



HOW CAN RELIGIONS CONTRIBUTE TO WORLD PEACE?

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On 21st September every year the United Nations celebrates the International Day of Peace (also known as World Peace Day) with an appeal for ceasefires in combat zones and an end to violence around the world. The idea was first adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1981 to instil the ideal of peace in the hearts and minds of all nations and peoples.

According to the original UN text launching the International Year of Peace and International Day of Peace¹, peace between states and peoples is one of the main goals the Organisation was set up to achieve under its Charter. The same goal is reiterated in the preamble to the constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

1 International Year of Peace and International Day of Peace. <http://www.un.org/ar/events/peaceday/2010/sgmessages.shtml>



As long as peace depends solely upon political and economic agreements between governments, the peoples of the world will never be able to come together and take firm and effective steps to establish it on a permanent basis. Yet the only way it can really be achieved and guaranteed to succeed is through intellectual and moral solidarity and a genuine commitment from the whole of mankind.

One can conclude from the UN's appeal for an end to armed conflict that there is a global desire for true peace upon earth to prevail, rather than for mere words that lead to nothing. Perhaps people in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have learnt enough lessons from two world wars to reject the machinations of those who would seek to undermine world peace and ignite the fires of war whatever the consequences. If this is the case, it could result in peaceful dialogue, good-neighbourly relations and a rejection of violence and, while this may sound like an attempt to create a Utopian dream, the very attempt itself could have the potential to change the face of the earth for the better.

Unfortunately, as a concept peace is nothing like as simple as it may seem. For example, can the entire world agree on a single view of world peace? Are there values and principles shared by all the member states that can be accepted as standards or yardsticks for judging the issues that lead to disputes between states?

Then there is the vital question: "Can world peace really be achieved at all in a human society that has never been a stranger to conflict throughout its entire existence?"

If it is not possible to achieve it "one hundred per cent", then what would the next best thing be – i.e. what would be the options that could take us closest to that dream?

In this paper we intend to examine whether religions can have a part to play in showing us the way.

Our focus will be on the three monotheistic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism – yet at the same time we shall not ignore that half of the globe (or more) whose inhabitants do not follow any of the

Abrahamic faiths. However, a full analysis of all the world's religions is outside the scope of our present investigation, though we may return to the subject in greater detail in a separate article.

Before we try to give detailed answers to the question, we need to examine the common ground shared by Islam, Christianity and Judaism in their approaches to peace.

How can we define peace and what is the main value it represents?

We can define peace as an absence of war and violence, in which a climate of serenity, confidence and tranquillity prevails as opposed to fear, anxiety and unrest. Peace is the opposite of conflict and verbal and physical violence, whether between individuals, communities or states.

Evidence suggests that peace is mankind's natural state. However, there has been fighting in the world since the human family had no more members than the fingers of one hand; later the fight developed into a clash between man and his environment and the earth ceased to live in a state of peace. There are historical anecdotes about hostile acts perpetrated by early man in the continent of Atlantis which caused nature itself to rise in revolt. Consequently Atlantis caught fire and sank along with all its human population as retribution for man's violation of the natural law of respect for his fellow human beings.

From that time on man strove for peace, but he usually found himself mired in war. Dreams of world peace can be found in the writings of the Ancients, but more from the angle of a "heavenly civilization" than as an attempt to understand human civilization on earth with its values and concepts of justice, equality and brotherhood.

In his famous book *De Civitate Dei*¹ (*The City of God* – which is really almost an encyclopaedia) the philosopher and thinker Saint Augustine (an ethnic Berber) wrote: "War is an accidental state which will cease to exist when the Community of Faith is able to vanquish the worshippers of Satan and achieve everlasting peace."

¹ *De Civitate Dei* (Arabic translation: *Madinat Allah*, Dar al Machreq, Beirut, 2nd impression 2007).



Saint Augustine totally rejected the notion that a genuine value system existed at all in a purely terrestrial context and asserted that the “Earthly City” could never know peace because it was a city of sensuality and evil; a virtuous person could only find perfect peace in the “City of God”, which was the ideal model for the whole of humanity.

Why did Saint Augustine hold this view? Was this “City of God” really the key to peace and the values it represented – values which needed to exist on earth in order for true peace to prevail, as opposed to short-term political expediency which was more like a truce. The latter situation, exemplified by the First and Second World Wars, and in one way or another during the Cold War, still occurs repeatedly around the world; the main worry these days is that these wars might escalate in one way or another and pose a threat to peace on a global scale.

