Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding*

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Recently, conflict resolution practitioners and scholars have begun exploring the application and compatibility of theory and practice to different religious and cultural contexts and conflicts. This article is aimed at, first, bridging conflict resolution and intercultural training concepts through the presentation of a training model in interreligious peacebuilding; second, examining the dynamics and participants’ responses in an interreligious context to the intercultural sensitivity model, which is used in an intercultural communication training setting. The data and analysis are based on a series of workshops and interviews conducted between 1996 and 1999 with participants from diverse religious backgrounds. The narrative and stories illustrate the dynamics of the proposed training model and its impact on the participants. The analysis indicates that, with the exception of responses to the last two stages, participants in interreligious settings have similar types of responses to the Intercultural Sensitivity Model. Adaptation and integration responses not only did not exist, but were rejected by all participants on the grounds that moral, ethical, and spiritual religious dimensions would often prevent individuals from adopting integration or adaptation responses. Finally, the article proposes several questions and hypotheses to advance the research in this field.

Religion in Peacebuilding

Since the end of the Cold War, many scholars have argued that most conflicts are driven from clashes of communal identity, based on race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. Religion has an impact on the conflict causes, dynamic, and resolution. A large number of studies focus on the role of religion in conflict, many of them relating to the destructive role of religion. Marty & Appleby (1991) explore in depth the use of religious beliefs in forming fundamental religious movements. Fox (1999) illustrates how religious legitimacy can influence the formation of grievance-formation by ethno-religious minorities. This article shifts the focus to the role of religion in the peacebuilding process, a theme that has been neglected in research as well as practice.

In recent years, there has been a rising interest in how religion can be used in both conflict resolution and the peacebuilding process (Abu-Nimer, 1996; Johnston & Sampson, 1994; Lederach, 1999). The importance of interreligious peacebuilding is obvious from the widespread, central role religion plays in the individual and collective identity of many warring communities in Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Religion has

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been politicized, and war-justifying aspects of sacred texts emphasized rather than peaceful teachings. Individuals operating on a religious or spiritual basis are often better equipped to reach people at the level of the individual and subnational group than political leaders (Johnston & Sampson, 1994: 4). Such a unique religious peacebuilding role is clearly illustrated in the various case studies (Philippines, East Germany, South Africa, and Zimbabwe) presented by Johnston and Sampson. The critical role that religion can play in resolving intractable conflicts is also identified by Cox et al. (1994), who review the neglected potential of religious peacemaking based on a brief review of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Islam.

Exploring the role of religion in peacebuilding is an essential step in the study of culture and peacebuilding. Religious values and norms are central aspects of the cultural identity of many people involved in conflict dynamics. Scholars and practitioners have recognized the critical influence of non-religious cultural attributes in the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts; the cultural religious attributes play an equally important role in such processes of conflict resolution. Religious values, like other cultural values, can motivate people to fight or to reconcile. Similarly, religious rituals (like other cultural rituals) can be powerful tools in transforming animosity to cooperation.

Religion can also bring social, moral, and spiritual resources to the peacebuilding process. The spiritual dimension in religious peacebuilding can create a sense of engagement and a commitment both to peace and to transforming a relationship of a missing dimension from the mechanical and instrumental conflict resolution models (for the role of spirituality in conflict transformation, see Assefa, 1993; Curle, 1990; and Nhat Hanh, 1987).

Change Through Interreligious Peacebuilding Training

During interreligious training, participants share their experiences of approaching a conflict from a religious perspective and how that helped them reach their associates. Framing the intervention within a religious context and deriving the tools from a religious narrative have made it possible for interveners to gain access and increase their potential impact on the parties. Within the context of an interreligious intervention, simple events that occur in day-to-day interactions are used for peacebuilding. For example, the act of a Jewish person bringing a chair so that a Muslim person could sit down was perceived as a gesture of reconciliation from Judaism to Islam. Special training workshops for interreligious peacebuilding, focused on a specific set of skills and concepts, are more effective tools for peacebuilding intervention in an interreligious context than is a typical intervention that does not recognize the uniqueness of interreligious conflicts.

The goal in training for interreligious peacebuilding, as in conflict resolution and intercultural intervention in general, is to facilitate a change from the participants’ narrow, exclusionist, antagonistic, or prejudiced attitudes and perspectives to a more tolerant and open-minded attitude. Trainers also want to motivate and empower those who do hold tolerant attitudes to translate them into actions that promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Identifying the most effective ways of changing attitudes has been the subject of much social science research. Lewin (1948) suggested a three-step process of (1) unfreezing negative attitudes and perceptions, (2) reformulating new attitudes based on new information and experience, and (3) freezing the newly acquired attitudes.
by positive experience and actions. This approach has been at the center of most conflict resolution intervention.

Contact hypothesis is another approach that explains the conditions necessary to effect attitudinal change in individuals and groups (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Using this theory, practitioners and researchers have devised intervention models to help participants in interethnic encounter groups change their attitudes and perceptions (Abu-Nimer, 1999). Researchers and practitioners in the intercultural communication field have constructed developmental models that show how perceptions and attitudes of individuals change when they interact with or experience a different cultural setting (Bennett, 1986; Brislin, Landis & Brandt, 1983; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983).

Three major factors influence a training setting: (1) how cognitive, affective (emotional), and behavioral factors can change the attitudes of individuals in a training setting; (2) how effective it is to address participants as individuals or as representatives of their collective communities; and (3) how effective experiential ('here and now') learning is as compared to instrumental learning, which is based on new information and knowledge or a task to be completed (Abu-Nimer, 1999). All three factors must be considered in designing interreligious peacebuilding training and must address the role and impact of spirituality and morality and how these can contribute to change in participants' attitudes. Assela (1993), Johnston & Sampson (1994), and Merry (2000) are among the few scholars addressing the impact of spirituality and morality (mainly from a Christian perspective) on peacebuilding intervention.2 Johansen (1997) and Abu-Nimer (1996, 2002) examine the role of Islam in nonviolent peacebuilding and political change.

