

Keynote address, Conference of World Religions, London UK, February 11, 2014

I congratulate all the speakers, participants, partner organizations and guests, who are participating in today's event. I wish you all a wonderful conference.

Sincerely,

Lal Khan Malik
National President
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada
September 28, 2014
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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Le Président

The President

11 September 2014
By E-MAIL:INFO@WORLDRELIGIONSCONFERENCE.ORG

Dear Mr. Rana,

I write in response to your letter of 13 August 2014, in which you kindly invited me to attend the 34th World Religions Conference, which will take place on 28 September 2014 in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. I am pleased to have received this kind invitation and I thank you for reaching out. Unfortunately, due to my other commitments I am not in a position to attend the Conference.

That said, I am most pleased to send you a message of support and encouragement on the occasion of the 34th World Religions Conference, which will take place in Guelph, Ontario, Canada on 28 September 2014. What is more, the theme of the Conference is a particularly rich one: 'Pathway to Peace'. As the President of the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, an institution dedicated to the pacific settlement of international disputes, the promotion of the international rule of law, and the maintenance of international peace and security, it is no secret that this theme is near and dear to my heart. I am particularly happy to know that it will feature prominently in the upcoming Conference.

In many ways, therefore, this is not only a propitious event to reflect and meditate on contemporary challenges and future prospects in the fields of peacekeeping, peace-building and peacemaking, but also an apt moment to consider how the World Religions Conference can contribute to the advancement of pacific avenues and peaceful dialogue in our fast-evolving global community. I would be most grateful if the World Religions Conference could further promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, including through judicial proceedings, among its constituencies.

Mr. Nabeel A. Rana
Chief Planning and Coordinating Officer
World Religions Conference
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Canada

There is every indication that the 34th World Religions Conference will be a resounding success. The Conference theme will provide an ideal opportunity to reflect upon the many contributions that multi-faith coalition-building, understanding and intercultural sensitivity can provide in identifying peaceful resolutions to global crises and challenges; always in concert with multilateral institutional processes, pacific settlement of disputes, development of international legal rules, and so on. I have no doubt that this Conference will bring together an impressive roster of panelists, scholars, political leaders, members of the media, and governmental representatives, all commonly invested in addressing present-day challenges posed by our interconnected and interdependent world.

Indeed, the Conference promises to further contribute to the ongoing dialogue over the role that multi-faith sensibilities can play in our shared conscience, with a view to identifying viable and peaceful avenues forward when addressing difficult questions and global challenges. I have no doubt that this event will generate thought-provoking and enriching exchanges among participants. After all, it is only by standing together, celebrating our differences of thought, religion and belief – but remaining resolutely united in our shared defence of the international rule of law, equality for all and peaceful resolution of any dispute – that we can truly make the world a better place. To my mind, that is the very spirit of your Conference, and you should be commended for that shared vision and progressive worldview.

Let me take this opportunity to extend my warmest salutations to all participants at the Conference. I wish the event organizers and interlocutors all the success they deserve so well, as they take part in what will undoubtedly be a productive and memorable World Religions Conference.



Peter Tomka



PRIME MINISTER · PREMIER MINISTRE

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings to all those attending the 34th World Religions Conference, organized by Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada.

This event brings together individuals from a wide range of religious beliefs and philosophical traditions to explore issues of shared concern. Members of faith communities have an integral part to play in promoting tolerance, openness, and understanding toward others. The fact that you have been assembling in a spirit of dialogue and congeniality for more than three decades speaks to your commitment to fostering mutual understanding, respect and acceptance and, thus, to making the world a better place.

I am certain that the theme of this year's conference, "Pathway to Peace," will stimulate a great deal of enlightening and thought-provoking discussion, and that this event will continue to thrive as an inspiring gathering where ideas can flourish for the common good.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I offer my best wishes for a most productive meeting.

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.

OTTAWA
2014



Premier of Ontario - Première ministre de l'Ontario

September 28, 2014

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, I am honoured to extend warm greetings to all the delegates of the 34th World Religions Conference.

Our province takes pride in being a harmonious multicultural society. It is, therefore, honoured to host an event that promotes inter-faith dialogue and builds bridges between our diverse religious communities. This year's theme, *Pathway to Peace*, is timely and relevant in light of the peace situation in some parts of the globe.

Kahlil Gibran, the great philosopher and poet once said, "God made Truth with many doors to welcome every believer who knocks on them." Every faith and creed offers a path to achieving compassion, mutual respect, and ultimately, world peace. This year's conference is an opportunity for members of different faiths to gather together to explore these many paths.

I thank the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at for hosting this conference. And I commend all the delegates and speakers for sharing their knowledge. By engaging in meaningful and respectful discussions, we can be inspired and enlightened by the wisdom of different religious and philosophical traditions.

I offer my best wishes for another memorable and inspirational conference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen Wynne".