In Saint Augustine’s view, the “City of God” is enveloped in the Creator’s protective embrace. The “keys” to the “City’s” many doors “hang” from the principles of justice, virtue and goodness and are constantly in harmony with the system and purpose that the “City” was created to serve. Is this a “city” of men or angels, and at what points does Saint Augustine’s theological vision coincide with political realities on the ground?

In his book *Ishkaliyat al Salam al ‘Alami baina Ibn Rushd wa Immanuel Kant (The Problem of World Peace from Ibn Rushd to Immanuel Kant)*¹, ‘Abdul Qadir Bu ‘Arafah raises an interesting point from Saint Augustine’s vision and suggests that the “City” was only “Heavenly” in a metaphorical sense, since the “City of God” on earth was intended to be understood as a model and a methodology, though at the same time its terrestrial inhabitants were supposed to emulate the angels so that peace could spread its wings over every part of it.

The author also states that what Saint Augustine actually meant by the “City of God” was Rome, the Eternal City and the place to which Christians turned for inspiration at that time – that is to say, those who were trying to

¹ Abdul Qadir Bu ‘Arafah: *Ishkaliyat al Salam al ‘Alami baina Ibn Rushd wa Immanuel Kant*. <http://www.facebook.com/AlmnmzmtAlrbytLIslamAldwly/timeline>

implement Christ's Beatitude in the Gospel: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God".¹ It was this "City" which would confront the "Worldly City" – that is, the material city of the Roman Empire which wallowed in sin and depravity and sought to bring the whole world under its sway.

What should we understand from this?

It is quite clear that the religious notion of a Utopia through the agency of the Faithful was regarded as a feasible prospect upon earth, and that it was possible to strive to establish the "City of God" based on a conceptual model which gave precedence to peace, goodness and justice over violence, evil and oppression.

Peace and the Abrahamic faiths – a preliminary overview

Even before the Abrahamic faiths were revealed through the prophets, the natural disposition instilled in man by his Creator rejected killing and fighting and saw peace as essential for human life.

The clearest evidence for this can be seen in the detailed description of the first battle in mankind's history when Adam's two sons fought each other and Cain killed his brother Abel. At that time there were no natural laws or man-made legal systems apart from the first natural law which Adam passed on to his sons and which included a provision that enjoined peace and criminalized violence and fighting. Consequently, after he had committed the heinous act of killing his brother, Cain fled from the face of the earth in order to avoid being killed by anyone who found him; he could have been easily identified since he bore the mark of his crime upon his forehead.²

Successive revealed religions have always endorsed the concept of world peace on the principle that all the monotheistic faiths come from a single source – a Creator Who loves peace; indeed, *Salam* (Peace) is one of His Beautiful Names.

¹ *Matthew 5.*

² *Genesis 1: 1-16.*



It is the firm belief of every Jew, Christian and Muslim that global stability does not exist of its own accord, but through the Grace and Power of Almighty God and that, as a part of God's creation, man is required to render an account before his Creator, to Whom he will return. This is a deep belief shared by Christians, Muslims and Jews, whatever differences they may have over other issues. Indeed, the ground they share is far greater than any differences that exist between them.

Is this due to primarily to the fact that they all subscribe to this basic belief?

Without courting controversy, we can say that this common belief recognizes that God is the Only Living Eternal God and that He is the Fountainhead of peace. Therefore anything else – or anything that is incompatible with peace yet seeks to set itself up as an absolute value – is to be rejected as false and followers of the monotheistic creeds are required not only to turn away from it, but to hold it to account and confront it in every possible way. This is because our faith - as Muslims and Christians, and even as Jews (Judaism has been seriously misrepresented because of the creation of the State of Israel) – states that God is the One and Only Absolute Truth; everything apart from Him is relative and comes from Him as part of His Creation, and unto Him it will return.

Are religions the prime force for spreading peace among members of the human race?

According to Mohammed 'Abed al Jabri this is indeed the case.¹ He believes that despite the differences between the three religions over the things needed by mankind that are classed as *hajiyat* (moral duties) or *tahsinat* (laudable actions), they all agree on the *dhururat* (necessary and fundamental categories) which are conveyed in the message of every prophet. They are:

- Protection of life
- Protection of intellect

¹ www.balagh.com/mosoa/pages/tex.ph

- Protection of property
- Protection of religion.