Culture and Interreligious Peacebuilding

There are over 160 definitions of culture (Avruch, 1998). For the purpose of this article, it is necessary to consider culture not as a set of static patterns and concepts recognized on a collective or group level, but as the social and cognitive process of individuals, emphasizing the variety of settings that individuals encounter. This approach expands culture to include not just quasi- or pseudo-kinship groupings (tribe, ethnic group, and national are the usual ones), but also groupings that derive from profession, occupation, class, religion, or region. Such orientation asserts that individuals reflect or embody multiple cultures (Avruch, 1998: 5). Thus, the working definition of culture, and its relation to religion in this article, corresponds with the following:

Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodement and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves. (Avruch, 1998: 17)

Individuals internalize cultural components differently. The deeper the cultural content is internalized, the more likely images or schemes will motivate actions. Religion influences the cultural behaviors and perceptions of an individual or group in varying degrees. When religious values, norms, and behaviors are an integral part of the interactions between individuals and among groups, then religion helps to construct both the individual's and the group's value system and world-view. If an individual or a group has internalized a set of

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2 Kraybill (1994) examined the role of three religious peacebuilders (the Roman Catholic Church, Moral Re-Armament, and the Quakers) in the transition to democracy in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. He identified three distinct intervention styles that corresponded with a spectrum of: persons – processes – structures.
religious values, these beliefs can motivate changes of attitude and action.

In interreligious peacebuilding, the major objective is to change the participants' worldview, particularly attitudes and behaviors towards the 'other'. Much of the research on intercultural interactions and training emphasizes ethnic, tribal, or non-religious aspects of the cultural identity. Like most communication and intercultural studies, the intercultural training materials that describe developmental intervention models (Bennett, 1986, 1993) rarely mention religion or interreligious settings. The same assumption that intercultural interactions are no different from interreligious interactions is made by conflict resolution training methods too (Fisher, 1997).³

This article presents the challenges, processes, and methods of peacebuilding training within an interfaith context. It focuses on questions such as: What are the dynamics of interreligious peacebuilding training? How do religious peacebuilding trainees react to the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993)? The study aims to illustrate the importance and uniqueness of religious attitudes and settings in intercultural exchanges, and aims to present a model for interreligious peacebuilding training. Using an interreligious peacebuilding training model systematically applied in several workshops, the study also identifies useful skills and concepts for interreligious peacebuilding.

Methodology

The study is based on data gathered by the author in conflict resolution workshops conducted between 1993 and 1999; interviews with members of different religious groups (mostly Muslims, Christians, and Jews); and observations and training in interreligious workshops. Bennett's intercultural sensitivity model was used in the 'Skills for Interreligious Peacebuilding' workshop conducted at Eastern Mennonite University. These workshops involved 58 participants affiliated with 11 different religious groups. The participants were queried formally and informally about their willingness to take part in other religious ceremonies, their motivation to conduct peacebuilding activities, and different religious methods of peacebuilding. The non-directive non-structured interviews allowed respondents to share their beliefs and attitudes about interreligious prejudice and stereotypes.

Interreligious Peacebuilding Training Model

Training Objective

Religion can influence conflict resolution processes through a religiously motivated intervener or through the religious nature of the conflict (parties and issues). Religion can therefore play a role in peacebuilding in each of the following situations: (1) the issues, the parties, and the interveners also have religious orientations; (2) the issues and the parties have religious orientations, but not the interveners; and (3) only the interveners have a religious orientation, but not the issues or parties.

In the training, the skills and strategies can be adjusted to fit the participants' intervention context, although the basic assumption of the training process is that religion, like culture, plays an active role in escalating and de-escalating a conflict because it influences the issues, parties, strategies, outcomes, and interveners. The objective of interreligious peacebuilding training, like any other training, is usually a function of the participants and their expectations. Thus, it

³ In an examination of several introductory texts and descriptions of the field of conflict resolution, interreligious interaction was not mentioned or included in the author's analysis or presentations. See, for example, Fisher (1997).
includes: (1) exploring the diverse roles performed by religious actors and the underlying values and assumptions that shape peacebuilding methodologies; (2) developing an awareness of both the constructive and destructive aspects of religion and conflict and how it limits interreligious interaction; (3) examining how interreligious cooperation can resolve conflicts; (4) encouraging participants to examine how religion has helped to construct their world-view and how it shapes their value system.

Training Methodology

Of the two typical training methods, elicitive and prescriptive, the elicitive approach is more effective in training for interreligious peacebuilding, because of the nature of participants and their objectives (Abu-Nimer, 1998). The elicitive mode relies on the participants' experiences and knowledge of the conflict to conduct the training or intervention, while in the prescriptive mode trainers use their expertise and specialized knowledge to teach specific skills and methods to deal with their conflicts (Abu-Nimer, 1998; Lederach, 1995). The elicitive approach empowers the participants and allows the trainer to draw upon the participants' experiences to construct and facilitate group awareness. Case studies, participants' personal stories, and professional experiences are the primary training tools. Although the elicitive training method is more effective and appropriate in this situation, participants who are used to frontal teaching methods often express an interest in lectures and structured presentations about interreligious peacebuilding or what other religions teach about peace. Individuals who have had no prior experience in conflict resolution often request the prescriptive approach and may be eager to learn about the field in a more conventional way. Non-Western participants, who find the elicitive method new and interesting, still, because of their cultural frontal learning style, may ask trainers to become instructors and provide substantive and structured input.

In training a diverse interreligious group with differing expectations, the elicitive approach is highly effective. Some of the participants' typical expectations are: to learn about various religious approaches to peacebuilding; to learn how to utilize different religious approaches to peacebuilding; to learn about religious peacemakers in different cultures; and to learn how to engage other religious communities in peacebuilding projects.