Kathleen Wynne
Premier

Pathway to Peace Islamic Perspective

Muhammad Afzal Mirza – Toronto
Missionary Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada

[Prolific speaker and a learned scholar of world religions. Takes keen interest in youth welfare. Regularly hosts a live phone-in radio program explaining contemporary Islamic issues. Graduated from the Ahmadiyya Islamic University in 1976. Worked as an Islamic Missionary in various cities in Pakistan, USA and now in Canada. Former Vice President of the Institute of Islamic Studies in Toronto. Presented at numerous interfaith forums throughout Canada.]

It is no secret that the world is going through very rough and unsettling times. A substantial portion of our planet is affected by economic instability, political strife and warfare in some form or another.

Uprisings, revolts and civil discords are abounding in third world countries where peace is already a rare commodity. Social and personal peace is nonexistent thanks to corruption, poverty, injustice and religious extremism. It does not help that many of those countries are being ruled by callous regimes that have no interest in improving the condition of their people.

In the first world, where we live in peace and security, there seems to be a deficiency of inner peace. Materialism and the pursuit of “happiness” have driven many to the abyss of despair and misery. In this increasingly bleak world, we are in dire need of peace.

Islam is a religion that promotes establishment of peace on earth, from day one. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) was primarily a peacemaker the likes of whom the world has never seen. He effectively established law and order in a society of brutes and savages.

He introduced a religion of peace to the world and taught that a *true Muslim is one who refrains from harming others.*

He trained his followers to be servants of humanity and always reminded them that their task was to provide comfort to humankind, not trouble.

If there is a solution to the unrest and instability that the world faces; if there is a “pathway to peace” it lies in the pristine teachings of Islam.

One of the primary causes of social unrest is religious intolerance. There is seldom any peace in a society that refuses to give the freedom of religion to its citizens. Justice demands that all people should have complete freedom of religion and conscience.

The Holy Qur'an has laid out a beautiful principle, which states that there is no compulsion in religion – every person has the right and freedom to believe in what he/she wills. We are taught that every religion should be given due respect and no deity or religious founder should ever be abused.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) established peace in society by granting religious freedom to everyone living under his rule. Having been forced out of his homeland due to severe religious persecution, his first act after migration was to form a peace treaty between the Muslim and Jewish

citizens of the city of Madinah. He established that all citizens had the right to practice their own religions without any fear of persecution or intolerance. Muslims and Jews were to live in harmony, as allies. This treaty resulted in peaceful coexistence between all citizens of Madinah, regardless of their faith. Moreover, when a Christian convoy visited him in his city, he allowed them to worship in his mosque. His doors were always open to people of all faiths, and he was ever ready to serve them and assist them in their needs.

Equality

Equality is another aspect of justice that needs to be promoted for the establishment of peace in society. When it comes to equality, Islam teaches that all human beings are born as equals and have equal rights and freedoms.

Centuries before the establishment of civil rights movements and human rights campaigns, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) had already established social, racial and gender equality in society.

In terms of gender equality, he liberated women from the oppression and subordination that they faced in society by giving them equal rights. For instance, he gave them legal rights, inheritance rights, property rights, and divorce rights. Women were given just as many, if not more rights than men. As a result, they were no longer viewed as inferior beings and they began to excel in society.

In pre-Islamic culture, slaves, orphans, and widows were also deprived of all rights and freedoms. The Holy Prophet (sa) changed that as well, and as a direct result of his teachings, former slaves such as Zaid bin Haritha (ra) were made commanders and widows such as Sayyidah Saudah (sa) were given the honourable status of being the “mothers of the believers.”

He gave equal rights to non-Arabs as well. His friends were people of all social classes, races and colours. In fact, one of his closest companions, Bilal (sa), was an African slave, to whom he gave the title Sayyidna Bilal (or, 'our leader, Bilal').

The Holy Prophet (sa) enjoined the Muslims to carry on his tradition of maintaining social equality in his final address. He declared:

O people, what I say to you, you must hear and remember . . . All people, whatever nation or tribe they may belong to, and whatever station they may hold, are equal. Even as two fingers of the two hands are equal, so are human beings equal to one another. No one has any right, any superiority to claim over another. You are as brothers.

Regarding racial equality he said, *An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab and a non-Arab has no superiority over an Arab.*

No white person has superiority over a black person and no black person has superiority over a white person. Only such a person is superior who transcends in his personal good deeds.

Such was the equality and justice that our beloved Prophet Muhammad (sa) preached throughout his life. This is that golden principle, which lays the foundation of a harmonious society and establishes peace on earth!

Pathway to Peace

Humanist (Atheist and Agnostic) Perspective

Karis Burkowski - Waterloo
President, Sacred Secular Sanctuary

[Sacred Secular Sanctuary president, and World Pantheist Movement board member, Karis is an atheist, embracing Secular Humanism and Scientific Pantheism (reverence for the Universe and Nature). Karis has celebrated with devotees in synagogues, cathedrals, temples, mosques and gurdwaras around the world. A member of Interfaith Grand River since 2001, she understands the only acceptable spiritual path to be evidence-based, rational, empowering, and - essential in our multifaith world – tolerant.]