All the prophets regard these *dhururat* as the original values from which the *hajiyat*, *tahsinat* and *takmilat* (“extras”) are derived.

Al Jabri maintains that these fundamental values can provide the building blocks for a common view of a culture of peace, because they are basic to every situation in which peace prevails and without them there can be no peace – no peace with oneself, no peace with one’s neighbour and no peace between nations.

From here he argues that it is possible to devise a new, sound, peaceful approach to dealing with the problems encountered by the “religious and moral conscience” in the present age – problems which fuel strife and create obstacles to peace.

He concludes that religion is the means through which the concept of world peace can be properly established, since the achievement of this goal requires a God-based rather than a social approach. Because of its “transcendental dimension”, religion is an independent deterrent force that is free from human interference.

It is certainly the case that all theistic religions without exception carry the message of peace, since this is implicit in man’s submission to his Creator and the Divinely Ordained Law, and in the reverence it engenders.

Hence when peace is seen in a religious context it enables mankind to understand that all human laws, statutes, regulations and ordinances – whether national or international – were created for the purpose of reinforcing the bonds of peace between the individual and his Creator, as well as between human beings in general and between states and continents across the globe.

This takes us back to our starting point – the “City of God”. We need to begin from here, even if man has distanced himself from it because of his illusions of power and influence and his efforts to impose his will upon time and place in a way that is incompatible with God’s Will and the role He has



designated for man as His vicegerent upon earth until the coming of the Hour.

The concept of “*shalom*” (*salam/peace*) in Judaism

Although this article is mainly concerned with the concept of peace in Islam and Christianity, we feel it would also be appropriate to take a look (if only a brief one) at attitudes to peace in the Jewish scriptures, particularly the Old Testament.

The German theologian Gottfried Vanoni¹ is of the opinion that God and peace occur together in some very important contexts and cites evidence from the Old Testament book of Isaiah - one of the great prophets of the Israelites: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who bring salvation, who say to Zion: ‘Your God reigns.’”²

From the contexts in which it appears in the Old Testament the Hebrew word “*shalom*” has acquired connotations of pain and deprivation – and even subjugation and humiliation of the kind experienced by the Jews during their years of captivity in Babylon. However, the Greek version of the Bible usually translated “*shalom*” as “*irene*” (“Peace”), which a Greek would understand to mean the opposite of war.

While the general sense of “*shalom*” is not altogether different from “*irene*”, it also implies other meanings too and its opposite is not just “war” but also “evil” and “corruption”.

Combing through the Old Testament for verses that convey the notion of peace, one will inevitably be struck by the Psalms of David, some of which offer a distinctive angle on the concept in that they see it as the twin brother of justice. Psalm 85 says: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other”. This reveals an “ancient thread” linking justice and peace, which is rooted in Israel’s old Canaanite religion and extends all the way from there to the New Testament.

¹ Speech to the International Christian-Islamic Conference, Vienna, 30th March 1993.

² *Isaiah* 52-7.

Has the Jewish “*shalom*” any other close links with this notion – i.e. the notion of peace which is generally endorsed by other faiths?

The answer, of course, is “Yes”, but in order to understand it fully we need to consider its other connotations such as peace of mind and security. But what kind of peace of mind? Is it the peace of mind enjoyed by people who have confidence in themselves and look upon their lives with satisfaction and perhaps a sense of smugness? Does it refer to the rest and repose of the affluent and indolent?

The answer to those questions is “No”. The “peace of mind and security” conveyed by the word “*shalom*” is impossible to achieve without justice: “The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. And my people will live in a peaceable habitation, and in secure dwelling, and in quiet resting places”.¹

It is through the words of Isaiah, more than any other prophet, that the Jewish “*shalom*” can be best understood. Speaking of the return of the Israelites from their Babylonian captivity² he makes a clear distinction between those who seek peace and the evildoers: “Their feet run to evil and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings; they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.”³

There is also a suggestion that the road to peace entails wisdom and discipline. We find this in the Old Testament books of wisdom and poetry. For example, in the Book of Proverbs the Wise King Solomon says: “Deceit is in the hearts of those that plot evil; but to the counsellors of peace is joy”.⁴ Along with other prophets of Israel who promoted the message of

¹ *Isaiah 17: 18-32.*

² The Babylonian Exile was a period in Jewish history when the Jews of the old Kingdom of Judea were held as captives in the ancient Iraqi city of Babylon by the Chaldean Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopolassar, who transported them from Palestine on two occasions – once in 597 BC and again in 586 BC. The Jews returned to Palestine after the fall of the Chaldean state at the hands of Cyrus the Great, the Ruler of Persia, who promised the Jews that they could return to Palestine.