As in other fields, this training approach must engage all three dimensions of the attitudinal-change triangle: head, heart, and hand (3H), which correspond to cognition, emotion, and behavior (Figure 1). Interveners are successful when they can influence the parties' thinking, engage them in a positive emotional experience, and show them ways to apply their new learning through hands-on experience or chances for action. When using the 3H approach in an interreligious setting, participants explore where spiritual beliefs belong and suggest adding it in the middle of the triangle. An African participant suggested: 'you might be able to change the attitudes of secular people by using your 3H strategy; however, to gain access to and change people involved in a religious conflict, you ought to have a spiritual gate.'

Figure 1. Principles of Attitudinal Change in Interreligious Training Design
Training for religious peacebuilding has two dimensions. First, participants learn peacebuilding skills which they can use in their professional and personal lives. Second, the reactions of the participants themselves become the training material – the ‘here and now’ awareness of group dynamics, how the different religious groups interact with one another, is itself a source of learning. Combining both methods of instrumental/prescriptive training (to teach specific skills) and the elicitive/facilitative approach (using interactions of the participants as teaching material) increases the possibility of attitude and behavioral changes among participants.

Story-telling is an effective tool in this type of training (Duryea-Lebaron & Potts, 1993). Participants of all cultural backgrounds volunteer stories, although non-Western trainees seem most comfortable learning and participating this way. The powerful impact of a reconciliation story told by an African participant cannot be matched by a simulation or cognitive, intellectual discussion.

Training Design
Each of the five phases for the training models (Figure 2) includes a set of activities designed to show participants the role of interreligious peacebuilding. The following section briefly describes what happens at each phase and explores any challenges facing the training team and participants. Included are the responses of participants in an interreligious setting to the intercultural sensitivity developmental model proposed by Bennett (1993).

Getting Started As in any other type of training, the peacebuilding workshop begins with participants giving their names, stating their expectations, and entering into a contract for learning that recognizes different learning styles. Several groups of trainees decided the workshop should include, in addition to the typical group's contract, a pause for reflection or prayer, a practice unique to this type of training. Most workshops begin with an ice-breaker or reflection on the previous day's activities. However, in interreligious training, participants attempt to create an intentional community that relies on a spiritual connectedness. Prayers and rituals become an instrument to fulfill this objective.

Situating Our Work At this stage, the objective is to establish a common language for discussing peacebuilding and the role of religion. Participants explore the various causes of war, violence, and conflicts, and how to intervene using different theories of conflict resolution. Terminology, basic definitions, and assumptions underlying the processes of conflict resolution are made explicit. Participants are surprised to discover that the values that form the foundations of conflict resolution – inclusivity, empowerment, and satisfaction of human needs, long-term resolution, and systemic and individual transformation – are the same values promoted by various religions.

When conceptualizing religion in conflict resolution, a discussion often erupts about the definition of conflict. An American participant declared in a 1999 training workshop: 'All conflicts are spiritual, even if religious institutions are not involved.' This led to the training's first debate – the difference between the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual'. Typically, it is Westerners who insist on a distinction between religion as denominational affiliation and religion as the individual expression of spirituality. Other questions that may be raised at this point are: Who intervenes and in what conflicts? How does a religious intervener take part in a non-religious conflict? And how does a secular intervener take part in a religious conflict? A participant in a 1998 training workshop argued that an intervener may be more effective in an interreligious context if he or she can relate to the participants' religious
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Figure 2. Training for Interreligious Peacebuilding (PB)

Getting started

Names, experience   Expectations   Norms   Learning styles

Situating our work

Who are the religious peacebuilders?
- profile, roles, attributes

Religious PB values

PB field:
conflict theories and history

Know where you stand

PB skills and assumptions:
analysis

My religious values

Framework for religious PB:
6-8 approaches

Meet the other

Diversity and prejudice

Developmental model
of interreligious sensitivity

Listening
- Interfaith dialogue
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation

What can we do together?

Interreligious organizations
(Resources)

Action plans

Identity: ‘If you are not in touch with your spiritual identity, you cannot intervene in a religious conflict!’

In understanding interreligious peacebuilding, trainees first had to go through a values-clarification process. When asked about values upon which religious peacebuilding is based, participants may list empowerment, voluntarism, and sacrifice as values to be held by activists and religious practitioners of peace. At this stage, only ‘faith in God’ and ‘prophetic mission’ differentiated the religious from the secular peacebuilders’ values. Participants are often confused and wonder at this point about the differences between religious and non-religious approaches to peacebuilding, particularly when they review the list of the values they have generated and discover that many secular peacebuilders and leaders would hold these same values.

Following the values-clarification exercise,
participants are asked to generate a list of religious peacemakers. Those usually mentioned include: universally recognized religious leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King; national or local leaders, such as Bishop Carlos Belo (of East Timor) and Aung Sang Sue Kyi of Burma; and political leaders perceived to be religiously or spiritually motivated, such as former German Prime Minister Willy Brandt, former US President Jimmy Carter, and former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

Several questions emerge while attempting to define who qualifies as a religious peacebuilder. Should religious peacebuilders be committed to nonviolence at all stages of their lives? For example, would political leaders such as Khomeini, who in 1978 led a nonviolent movement against the Shah of Iran, or Jimmy Carter, who carried out several military actions while president but now goes on peacebuilding missions throughout the world, be considered religious peacebuilders?

On several occasions, this discussion led participants to conclude that religious citizens of a community are as important to the peacebuilding process as the few who become global religious peacebuilders. Participants then categorized their peacemakers according to their roles as advocate, intermediary, or exemplary humanitarian figure (Mother Theresa). Next, participants identified possible roles for an interreligious peacebuilder such as facilitator, mediator, convener, and advocate. In general, the religious peacebuilders are perceived as agents for social change committed to achieving justice as well as peace, whose main contribution has been to confront injustice and create awareness through consciousness-raising.