When every news cycle shows us images of war and strife, of chaos and assaults on one another as well as on the climate and on the planet that sustains us, where do we look to find Pathways to Peace?

There are three answers to that question.

The first Path to Peace is through authenticity at an individual level. When what we believe and what we do are in harmony, our behaviour is authentic. We are “Walking our talk”. When what we believe aligns with what we understand through explorations, evidence and education, we eliminate cognitive dissonance, and our thoughts become more peaceful.

The second Path to Peace is through social justice. We humans have an innate sense of right and wrong, which developed over hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution, when we learned that the tribe only survives when we take care of one another.

Give one small child two toys and another child none, and they will both immediately sense the unfairness. What happens next will depend upon the beliefs and training of the children and the adults around them. In a culture of fairness and social justice, the toys will be shared. But if adults have trained one child to believe he is superior to or more entitled than the other child, the unfair situation will continue. Resentment will build and eventually there will be conflict. This is social inequality in microcosm.

When we deny equal rights and privileges to any group defined by race, gender, age, ethnicity, or by any other criteria, we create inequity and we can, and should, expect that this will lead to unrest, conflict and, eventually, violence.

The third Path to Peace, at a global level, requires seeing the Big Picture; understanding and accepting reality. The international conflicts, devastation and senseless slaughter that we see in the world are just larger examples of the two children fighting over who gets to have all the toys. The surrounding adults, who should be stopping the fighting have, instead, taken sides and joined in. They are busy encouraging the fight, providing reasons based on their belief systems for why the fight is justified, and handing bigger and bigger weapons to those fighting.

When I say belief systems I do not necessarily mean religions, although religions have sometimes been a significant part of the problem. Belief systems can also mean beliefs about ethnic groupings or land rights or manifest destiny. In all cases, the fighting continues because of the belief systems of the

parties involved.

Vast areas of our planet are being destroyed because of belief systems about the rights of corporations and capitalist enterprises. Somehow there is a belief that economic growth is an ultimate goal, coupled with a belief that the environmental impact does not need to be counted in the economic cost of production. This is ridiculous, given the fact that we are on a finite planet with finite resources but the belief system persists and the plundering goes on.

Population growth is overwhelming the planet and its resources. In my lifetime world population has increased from 2.5 billion to over 7 billion people. Yet women are still prevented from choosing for themselves whether or not they will bear children. Science has provided contraception tools for controlling population growth but, because of our belief systems, these tools are withheld from those who need them most. Instead we seem to have decided to just keep blindly, relentlessly growing until we reach the limit of what the planet can support. When that happens, we will reduce our population growth, but it will be through wars over resources, diseases caused by overcrowding and pollution, and starvation.

We must begin taking the necessary steps to assure our own survival, to save us from ourselves. We need to take a good, hard look at all of our belief systems, abandon those that are no longer helpful, and **accept the reality of the Big Picture**. The alternative is bleak.

We have only one planet, one life, one humanity. The Pathway to Peace is a clear understanding and acceptance of that reality, an understanding that will make it possible for all of us to walk the Paths of Peace together.

Pathway to Peace Hindu Perspective

Swami Chaitanya Jyoti – Kitchener
Vice president of International Brahmriishi Mission
Head Preacher at Brahmriishi Mission of Canada

[Disciple of H.H. Brahmriishi Shri Vishvatma Bawra Ji Maharaj, Chaitanya Jyoti is graduated in M.A. and M.Ed. and has been a lecturer at the Punjab Agriculture University, India. Now vice president of International Brahmriishi Mission and head preacher at Brahmriishi Mission of Canada. Received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal Award, 14 November 1012, for outstanding and selfless dedicated service to the community and to Canada for over 30 years.]

Peace through spiritual discipline

Global disturbances and restlessness of mankind are some of the major problems in the World. It is a well-known fact that these disturbances and restlessness are not the cause in itself but the effect of some deeper and more subtle cause. A great, ancient seer once said that if one tries to remove any disease without searching out an understanding of the root cause of that disease, one cannot be successful. Likewise without knowing the root cause of these sufferings, anxiety, pain and calamities, it is not possible to remove these and attain peace. According to Sankhya Philosophy, the root cause of all miseries is residing in the human intellect, but mostly mankind is not aware of this fact. People are searching for answers on the surface of life and outside of themselves in the world.

Some people belief that peace and happiness can be achieved by fulfilling their individual interest or selfish motives. Some think that the accumulation of the objects of worldly enjoyment as well as the increase of wealth will guarantee their peace and happiness. Some propagate the ideology that if wealth would be distributed among all people, then human beings would be happy and free from all miseries.