³ *Isaiah 59: 7-8.*

⁴ *Proverbs 12: 20.*



political peace between Jews, Isaiah also declared: “And all thy children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established”.¹

“*Shalom*” also carries the implication that religion has a peace-keeping role to play, not just between man and his fellow man, but also between man, his environment and the natural world.

Over three thousand years ago it was not possible for Jews to foresee the environmental catastrophe that threatens to engulf the world today. Even so, the great prophets of that time told us what would happen as a result of abusive and arrogant treatment of the poor by the rich. “The populated and cultivated land shall become an empty and barren desert”.²

While the scripture is clearly referring to the destruction produced by war, it also means that the destruction of nature is an indirect result of social injustice. However, the poetic language in which it is couched enables us to see a connection between injustice, violence and the destruction of nature.

Does the Jewish concept of “*shalom*” include the realm, the state, peace and war?

In the Book of Zechariah we read: “Rejoice, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the heathen; and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth”.³

What is the most striking thing about this passage?

First and foremost, we see justice mentioned in the same breath as peace, since the King of Peace described by the prophet Zechariah is the

¹ Isaiah 13: 14-54.

² Isaiah 9: 14-32.

³ Zechariah 9: 9-10.

diametrical opposite of the monarchs known in the history of Israel as the “Davidic Kings” (the term is taken from King David), who imposed peace by force of arms in the style of the rulers of those days from the Pharaohs of Egypt to the Caesars of Rome.

The picture of the King of Peace presented by the prophet Zechariah¹ is of a lowly man riding upon a humble ass – a striking contrast to the steeds of war favoured by the traditional kings.

A fundamental question that arises from the concept of “*shalom*” in Judaism and the Old Testament is: “What does Jehovah – the God of Israel – desire from the whole of mankind at the end of time? Is it peace or conflict?”

The answer is to be found in Isaiah, who expresses Jehovah’s desire as follows: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”².

Today those words are engraved on the Isaiah Wall on New York City’s Manhattan Island, at the junction of 1st Avenue and 43rd Street opposite the United Nations building. They stand as a reminder that the UN’s main goal, and the core idea behind its creation, is to preserve world peace. The words need no explanation: the swords pointed at people’s breasts will become ploughs for cultivating the earth and benefiting humanity, while the spears will become sickles for harvesting what man has planted. Consequently, human beings will cease to fight each other, there will be no more war and the wolf will no longer have predatory designs upon the lamb. Although this is what the United Nations was established to achieve, it has unfortunately failed to fulfil this aspect of the Jewish term “*shalom*”.

How great is the discrepancy between Jewish theological principles and the reality of Israel today?

¹ Zechariah.

² Isaiah 2: 4.



It is enormous. In Israel's efforts to create a national entity, "*shalom*" and justice are nowhere to be seen and the spirit of Jehovah has been abandoned along with the sense of the Divine Will that expresses itself by destroying spears, swords and all other weapons of war. (This situation is also paralleled in contemporary Christian life, which today is far removed from the true spirit of Christianity.)

In his immortal work *Sand and Foam*, Jibran Khalil Jibran wrote: "Once every hundred years Jesus of Nazareth meets Jesus of the Christian in a garden among the hills of Lebanon. And they talk long; and each time Jesus of Nazareth goes away saying to Jesus of the Christian, 'My friend, I fear we shall never, never agree.'"

What conclusion, if any, can we draw from this about the relationship between Christianity and peace?

Before we try to do so, perhaps we should conclude our brief look at the Jewish notion of "*shalom*" by pondering on Sheikh Mustafa Abdel Razzaq's comment that religion – any religion – is "beautiful in the devotion and certainties it engenders, and beautiful in the way it wipes away man's pain and suffering. However, religion deforms and disfigures those who seek to deceive and mislead hearts and minds."