In questioning what values are associated with these religious peacebuilders, participants often generate a list that includes:

- moral authority/prophetic vision
- say the truth as it is
- compassion
- humility
- humble
- charismatic
- believes in and inspires people
- listen/reflect
- humor
- sacrifice/voluntarism
- creative
- forgiveness
- courage/risk
- patience and persistence
- integrity
- facing evil oneself
- love
- build trust
- inner spiritual peacebuilding
- prayerful
- tolerate other religions

This faith-based list, when compared to a secular list, might seem to include only a few uniquely religious qualities, such as prayerful, inner spiritual peacebuilding, moral authority/prophetic vision, and the ability to use both primary and secondary language (the particularistic language of one’s own religion and the more universal language of shared moral values). However, when examining all the qualities listed above, participants felt that religion and faith exist in all of them and therefore should be incorporated in the religious peacebuilder profile.

Know Where You Stand The next three phases are based on the problem-solving workshop model. Each phase has a set of activities intended to increase participants’ awareness and intervention skills (see major

4 This set of stages also perfectly fits the Aikido model of martial art. In fact, the Institute for MultiTrack Diplomacy (IMTD), particularly Louise Diamond and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, has been applying this model in conflict resolution training in the relief and development context.
The first phase, ‘know where you stand’, means understanding your own strengths, limits, important values, and what motivates you. Self-awareness empowers interveners and the parties alike in dealing with conflicts. Storytelling and sharing successes are effective tools in understanding where one stands. The stories shared by the various participants often describe their experience in initiating interfaith dialogue in tense conflict situations. By sharing these painful and yet successful experiences, participants felt a sense of empowerment, achievement, and connectedness, and it also illustrated the potential use of religious beliefs in peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, a Bosnian participant told the group about a successful interfaith dialogue initiative in Sarajevo in 1997. The leaders were anxious to meet each other, and this participant took the risk and brought Muslims and Christian community leaders together. An Afghan woman told of her humanitarian aid project that reconciled two fighting clans in the area of Pashtun by using the local mosque as a safe meeting place and through discussions on sharing water. A Northern Irish Protestant pastor described a request from his parish that they pray in his Sunday service for the Irish Catholic victims of sectarian violence. After members dealt with their anger and resistance, they were able to learn about Irish Catholicism for the first time in 25 years. Soon they invited a Catholic priest to their Protestant church to talk about his faith.

In the process of self-exploration, participants examine the conflicting messages of war and peace inherent in their respective religions, framing these around concepts of exclusion–inclusion and nonviolence–violence (Boulding, 1986; Kasimow & Byron, 1991). Participants spoke of the values in their religion that they were proud of and those they would like to change. Among the cherished values were inclusivity, collectiveness, love, forgiveness, social justice, unity with earth, worship, social consciousness, strict nonviolence, sacrament of reconciliation, etc. Participants can often easily identify peacebuilding values in their own faith. At this phase, they will emphasize the positive, constructive, and inclusive aspects of their own faith and that of others. Participants acknowledged the notion that the positive presentation of one’s own religion is an effective defense mechanism when one’s religious approach to peace and war is challenged.

When asked about the ethnocentric and exclusive values in their religion, participants are cautious and skeptical. Two participants in the 1998 training workshop declared that their religion had no values of exclusion! Evangelical (particularly non-Western) participants had the most difficulty acknowledging these qualities to others. An Egyptian Coptic priest insisted that he could not think of any values in his faith that he would change. Eventually, when pressed, and after establishing a basic trust in the group, participants will share their perceptions of the ‘dark’ side of their religions. Protestant participants identified ‘trinity, just war, literal interpretation of the Bible, direct divine access [lack of accountability], and salvation only for Christians’. A Coptic Christian listed ‘claiming exclusive and primary historical truth, self righteousness, and no intermarriage’. A rabbi identified ‘authenticity [who is a Jew?], theological laws of prejudice, double standards for ingroup/outgroup [women and non-Jews, enemies], killing in the name of God as a mitsvah [duty], and “chosen-ness” interpreted as superiority’. A Hindu participant listed ‘non-conversion, caste and untouchability, claims to sacred space and victimization’. A Muslim participant identified ‘ingroup/outgroup [in group being “Ummah” the Muslim community and the outgroup being non-Muslims], Islam as most complete and the final religion, perception of jihad as a holy war only, no place for the secular’.
Once again, the main challenge when examining religious values of both exclusion (destructive, religiocentric) and inclusion (constructive, tolerant) is to distinguish between religious and cultural or non-religious characteristics of participants’ identity. Although participants were able to identify characteristics they would change, some would not recognize or define them as religious. For example, a Muslim participant labeled ‘authoritarianism’ as a cultural value in Arab society but would not acknowledge it as a value in Islam.

Identifying positive religious values that support peacebuilding and critiquing exclusionist values in one’s own religion pave the way for learning conflict analysis, the first step in dealing with any conflict. Analysis includes identifying the parties’ histories, goals, power bases, interests, positions, needs, relationships, and options available for settlement. In both small and mixed groups, participants share and analyze conflicts from their personal or work life, preferably one with some religious content. Learning and practicing these skills in a familiar situation helps participants understand ‘where they stand’ in the conflict and gain new insights about the role and impact of religion in conflict and in conflict resolution.

At this phase of the training, as part of the instrumental and cognitive tools, participants construct a framework for religious peacebuilding. Participants use specific case studies to identify and discuss the nature, values, context, and methods of peacebuilding associated with each religious group. Some of the cases are: Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Muslim nonviolence peace leader who mobilized his Pashtun community against the British colonial powers in Pathan (a mountain area in Pakistan), Gandhi’s nonviolence movement, Catholics in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, and Quakers in the Middle East. The framework shows how religious assumptions, values, beliefs, and practices shape the individual and group approaches to peacebuilding and reveal the uniqueness of religious peacebuilding practiced by different denominations and faiths.

In the process of constructing this framework, Christian participants were surprised to learn of the Muslim nonviolent resistance movement led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, which paralleled Gandhi’s efforts during the anti-colonial period on the Subcontinent (Johansen, 1997). Constructing the framework reveals the differences between religious and secular peacebuilding to those previously unaware of their differences. At the end of such a learning session, some participants have indicated: ‘I became more open with this group on religious issues than I am with friends whom I have known for 20 years; ‘I am beginning to understand the baggage that I brought with me to this encounter.’