From these conclusions another question arises. If wealth is not giving peace and happiness to the richest persons, then how can that wealth, when distributed, have the power to give happiness to society as a whole? A Vedic Seer, Yama, declared in the Kathopanised, "na vitten tarpaniyo manusya," man can never be satisfied with wealth. Inner satisfaction comes through the attainment of true knowledge about life and its own source.

As the Upanishads declare, eternal happiness is the nature of infinity. That very infinity is our own source of life, in other words, that is called Godhead or Supreme Being. Truly, our real self is a manifestation of that Infinity and therefore, we can say we are all children of this Divinity. Our self is eternally pure and by nature it is blissful, knowledge full and infinite. Lord Krishna states in the 14th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita that manifestation takes place in the intellect which is the first projection of Divine Energy. Finite is not our own nature but it is the nature of the intellect. When our self becomes identified with the intellect, it assumes limitation and all impurities begin from there. The impurities produce an external movement outside one's own self and resultantly create individuation and separation from wholeness. Along with individuation comes delusion and egotism. Due to the impurity of intellect and existence of egotism, the mind becomes restless and creates tension, anxiety, lust and greed. In this state, a person's life becomes miserable and peace less.

A restless person cannot be happy, nor can a restless family, society, nation or world fulfill their inner desire for happiness and peace. As long as we are not rooting out that infatuation we cannot create peace in the world, let alone any other level of family, society or nation. As lord Krishna states in the 2nd chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, happiness is the result of peace and peace is the result of generosity which comes about through devotion and development of pure wisdom. That can be achieved through Yoga, through realizing Oneness with Supreme Consciousness.

The process of bringing peace into each individual heart is called spiritual discipline. Every person has three instruments, body, mind and intellect. If restlessness is in any one level, there cannot be peace. We create peace in human life by working on these levels of the individual. Spirit is above these three levels and is always peaceful. According to the Upanisads, the term for Spirit, “*Asango ayam purusha*,” indicates that Spirit is never polluted or disturbed. Disturbance only lies in body, mind and intellect. How to make the body, mind and intellect pure, healthy and stable is the subject of spiritual discipline. Through practice of asanas (physical postures), pranayama (breathing exercises) and meditation we can purify the body, mind and intellect. But the most valuable method for purification of the body is pure food. Its impact is not on the level of body alone but extends with greater impact to the mental and intellectual levels. According to the Vedas, “*Ahara shudau sattvashuddhi*,” i.e. pure food creates pure intellect.

In the 36th chapter of the Yajur Veda, Dadhichi, a great ancient Seer enunciated a great method in a prayer. It is:

Lord, May there be Peace in the Heaven , Peace in the Space, Peace on the Earth, Grant us Peace in the Waters, Peace in our Food grains, Bring Peace in the Cosmos, Peace in the Whole Creation, Peace in All, May there be Peace in Peace, Peace in our Heart and Peace in the World.

In this prayer, the seer first enunciated that heaven, space and earth all must be peaceful and unpolluted, because if pollution or impurity exists at any level, then we will never be able to make our body, mind, and intellect pure. Heaven is always pure, but is a well-known fact that our space and earthly environments become polluted by our unwise actions and greedy behavior. If we are eager to bring peace in the world, then we must first correct our own actions and behavior. We know that our action is the projection of our inner desire, and our desire is directed by our own thought. If our intellect and mind are not pure and peaceful, then our thought and action cannot be pure. Impure thought cannot direct us towards peace and happiness.

In conclusion, when we are talking about global peace, we mean peace in the human mind. This can be attained through pure and stable wisdom through spiritual discipline. The greatness of a human being resides in his pure wisdom; this is the greatest gift of Godhead for mankind. In Vaidic philosophy, when a man has stable wisdom and a restful mind, he not only becomes a vessel of Divinity, but he becomes honorable for deities, too. On the other hand, when a man has a restless mind and impure wisdom, he becomes dangerous for all creation and worse than a wild animal. Therefore, we should all try to adopt a spiritual discipline which will lead us to divine wisdom and bestow us with a peaceful mind. The purpose of a spiritual discipline is to be fully aware of our own real nature and try to elevate ourselves from this finite state to realize unity in diversity.

Pathway to Peace Christian Perspective

Rev. John Lawson – Guelph
Minister in the United Church of Canada

[John is a minister in the United Church of Canada currently serving in Guelph. Before theological studies in Princeton, New Jersey he studied International History at Western and London School of Economics. John is passionate about the spiritual connection with the environment, was a candidate for the Green Party in Guelph during the last federal election and is involved in multi-faith dialogue in the Guelph community.]

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the organizers and sponsors for the privilege of speaking to you today. And especially to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Community for their faithful commitment to this multi-faith dialogue. This world religions conference has never been more essential than in this 21st century.

And the theme for this conference “Pathway to Peace” could not be more timely as we see the rise of religious conflicts and sectarian conflicts all around the world.