The dialectics of the relationship between peace and Christianity

When we consider the relationship between Christianity and peace, the most remarkable thing about it is that at the hour of the Messiah's birth the angels in Heaven came down to earth and filled the world with these words of peace: "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."¹

So from the moment that Jesus was born peace was inseparable from goodwill.

Did peace and its associated virtues always lie at the core of the Messiah's message to mankind?

¹ Luke 14-2.

It is certainly the case that Jesus's character embodied the essence of that love and gentleness that are inextricably associated with peace – peace with oneself as well as peace in one's relations with others. When he sent his apostles and disciples on their first mission to spread the message, he told them: "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."¹ When greeting his disciples and apostles he always addressed them with: "My peace I leave with you" or words to that effect.²

It is a historically established fact that the time of Jesus's birth was a time of peace across the entire known world. In the years leading up to the arrival of Christianity the Roman Empire was at peace; at the start of the year 15 BC the Emperor Augustus's sons - the brothers Tiberius and Drusus – brought a territory extending from the Alps to the Danube under their sway; then in 13 BC Augustus's brother-in-law Agrippa conquered Dalmatia and Pannonia and from 12 BC he launched his campaign against the Germanii and imposed Roman rule over them.

Peace prevailed from the year 8 BC as the Romans tightened their grip across the length and breadth of their empire; the only exceptions were a few isolated incidents at the beginning of the Christian era involving the Germanii and the inhabitants of one or two other far-flung regions.

This was a Golden Age for the Emperor Augustus, the architect of "*Pax Romana*", or "Roman Peace", and many people believed that he was immortal. As master of the known world and held in greater honour and reverence than any emperor before him, temples (and indeed whole cities) were established in his name and his people claimed that he was descended from Jupiter - the greatest of all the Roman gods.

¹ Luke 10: 5-9.

² John 14: 27.



However, despite the glorious titles bestowed upon him, he was never given the accolade “the Prince of Peace”, although some seven centuries earlier the Prophet Isaiah had described the awaited Messiah in those and similar terms: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”¹

Would we be correct to describe the Messiah - who called himself the Son of Man - as a revolutionary embodiment of peace?

We would indeed. Let us consider the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter Five of the Gospel of St. Matthew (or Chapter Six of the Gospel of St. Luke), when Jesus said to his disciples: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you...”

Was this a sermon or a revolution?

It was in fact a “peace revolution” – something completely new, a message of a kind the world had never witnessed before. Until then – whatever their views on other matters might be – people were agreed that being “blessed” meant being happy, satisfied, and able to fulfil their desires and enjoy respect and status in the eyes of others. When they heard a sermon on the subject, this was the sort of thing they expected to hear.

¹ *Isaiah 9: 5.*

While the Stoics used to regard any unconventional view as being “at odds with reality”, by contrast the Sermon on the Mount created a revolution in people’s heads and turned the world upside down, so that what had previously been white became black and what had been black became white. Bad and good were reversed. In fact, an honest comparison between the principles laid down in Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount Revolution and the other revolutions that have taken place in human history will reveal the latter to be relatively petty affairs of no lasting value.

Modern revolutions are not the result of ideological or social interaction; instead, they have been imposed and driven by diktat – e.g. “It’s like this because I say so,” or “That’s what they used to say to you, but I say.”

The basic principle of Mosaic Law was “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, while Jesus’s Law was “And him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also.”¹

During Jesus’s mission the symbols of the Roman Empire were a sword, a spear, an iron shield and the weapons of war which it used to subject the world to its will. Meanwhile, the Messiah spoke of peace and peacemakers, whom he described as the children of God, since God the Most High is Himself the very embodiment of peace.

According to the Gospel of St. Matthew Jesus regarded the seekers after peace as being not only those who were satisfied to live in peace, but also those people who spread peace and upheld it. At the same time, those who suffered persecution and humiliation in the cause of righteousness would be granted joy and happiness because their reward would be the Kingdom of Heaven.

At this point we are inclined to ask what precisely this peace consists of – this peace which Jesus aspired to promote through his disciples as his legacy for mankind.

¹ *Luke 29-6.*



In his book *Meditations* the French-born priest Fr. M. Hamon describes this peace as a “tranquillity” which inspires self-control, curbs the passions and lusts, disciplines the heart and protects it from rashness, anxiety and turbulence.