Having become more aware of themselves and their own faith and how they fit into the frame of religious peacebuilding values, principles, and frameworks, the next phase of the process, the dynamics of building relationships with other faith groups, can begin.

Meet the Other Changing attitudes and behaviors requires meeting the other, an exercise with its own dynamics and tools. At this stage, listening, facilitation, and mediation skills are used to teach participants new kinds of responses when meeting the other. When using these skills in conflict resolution training, religious peacebuilders find

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5 This framework is based on the analysis of the Catholic Church, Quakers, and Moral Re-Armament religious peacemakers’ role in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe (Kraybill, 1994). In the peacebuilding training, the analysis is expanded to include other religious groups.

6 A US participant in a training course exclaimed that the story of Abdul Ghaffar Khan was “the best kept secret” about peace that he had encountered and expressed regret that he had not learned of it previously.
themselves, like other types of participants, discussing issues of neutrality and impartiality, justice, the meaning of peace, and levels of listening.

By this time, participants have usually established a relationship with one another and a basic level of trust that allows them to explore some differences. The anxiety of encountering the other, however, is still present in the training room. The dynamics of this situation are often reflected in a group decision to share a morning prayer or reflection. The idea usually arises on the first day of the workshop. Although likely to postpone a decision on the rituals and themes of the morning reflection by appointing a committee, the discussion indicates how flexible the group is and its members' awareness of their religious differences. During the 1999 interreligious peacebuilding course, the group opened its second day with a universal reflection calling for love, compassion, and brotherhood. The third day reflection, performed jointly by Egyptian and Haitian evangelical pastors, requested that the group sing a praise to Jesus: 'Rejoice in the Lord everyday in your life.' The group then spent the next two hours discussing how the morning prayer affected them. The reactions to participating – or being expected to participate – in the worship language of only one faith ranged from total resistance to full participation. Most participants expressed some discomfort or resistance. Adopting a different strategy from those who were uncomfortable or resistant to joining in the Christian prayer song, an Afghani woman said: 'In the beginning I felt uncomfortable. However, when I began substituting the name of Jesus with the prophet Mohammed, I did not mind singing.' Other participants declared that the experience was meaningless, or that they felt excluded from the prayer. Such strong reactions to the reflection illustrate the level of anxiety, mistrust, and defensiveness within the group. Group reflection on these issues is a powerful teaching tool, particularly as participants become aware of their own defensiveness. Participants learn that interfaith worship should be expressed in a universal, non-exclusionary language or, if expressed in an exclusionary language, only those comfortable with it should be expected to participate while others could observe respectfully.

This stage, 'meeting the other', aims to increase awareness of group members to the prejudice, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and religious expressions of exclusion that they have faced and/or have inflicted on others, a difficult experience for many participants. In mixed groups, Western and non-Western participants who come from war-zone areas share difficult and painful memories of their experiences, while Americans and Europeans will share incidents of racial discrimination or how certain ethnic minorities in their culture are excluded.

When participants share their experiences of committing prejudice against another group, they also discuss how they would do it differently if given a second chance. These discussions convey important messages of empowerment, possibility of change, and avoidance of guilt and shame. An Asian participant, sharing his first encounter with a black person, said he was ashamed at having expected the person's skin color to come off on his hand. Although the group members' first reaction was laughter, the subsequent discussions helped to clarify the consequences of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

In the second part of 'meeting the other', and after the discussion of the intercultural sensitivity model, participants engage in an interfaith dialogue during which the 'here and now' and the group dynamic is emphasized. During the process, tension, mistrust, and conflict penetrate the usually sheltered environment of the training seminar. During this activity, a Muslim participant, looking back to
the crusades of the 11th century, opined that the deep-seated mistrust between Muslims and Christians originated in that period. Most Christian participants were unaware that such old historical events constituted a factor in the collective memory of today's Muslims. This illustrates why interreligious interveners must further their understanding and examine the biases inherent in their world-views (particularly the historical perspective, as in this case). During the interfaith dialogue, participants can learn about the positive and negative perceptions of the others, moving from a cognitive to an experiential approach.

If dialogue is introduced into the training, the trainers must allow enough time for participants to process and bring to closure any issues raised by the participants. In fact, whenever combining the cognitive and the 'here and now' approaches, it is essential to allow enough time to debrief and process any conflicts that emerge. In dialogue groups, certain conditions can contribute to the success of the encounter (Abu-Nimer, 1999; Saunders, 1999):

1. Symmetric arrangements in the:
   a. selection of appropriate participants;
   b. structure and process of the encounter;
   c. co-facilitation of the encounter.
2. Both similarities and differences are examined by participants.
3. A collaborative task is included.
4. Process of interaction is flexible.
5. Collective and individual emotions and injuries are acknowledged.
6. Uni-national/ethnic preparation that:
   a. helps participants know where they stand on the issues;
   b. allows participants to establish both unity and diversity within their own group;
   c. allows participants to choose their dialogue experience;
   d. sets the collective and individual criteria for a successful dialogue.

In addition to these conditions, an effective interfaith dialogue would stress that:

1. Spirituality is central to the encounter's experience and to changing participants' attitudes.
2. Rituals and symbols can strengthen the interfaith dialogue, although they are rarely utilized in inter-ethnic encounters.
3. The facilitation team has a basic knowledge of the different religious groups and will be able to tap into the uniqueness of each religion to facilitate the dialogue.
4. Scripture and sacred texts enrich interfaith dialogue.

Rituals of forgiveness and reconciliation can provide another set of principles and activities from different religious traditions which can also be used for 'meeting the other' and enriching the perspective of all participants (Henderson, 1996).