I will be speaking on behalf of Christianity – which is a daunting thought. For as I am sure you know, Christianity has many expressions both here in Canada as well as around the world. So I come humbly to speak as a Christian and as one voice within that broad tradition.

Some while ago, in my work with students at the University of Guelph, one young Christian student came in and reported that a professor had said that religion . . . and Christianity in particular, was at the bottom of most of the violent conflicts around the world. The student was taken aback but didn't feel she knew enough to challenge the assertion.

So ironically – in this secular society of Canada in the 21st century – we often find ourselves, as people with a religious perspective, lumped together as those “religious types”. And depending on the perspective of the one making the comment – this could be taken as a concern, a problem or simply as a curiosity. And so we who share a religious expression for our spirituality now find that we have a curious unity that often paints us all with the same brush that we all share within this secular context of Canadian society it the 21st Century.

I'm sure you would disagree with blanket and simplistic statement of the professor at the University of Guelph that religion was at the bottom of most of the violent conflicts around the world. But nonetheless we cannot escape our role in the fact that people often divide along religious lines and there is no denying that these have led to conflict . . . sometimes violent.

In this talk I hope to do three things.

First, look at some of the teachings of the founder of Christianity – Jesus of Nazareth and what he had to say about peace.

Second, to briefly give a sense of how, over two millennia the followers of Jesus – Christians – have or have not followed pathways of peace.

Thirdly, a sense of where we might be today as Christians – and what gifts we might have to offer to conversations such as this as we live into Pathways for Peace.

At the center of Jesus' vision – which he called the Kingdom of God -- was a vision of justice and peace for all peoples. From a Christian understanding this peace has always been God's intent for humanity and all creation. Jesus' vision drew on his Jewish roots – especially the prophetic tradition – which had a vision of the peaceable Kingdom where “The wolf will live with the lamb . . . They won't harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11)

Jesus' teaching on peace were unequivocal – Here are some of his teachings:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9)

“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39)

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44)

“I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you.” (Matthew 5:39)

Jesus was also clear that anger and violence originated in the human heart and therefore there needed to be a change in the human heart for peace and reconciliation to occur. One of the central aspects of his ministry was demonstrating the peace and reconciliation that God intended for all people.

Jesus lived what he preached. When he was arrested by the Romans he forbade his disciples to fight saying, “those who live by the sword will die by the sword”.

For the first three centuries the Christian movement was a persecuted minority within the Roman Empire. Christians did not fight nor join the army – and this sometimes led to persecution for un-loyalty and subversion. Then in the early 4th Century the emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire. And so began a marriage of Christianity with State power that has existed more or less until the 19th and 20th century in the West and where Christianity was the dominant religion. This Christians call Christendom.

This meant huge changes with Christianity. Sadly those who had been persecuted for their Faith now, sometime, became the persecutors. A special note must be made of persecution of the Jewish people who for centuries were viewed by some Christians as the ones that rejected Jesus and had him killed. This anti-Jewish hatred set the stage for the Holocaust in Europe in the 20th Century. Further, religious wars were fought between Christians who disagreed with each other. Then as European countries set about carving up the world for colonization they took with them Christianization and Christian missions. Sadly Christianity was seen as an imperialist religion allied with imperial power.

But there have always been voices of dissent. Some of the great Saints of the church, for example St. Francis, had a vision of peace and peacemaking in the time of the crusades. Peace churches – such as the Mennonite church – came out of the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s in Europe and have, often at great cost, been witnesses for peace ever since.

What Christianity has witnessed both in Europe and in Canada over the last few decades is the end of special privilege as society embraces secularism and a multi-faith identity. And to use a saying of Jesus in a different context, we as Christians in the West have been witnessing the unraveling of this close state church relationship and we are trying to figure out “what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God”.

We are learning a few things – and pathways to peace and rediscovery of the peaceful vision of Jesus has been one of the benefits of this unraveling. I would name four areas for Christians as we are reclaiming the peace tradition – and I believe these make us in a better position to be peacemakers within this multi-

faith world.

The first is personal. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, peace I give to you – not as the world gives to you”. Jesus is clear about the goal for peace that must come from a peaceful heart. That it comes from the love of God and the love of neighbour – and Jesus is clear that a neighbour includes everyone of every religious or cultural background.

Second Christians are beginning to learn repentance. This has always been a key Christian teaching. Jesus said, “If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift.” We, in my tradition, the United Church of Canada, for example, are beginning to discover what it means to repent for our role in trying to destroy aboriginal culture and religion here in Canada through residential schools. We are now trying to walk together with our First Nations brothers and sisters in “right relations”.

Third, Christians have rediscovered Jesus' call to be peacemakers – helping in the work of peace and justice in the world. There is a recognition that true peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but a larger vision of human compassion and right relations. This moves beyond a charity model to seeking justice and meeting people as brothers and sisters in the human family.