What Can We Do Together? This last stage of the interreligious peacebuilding training emphasizes action. Participants develop a specific, concrete, and feasible action plan to apply upon returning to their communities. Also, participants are asked to note the resources for religious peacebuilding in their own communities and others. As part of this exercise, participants map the landscape of the interreligious organizations at both the national and international levels. Developing concrete action plans encourages participants to use their workshop learning in a real-life situation. This step helps 'freeze' (Lewin, 1948) the knowledge and attitudes gained during training, and prepares trainees for their return to their communities. Action plans born of interreligious training will vary according to
one's comprehension, motivation, resources, and available time.7

The training often concludes with rituals or stories from different cultures or religious traditions, and participants may exchange objects or religious symbols as a way of expressing support of one another's work.

A Developmental Model of Interreligious Sensitivity

Identifying participants' responses to religious differences when meeting and building a future relationship and vision with the 'other' is an important phase in this training approach. The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity has been used to explore these issues during the phase of 'meeting the other'. The central theme of the model relates to attaining the ability to construe and experience cultural differences in more complex ways (Bennett, 1986, 1993). The ways individuals react to and experience cultural differences can become an integral part of their world-view. Practitioners in intercultural communication have used such a model to increase the 'cultural competency' of participants in dealing with differences. The model as applied to intercultural interaction proceeds through six types of response, which are divided into two main orientations: the first category is the ethnocentric, which includes: denial (with isolation and separation reactions), defense (with denigration, superiority, reversal reactions), minimization (with physical and transcendent universalism reactions). The second category of ethnorelative reactions includes: acceptance (with respect to behavioral and values differences), adaptation (with empathy and pluralism), and integration (with contextual evaluation and constructive marginality).

The objectives when applying this model in interreligious training are to increase participants' awareness of how limited their tolerance and interreligious interaction is (both cognitively and behaviorally) and to explore the group's vision of interreligious relations and dialogue. Thus, participants are asked to identify their attitudes toward other religious groups using the proposed developmental model.

The ethnocentric responses included the following:

Denial Reactions in this stage are reflected in religious teaching that might deny the existence or humanity of those who do not believe in the faith, or deny the existence of a small religious minority through simple physical isolation. Denial does not represent the experience of the religious minority members who are required to interact daily with the religious majority. Owing to differences in the minority and majority experiences, therefore, their responses to the intercultural and interreligious sensitivity developmental scale must be examined separately. Bennett's discussion of the intercultural sensitivity developmental model does not address this distinction sufficiently.

Defense In this stage, as described by Bennett (1993: 35), differences are experienced as a threat to one's own reality, and therefore 'people in defense mode recognize specific cultural differences and create specific defenses against them'. Many of the participants' responses and stories illustrated this defense mechanism. For example, a Christian African told of being instructed by his religious leader that the other religious group (the enemy) did not have the right to exist and that the Lord had placed his

7 Some examples of action plans suggested by participants in various interreligious peacebuilding workshops, conducted between 1997 and 1999, are: use rituals and sermons to achieve healing and forgiveness among community members in Rwanda; encourage leaders of a Protestant church in Northern Ireland to more actively deal with violence in sectarian parades and integrate ex-combatants from the Liberian civil war into Liberian society.
punishment on that religion because of its inferiority. The denigration of another religious group is clearly a defensive response, which is often used to prove the superiority or inferiority of one group, or that the ultimate truth is on one’s own side. Examples of such arguments include: ‘How can Jesus be the son of God, if God is . . .’; ‘Islam is the religion of the sword’; and ‘We are the chosen’.

**Reversal** Participants in interreligious training workshops have suggested that the reversal response in the defense stage, exemplified by the rejection of one’s own culture (with superiority over or denigration of) the others (known as ‘going native’), is found in interreligious settings, too. The superiority response ‘involves a denigration of one’s own culture and an attendant assumption of the superiority of a different culture’ (Bennett, 1993: 36). However, when this response is applied to religion it would be seen as a conversion. Conversion might involve denigrating one’s previous culture or insisting on the superiority of the new one; however, conversion in an interreligious interaction is often perceived as an abandonment of the current faith and adoption of a new faith, and denigration or superiority are not necessarily components of this response, as suggested by many participants. (This conversion response, which is characterized by defensive mode and inability to experience the other’s world-view, is different from a conversion response in the interreligio-relative phase in which a person retains respect for and acceptance of his/her previous religion.)

**Minimization** When examining this stage, participants from different faiths used the ‘physical universalism’ response – ‘we’re not that different, we all have eyes and ears, we all eat and sleep’ – as analogous to a religious person who declares that the rituals of different religions are all the same (‘We all pray, we all fast’). Like cultural minimization, which is ethnocentric, religious minimization is religiocentric because the person is ignoring the different religious meanings represented by the ritual acts. Transcendent universalism in an interreligious context is represented by such classic faith statements as: ‘We are all the children of God’, ‘There is only one God and we all believe in his power and wisdom’, ‘We are the children of Abraham’. This type of transcendent universalism minimizes religious differences and excludes some groups altogether, such as atheists and nontheistic or polytheistic faiths. It is in this stage that Bennett (1993: 44) describes conversion activities thus:

> A more pernicious manifestation of ethnocentrism based on transcendent universalism is derived from any variety of aggressive conversion activities. Whether the conversion sought in another culture is religious, political, or economic, it rests on the assumption that there is a single truth, or best way, and that with sufficient education all people will discover this truth within themselves. These overtly ethnocentric conversion efforts may be accompanied by a high degree of interest in cultural difference, perhaps with the rationale that knowledge of difference is necessary to implement the conversion effectively.

The above type of aggressive conversion, a basic tenet of numerous faiths and denominations, was not mentioned during the minimization stage of the training. Participants emphasized similar religious assumptions, values, and rituals in order to find common ground for their interaction with others. At this stage, participants fall into two categories: (a) those who are aware of the differences and choose to avoid, neglect, belittle, or minimize the differences, assuming that emphasizing differences would provoke conflict; and (b) those who are oblivious to fundamental differences in religious assumptions, values, and rituals, and therefore unable to place their own religious perspectives into a broader framework.
Participants in the training workshops, regardless of their faith, had difficulty applying the developmental model in the ethno-relative stages when religion was substituted for culture. Bennett (1993: 46) describes the shift from ethnocentric to ethnorelative as a shift from absolute standards of rightness or ‘goodness’ in cultural behavior: ‘Cultural behavior is neither good nor bad, it is just different. . . . One’s own culture is not any more central to reality than any other culture, although it may be preferable to a particular individual or group.’

The majority of participants in the inter-religious training were opposed to this description when applied to ‘religiorelativity’. They argued, for example, that the religious dimension of identity is different from other cultural identity dimensions because of the centrality of the moral and ethical aspects. The notion that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong was strongly resisted by most participants. In addition, certain absolute religious truths cannot coexist or be held by the same person. The difficulty experienced by participants in this phase can be an indicator that they themselves have not acquired the skill or ability to experience the other’s world-view. Also, it could be that they are in the ethnocentric set of responses (as Bennett suggests).

However, another possible explanation is that in interreligious settings the moral and spiritual dimensions of the identity add more difficulty to the person’s ability to move from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative stage (than in a cultural or non-spiritual setting). In fact, Bennett only suggests that the person would have to find ways to resolve the ethical and moral issues to be able to move to the ethnorelative phase: ‘The position – ethnorelative stage – does imply, however, that ethical choices will be made on grounds other than the ethnocentric protection of one’s own world-view or in the name of absolute principles’ (1993: 46). The religiorelative responses in inter-religious setting included:

**Acceptance** The general rejection of relativity in favor of certain absolute standards in each religion and individual’s view did not prevent certain participants, however, from declaring that they could accept and respect the right of people of other faiths to believe and practice differently. This type of cognitive acceptance of difference was fairly common: a considerable number of participants were able to refrain from judging one another’s beliefs, values, and behaviors. A statement such as ‘we all can see God through our different belief systems’ indicates that differences were accepted and respected, making their responses similar to Bennett’s description of acceptance in the ethnorelativist stage: ‘Cultural difference is both acknowledged and respected. Rather than being evaluated negatively or positively as part of a defensive strategy, the existence is accepted as a necessary and referable human condition’ (Bennett, 1993: 47).

Bennett’s finding that individuals more easily respect different behaviors than values was also reflected in the interreligious setting. Several participants were willing to observe or even participate in rituals of other faiths. They would not, however, accept as valid certain fundamental values or beliefs. A Muslim participant said he was unable to accept the belief that Jesus is the son of God. However, he was willing to sit through a Christian service. Although the point of acceptance is accepting the validity of different value systems but not necessarily believing in them for oneself, which would be a form of adaptation or pluralism, this participant was unable to acknowledge this reality. Participants differed in their level of acceptance: a Jewish trainee had difficulty participating in the group silence, which is resonant in Christianity but not in Judaism.

While meeting the ‘other’ in interreligious
training, most participants avoid publicly introducing their own rituals but will share their universal or secondary language and beliefs, which constitute a safe bridge for meeting the ‘other’ or the stranger. Secondary language encompasses such terms as peace, brotherhood and sisterhood, social justice, mercy, and forgiveness. The primary language and rituals of each faith, such as ‘Mohammed is the last of the prophets’, ‘Jesus’ resurrection’, or ‘multiplicity of God’ are avoided.

Adaptation  The adaptation stage described by Bennett does not involve assimilation into another culture, but rather temporarily and intentionally shifting one’s cultural frame of reference (empathy) or adopting multiple permanent frames of reference (pluralism). Very few participants were able to imagine adapting this way in their religious lives. Most felt they could not shift into a different religious system even temporarily without threatening their own religious identity or credibility in their community. ‘If I pray with the Muslims what would my Christian followers in my church think of me next Sunday?’ demanded a Catholic priest from Kenya. Many participants agreed that it is easier to achieve empathy in an intercultural setting than in an interreligious setting because it does not so strongly challenge their moral values, ethics, or faith. This inability to temporarily adopt another’s religion or faith might be difficult to overcome because of the intensity of empathy in a faith setting. Nevertheless, Bennett argues that both world-views (cultural) can be expressed empathically if one has sufficient knowledge and experience.

Only one of 70 participants could imagine embracing her own multiple meaning systems in a pluralistic fashion. The contrast between accepting differences and pluralism is captured in the following debate that occurred in a training workshop. A Kenyan pastor, explaining the acceptance of differences, said: ‘For me, God is like a big elephant and I see God through the tail. Other religions might see God through the trunk, the leg, the back, or other parts of the elephant, but I am not willing to let go of the tail for even one minute.’ To that, a Philippine woman, taking a pluralistic stance, replied: ‘For me God is like a big elephant too, but I am happy to experience and see God through the trunk, back, belly, and tail.’ The woman, a Catholic, had been raised in a mixed Christian and Muslim region, had spent much time among Muslims, had participated in Ramadan fasting, had worn Muslim women’s clothing, and took part in indigenous people’s ceremonies, describing all as comfortable acts that not only did not challenge her Catholic faith but were inspiring and meaningful.

This woman’s experience might be an example of interreligious pluralism using Bennett’s (1993: 47) description of pluralism:

Characteristic of all pluralism is the internalization by one individual of two or more fairly complete cultural frames of reference. Because people in this form of adaptation are identified with different worldviews, they experience cultural differences as part of their normal selves.

Unfortunately, this woman’s experience was the exception among interviewees and participants in the interreligious training workshops. Bennett’s definition of this stage triggered the same question among the various workshop participants: Can a religious person equally integrate and internalize two or more sets of religious beliefs? But more important is whether such ability should be perceived as preferable to a single but tolerant set of beliefs, as in the acceptance phase?

Integration  Contextual evaluation and constructive marginality are two responses of this last stage. A multicultural person at this stage is always in the process of becoming a
part of and apart from a given cultural context' (Adler, 1977: 26), living a multiplicity of realities integrated in his or her daily life, either by keeping one primary reality (contextual evaluator) or by internalizing multiple cultures that clash and cause cultural marginality.