Finally I think many Christians are learning a sense of partnership with “people of goodwill” from all or no religious traditions. There has been an openness to multi-faith dialogue and working together in common cause for living in Pathways of Peace.

I wish to introduce a song with words by St. Francis of Assisi from the 13th Century called “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace”, a prayer really . . . and as valid today as it was then. I am sure those of many different faiths will find in these words a prayer that they can also pray.

Pathway to Peace Buddhist Perspective

Dr. Christopher Ross – Waterloo
Associate Professor at Wilfrid Laurier University

[Psychologist, Dr. Ross provides psychotherapy spiritually-informed by world wisdom traditions. An Associate Professor at Wilfrid Laurier. Recent publications: "Buddhism, Healing and Pastoral Care" in Psychotherapy: Cure of the Soul, and "Typewise: Using Jung's Theory of Psychological Types in Teaching Religious Studies". Current teaching: "Therapeutic and religious responses to grief loss and death", "Spirituality in the human life cycle", "Religious experience", and "Buddhism, psychotherapy and western psychology".]

The cause of suffering for the Buddha was three-fold. First is clinging to what we want. Attachment in this sense of clinging produces the suffering of loss that we cannot abide. We spend so much of our lives warding off loss – to quote mark Twain: “I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.” It's not that we should not have desires; it is that we should not cling to them if we're to enjoy an underlying peace that slowly accumulates with practice.

The second cause of suffering is aversion to what we don't like. Not that we have to pretend to like what we do not like. But that we note the not-liking and watch our mind manufacturing anger and even hatred which is the wish to harm or destroy what we conceive as the cause of our dislike. Nor should we ignore or suppress our anger. Rather we observe it and learn from that about our attachments, and then make a decision in relation to it based on being awake to our desires and our lingering narcissism. For example we may be more oriented to helping others than ourselves but we're crippled by resentment because unconsciously we await pay-back if not in kind then in approval. The study of our aversion in all its subtlety is worth a life-time, or two as the case may be!

The third cause of suffering is ignorance or confusion concerning our own true nature. What is ultimately real! Aside the obviously discredited candidates – wealth, power status and so on – let's go to strongest candidate from a practical, functional point of view – our mind must be real! After all – we're afraid of losing our minds. However, who we are cannot be our minds, because the possessor cannot be the possessed. I have a car – therefore I cannot be my car. I have a mind, therefore I cannot be my mind. Well if not my mind, what might “I” be - perhaps just Mind or Consciousness, something that I share with all sentient or conscious beings. When we are full of mind, when we are mindful, we come into contact with our own true nature – the clinging and the aversion have their place but they are observed rather than possessing us. This is the ground of the pathway to peace, the ground of everyday life when observed with equanimity. Here is a guided meditation:

Imagine that you are lying under the deep blue sky upon the light earth-brown shores of Lake Manosarovar, at the foot of the most sacred mountain in Tibet's high plateau roof-world - Mount Kailash. Fifty yards out on a slight flat island there is a tall tree with wide handsome bowers extending on either side. Surprisingly you see sitting in the branches on the left of the tree all the people you have ever loved or respected including family members and beloved teachers or admired figures made known to you through books or other media. They are smiling at you, happy that you are here enjoying the warmth of the sun on this roof -world and its beautiful scenery. Time drifts by as you bathe in their warm affection, and your own. They are indistinguishable. A sound emanating from the right side of the wide-bowered tree draws your attention, and then you see that upon the branches on the right side of the tree sit people with whom you have had conflict - opponents, rivals, even enemies, and you experience a

different set of feelings - anger, annoyance, even hatred. These feelings persist for as long as your eyes fasten upon them, and until your eyes wander to the upper boughs of the tree which you see is full of people whom you have never seen before this moment. They are indeed strangers, and again your feelings shift. You feel perhaps an absence of feeling, indifference, perhaps a “blah”.

While still absorbed in getting used to this reality, you hear a rustling. It is not the wind. You then look in the direction of the island tree, and lo! The people in the top of the tree are clambering down to the left side and filling the branches hitherto occupied by your love ones (Of course people you love were once unknown to you!), even while those in the loved position have now traversed to the enemy-rival position in the tree upon the right-hand branches, which is only possible because the former enemies have now become forgotten into strangers and evacuated to the top of the tree.