Participants in the interreligious training rejected these last two responses, proving that the intercultural developmental model was not fully transferable in an interreligious setting and integrating religious perspectives was undesirable. Participants expressed their resistance to the integration concept through various statements, such as: 'It is impossible to have multiple religions and multiple truths'; 'This will mean that we have to give up our sole religious devotion to our community'; ‘You can be a multicultural but you cannot be a multireligious person. Because religion is different than culture, the faith is a deep sense that is difficult to internalize'; and 'Why is internalizing more than one religion superior to having one religion and respecting the others, as implied by the intercultural sensitivity model?'

Again, the above responses can indicate that those participants are having difficulty experiencing the other's world-view, and that they are not in the adaptation or integration phase. However, another interpretation is that religious identity is more central (perhaps meaningful) for individuals than other aspects of cultural identity. One of the workshop leaders said: 'Again, I would hold that for myself and probably most others, cultural integration would also not be a stage seen as desirable and to be sought after in interreligious settings.'

Responses to the intercultural sensitivity model suggest that it contributes a great deal to the participants' understanding of and distinguishing between religiocentric and religiorelative perspectives in interreligious peacebuilding training. However, the last two stages, pluralism and integration, are problematic and possibly counterproductive in developing interreligious sensitivity. It may be that in an interreligious encounter or training, promoting pluralism or integration (as described in an intercultural setting) is not effective in changing participants' attitudes. Furthermore, it caused them to feel more defensive and to question the moral and ethical assumptions of the training. It was perceived as a threat – an attempt at aggressive conversion. Thus, further research and experimental applications are needed to fully adapt the model to an interreligious setting.

The Process of Interreligious Peacebuilding Training

This training combines experiential (process) learning and task learning. As such, it is not just a dialogical encounter between different groups or individuals, but has a format for teaching participants new conflict resolution skills and providing a measure of safety while discovering differences. When participants are not secure, comfortable, or ready to explore differences, they can resort or default to learning information and analytical conflict resolution skills.

Similar to other dialogue or encounter groups, the process and group dynamic in interreligious training can be captured in four phases:

(1) Participants express their personal excitement at meeting members of ‘other’ religions. They engage in series of activities and dynamics that reflect tension, joy, politeness, and kindness of meeting the ‘others’. In this phase, there is a focus on exploring individual and group similarities. Also most participants engage in a form of idealization of their own religion.

(2) The religious and cultural tension and

8 Cynthia Sampson in an informal discussion of interreligious peacebuilding, September 1999.
caution continue, but participants begin to learn more about the differences that exist between the different groups. The personal, cultural, and religious acquaintance process continues; however, more emphasis is placed on similarities between religions. During this phase, participants reveal some personal stereotypes about other religions. The setting becomes less threatening because of the intensive informal contacts and the discovery of the universal ritual and ceremonies that connect the participants. This environment is reflected through the use of secondary religious language (peace, love, harmony, faith, cooperation, sacrifice, etc.) as each religion expresses them.

(3) Participants explore different religious beliefs and values. The realization of differences can cause frustration, growing mistrust, suspicion, blaming others, and tension. The level of tension depends on the relationship that has developed among the different religious groups and individuals in the encounter. For instance, Muslim and Jewish participants usually express the highest level of tension in such encounters. At the end of this stage, participants discover and assure the differences in religious values and faith practices. Statements regarding the importance of interreligious tolerance are repeated by most participants to assure the legitimacy of differences.

(4) With this phase, participants have recognized that the interreligious peacebuilding encounters limits and advantages. They feel empowered because of their ability to connect to other religions and their new understanding of peacebuilding in their own religion. Most participants are more trusting and less threatened by ‘other’ religions. They emphasize the agreements, reinstate similarities, and define the sensitive issues. The last segment in this phase is when participants explore alternatives for interreligious context. They search for common activities or practical application for their agreement and to their improved ability to learn and understand the other religions.

Future Research and Conclusions

Utilizing the religion of the interveners and conflicting parties, and religious aspects of the context, can assist the peacebuilding process and change in certain conflict settings. The proposed interreligious peacebuilding training approach is based on both intercultural sensitivity training and conflict resolution training concepts. An interreligious training requires content and process designs different from a typical conflict resolution or intercultural training setting. This research illustrates that, in the interreligious training, participants’ responses partially correspond with Bennett’s intercultural sensitivity developmental model. However, the spiritual, moral, and ethical components of any religious identity prevent full application of this model in such settings.

This research has illustrated the similar role that culture and religion can play in promoting conflict resolution processes among different parties. However, it has also provided a clear indication that religious values and beliefs can dictate different reactions among people than those usually emerging in response to intercultural interactions. This supports the hypothesis that there is no full overlap between cultural and religious aspects of the individual’s or group’s identity. Thus, intercultural developmental sensitivity models partially capture the dynamics of interreligious interactions, and new developmental models should be developed to guide practitioners and scholars in addressing interreligious interactions.

Several other conclusions can be proposed...
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as future research themes and as guidelines for practitioners and scholars when dealing with peacebuilding training in an interreligious setting. First, combining elicitive and prescriptive training approaches is more effective than relying on one single approach. Second, integrating cognitive (instrumental), affective (here and now), and behavioral (action) elements in such training contributes to the process of change sought by the interveners. Third, the moral and ethical aspects of interreligious settings (in comparison to intercultural settings) add difficulties to the abilities of training participants in one religion to experience the different world-views of others. Fourth, conflict resolution skills and intercultural communication skills and processes can be effective if combined in one training format. Although qualitative and anecdotal data derived from this study suggest that the proposed training format affects the participants, a more systematic evaluation process is needed to illustrate how and to what extent the training process and design affect participants' attitudes and behaviors. In addition, both the facilitator's role and the facilitation approach should be examined to identify the most effective training conditions and structures.

References