The moral of this visual argument, and the object for analytic meditation is that our minds are unstable because we engage, all the time, in an existential triage - of friend, enemy or stranger - perhaps not by Lake Manosarovar but most lunchtimes as we enter the café by work-place and survey the tables even as we ask “Who is here?” Our wise Tibetan lamas (Kelsang Gyatso 1990; Kyabgon 2007) now conclude in favor of “equanimity” - equal-mindedness:

There is no certainty. Moreover, in the past we have been close to those we now regard as strangers, and there will come a time when we shall become estranged from those to whom we feel close. Therefore there is no sense in our being attached to some and feeling aversion or indifference towards others. By thinking in this way we can give up these unbalanced attitudes of attachment, aversion and indifference, and cultivate instead a feeling of warmth towards all living beings. (Kelsang Gyatso 1990: 62)

In short, why not have the warm affectionate disposition that we experience with friends toward all beings? This is the quality of deep availability people note in such exemplary figures as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Buddhism has been criticised for being inward looking and so ill-equipped to deal with the global crises of climate change, increasing inequality in the West, and oppression world-wide. Let me explain: being inwardly calm helps you to see what's out there and make sound judgements about what to do. Being peaceful allows us the depth of concentration to listen to all aspects of a problem and to make careful judgements. We fly to enlightenment on the wings of both compassion and wisdom.

Pathway to Peace Jewish Perspective

Rabbi Michael Dolgin – Toronto
Senior Rabbi of Temple Sinai Congregation of Toronto

[Senior Rabbi of Temple Sinai Congregation of Toronto and Past President of both the Toronto Board of Rabbis and the Reform Rabbis of Greater Toronto. Ordained by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1992 and is proud to have served Temple Sinai during the last 22 years. His congregational rabbinate has focused on the creation of new liturgy and meeting the challenges of Jewish life through study, prayer, and learning.]

Peace is the central value of the Jewish tradition. In fact, it is more than a value. The Hebrew word for peace, Shalom, is also a name for the Everpresent One. Shalom is the vessel in which all other blessings are held. When peace is absent, other blessings lose their meaning and strength. The word shalom cannot be translated as peace alone. Its root meaning is wholeness, completeness or unity. We seek peace for the world, for all peoples and for all individuals.

Judaism as practiced since the destruction of the central Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE emphasizes the desire for peace. Our tradition is comprised of mitzvot or commandments. We are commanded to seek peace and pursue it continually. The central element of Jewish prayer contains 19 blessings. The final one always is a prayer for peace. The last words at the end of our service also speak of the centrality of peace. “May the One who makes peace in the heavens cause peace to descend on us and on all Israel.” The initial words of this prayer are a quotation from the book of Job 25:2. This allusion reminds us that we cannot separate our quest for peace from our seeking after meaning and justice in a troubled world.

Though the sages taught about peace, the roots of that desire flow from our Bible and the Torah, its first five books which are the core teachings of Judaism. In the book of Proverbs, the Torah is described as a tree of life. Proverbs: 3:18. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. Jewish study and learning are our primary guide in seeking peace.

The Jewish tradition is rich in commentary and teaching that brings out the meaning of ancient words in our modern context. Our most ancient and powerful prayer for peace is the Birkat Kohanim, or priestly benediction found in Numbers 6:22-27. These words of peace are shared by those of priestly descent in many synagogues on holidays and by parents over their children each week on Shabbat, our most sacred day. These verses are familiar far beyond our tradition: May the Eternal bless you and keep you; May the Eternal deal kindly and graciously with you; May the Eternal bestow divine favour upon you and grant you peace.

Our commentaries describe these three verses as a pathway to peace. A first step to peace is the blessing of protection, safety and security. Food and shelter are necessary prerequisites to search for true peace. The second step is the mission and direction provided by entering into covenant with the Eternal One. These elements allow for successful preparation or leadership and the sharing of peace with others. A commentary will be shared in the presentation to further illuminate this teaching.

Shalom, peace, is our most traditional greeting and our wish for all peoples. Just as we believe that God is One, so we seek a united earthly existence. No individual or nation can truly have peace unless it is offered and shared with all.

Pathway to Peace Aboriginal Spiritual Perspective

Rick Rogers – Toronto
Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Bear Clan

[A member of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Bear Clan, with tribal affiliations of the Chippewa/ Pottawatomi Nations. For several years in Ontario, Rick has been involved with Aboriginal organizations as well as non-aboriginal educators and organizations including Concerns Canada, Univ of Toronto, Toronto Board of Education, Correctional Services and various social service groups. Rick's strongly feels a need to make people aware of Aboriginal lifestyles.]

Ahnii, Bozhoo, Ogitchidaa N'Dishnawkas, M'kwa N,Dodem, Aamjiwnaang Doon Jiwbah.
Anishnawbe n'dow...

As we walk in our daily lives let us always remember to recognise and give honour to the single celled amebas that live in the waters to help clean the waters, as we walk further, give thanks to the plants that live in the waters that feed the fish, as we step ahead to give thanks to all the one that live in and out of the waters, stepping further let us remember to give thanks to all the plant life that gives us food and medicines, as we walk further let us give thinks to all the four leggeds that give us food, shelter and clothing, as we walk even further lets us give thanks to the tree people who help purify the air that we breath and as we walk even further let us thank the winged ones who bring us song in the morning to wake us for the upcoming day, walking even further we give thanks to the insects who help with the pollination of plants to feed the animals and winged ones, as we walk even we give thanks to our brother the Eagle who watches over us and takes are messages to the Creator. As we walk even further we thank the Grandmother Moon who controls not only the cycles of the waters but also the cycles of the women. As we walk even further we give thanks to the stars who shine every night and gives us light to see in the dark. Again we walk further and give thanks to the Grandfather sun who shines brightly on us every day. Without him there would be no life. As we walk even further we give thanks to our Ancestors who have passed on to the Great Mystery(The other side). GihemN'doh. The ones who have left us with the teachings on how to Love , respect, honour all things. Let us give thanks to the Creator who has put us here to care for all of these things for the next seven generations. Nahaw..

Since the advent of the European there has been much strife, grief for the First Nations people through the greed and wanting of their need to OWN land, air and water. This has brought much confusion to the First Nations as we believe that we are not here to own but care for all of things on the Mother Earth for the future generations, as was our instructions from the Creator. To be caregivers of the Land.

The First Nations people have promoted peace and harmony even through attempts of genocide and assimilation by the visitors to this country. Of the 12.5 million First Nations that were here before these visitors contact, there are only 2.5 million in Canada today. We have lived through this turmoil by promoting peace and harmony with all.

UNTIL WE ARE WILLING TO RE-LEARN THE ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS OF THE CREATOR (GOD) AS TO THE CAREGIVING OF THE MOTHER EARTH AND CARING FOR EACH OTHER AS BROTHER AND SISTER ALL WILL BE DESTROYED AS WILL ALL HOPE FOR MANKIND BE DESTROYED.

Ogitchidaa/ Rick Rogers

Pathway to Peace

Sikh Perspective

Jagmeet Singh – Toronto
Member of Parliament Bramalea-Gore-Malton

[MPP Singh was re-elected in Bramalea-Gore-Malton during the 2014 provincial election. Jagmeet presented a bill in the Legislature, calling for the month of April to be recognized as Sikh Heritage Month which received royal assent. Mr. Singh was listed as one of Toronto Star's Top 12 people, named as Ontario's 75 most powerful people and featured as Toronto's 50 Most Influential People as one of the 5 youngest rising stars.]

Peace is a state of harmony or ease. It represents a concept of deep satisfaction and equipoise. When we are not at peace we are in some form of conflict. The ultimate manifestation of conflict is war.

What is the pathway to peace? Given the conflicts and wars across the world today, the answer to this question has never been more important.

Differences are the root of conflict. Throughout our history, wars and major conflict have been and continue to be fought on the basis of differences. These differences include but are not limited to religion, language, ethnicity, gender or geography. Even small conflicts between friends, family or neighbors boil down to differences. On a smaller scale these may only constitute differences of opinions, however the truth remains differences fuel conflicts.

Sikh philosophy teaches that the divisions caused by our differences are really just illusions. The divisions are manifestations of our ego or obsessively self-focused mindsets.

Sikh philosophy holds that each one of us is a drop of water from the infinite ocean of the universe. Inside each of us is a key to unlock the mysteries of the universe. Our egos, or haumai the obsession with self , act as a barrier which prevents us from merging with the divine infinity within us.

Sikhs believe that we all come from the same source, whether you call this source god, the universe or a form of energy. We all share this in common.

Whether we wear bright or dark, thick or thin clothes, clothing has no bearing on our self worth. Similarly whether our energy, life force or souls are clothed in the body of a man or a woman, whether we have black or white skin, or believe in the existence of divinity or not, none of this changes the fact that we share a common life energy, soul or existence. Our differences are just as irrelevant as our clothing.

A Sikh strives through meditating on the one universal energy to tear down the barriers created by one's ego. After tearing down this barrier one merges with the infinite divine universal energy within each and every one of us. Thus the goal of the Sikh is to realize the truth that we are all one and to merge with the one infinite universal energy.

By achieving this state of being one would achieve both internal as well external peace. By merging with the infinite one would be free from the suffering that flows from the finite world. One would move from me thinking, manmukh (literally face toward the ego) toward we thinking, gurmukh (literally face

toward the infinite).

In a state of we thinking, as a Gurmukh, one would realize the interconnectedness of all things and realize our oneness. One would come to realize the unity of diversity.

A Sikh's goal is to realize that a person half way across the world who looks different and has different beliefs, language and culture is in actuality connected to us. In fact that person is really the same as us. The Sikh belief in equality goes beyond the belief that woman is equal to man or black is equal to white. Sikh philosophy contends that these differences bear no impact on one's true value since one's fundamental essence is infinite, interconnected and one.

Thus with a Sikh perspective we would achieve inner peace by finding the infinite within ourselves and outer peace by realizing that we are intrinsically connected to all those around us. There is no, "us and them", no "me and you" because we are all one.

How could I harm you, if I am you? It would be like harming myself.

The goal of a Sikh is to truly love the one universal energy, to see this energy in all things and ultimately to love all as one.

And in doing so to achieve a path to universal peace.

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