The peace that Jesus referred to is that “sweet freedom” which leads every action to be performed at its appropriate time in a prudent and orderly manner. It enables man to focus on those things that are of concern to him and refrain from lamenting past misfortunes or mistakes, while viewing the present with detachment and the future without fear or anxiety.

Finally, the “true Christian peace” is that inner peace of mind and confidence which casts its radiant light into the outside world and ensures that a person’s every movement and physical action is characterised by an equanimity, meekness, gentleness and moderation that produces positive echoes in other people.

However, those proponents of the Christian message of peace find themselves baffled to some extent when they consider it in relation to the history of Christianity (rather than the Christianity of Jesus himself). Historically, Christianity has a legacy of violence that is completely at odds with the Gospel’s peaceful roots. It is an undeniable fact that some European Christians engaged in Holy Wars in the name of God and the Cross, and any attempt to “sweeten” this reality can only be described as cynicism of the highest order. Certain Christians have insulted the memory of the victims by resorting to the behaviourist argument that violence and destruction are just a part of human nature¹ - an attitude which, from a theological point of view, reflects a deep lack of faith in the Creator and a rejection of the notion that peace is a miraculous phenomenon granted to mankind by God.

How did the early Christian philosophers regard the concept of “the true Christian peace” – the kind of peace that has nothing to do with the specious logic that led to religious conflicts, particularly during the Middle Ages and the era of the “Crusader peace”?²

1 S. Assmann, D. Harth: *Kultur und Konflikt*.

2 Tomasz Masternak: (Arabic translation) *Al Salam al Salibi* (Tr. Bashir al Siba’i).

To answer this question we need to go back to St. Augustine's immortal work *The City of God*, in which he states that peace is an innate aspiration of every created being and the ultimate goal of every war.¹ In considering the notions of war and peace, Augustine points out that there is no human being on earth who does not desire peace, and that those who want war are seeking victory – though victory with peace on their terms. In other words, their sole aim is to use war as a tool for achieving a “glorious peace”.

It may be said, with some justification, that this view is not above criticism (let us consider, for example, the “*Pax Romana*” – the peace imposed by the Roman Empire). Indeed St. Augustine himself was aware of the inconsistencies of this position and subsequently he noted that everything connected with the temporal world serves the interests of temporal peace, while that which is concerned with the “Heavenly City” serves the interests of everlasting peace.

In St. Augustine's view, if we were dumb animals we would only be interested in those things that satisfy our bodily organs and instincts and give us pleasure; in other words, peace of mind would be a by-product of “bodily peace”, since “non-rational mental peace” is disrupted if the body is not at peace – i.e. if it is suffering from physical discomfort.

What can we conclude from St. Augustine's position? Briefly, it is this. From a Christian point of view the search for peace is a dynamic (not a static) process which is constantly being renewed on a daily basis. The clearest evidence for this can be seen in Christian history and the examples of those individuals who have understood the important role religions have to play in promoting peace around the world.

During the Mediaeval period – particularly the part of it that coincided with the Crusades – we have the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who opposed the Crusades²- the military campaigns which were justified on the grounds that the Christians were fighting to redeem the Holy Land from the

¹ *De Civitate Dei* (Arabic translation: *Madinat Allah*, Book 19, Vol. 3, Beirut, 2007).

² Emile Amin: *Jusur La Jidran*, Al Maktab al Misri al Hadith, Cairo, 2005.



Muslims. Consequently he appealed for another Crusade of a kind that was a stranger to fighting, killing and terror. What he called for was a Crusade of Love.

There was nothing in the least Christian about the Crusader wars waged under the command of the big feudal landlords and greedy merchants, who saw them as just another opportunity for indulging their insatiable material ambitions. The crucifixes they wore and carried into battle were no more than a screen for their political and economic schemes, which were a gross perversion of the morality and ideals of Christianity.

St. Francis¹ believed that the Crusade of Love was the proper way to enter people's hearts and to this end he was prepared to go to any lengths – even to the point allowing his own blood to be shed if necessary. This can be seen in his repeated warnings to the Crusaders in Damietta, when he told them that they were doomed to suffer defeat and they accused him of insanity.

St. Francis of Assisi was able to serve the cause of peace through his meetings with the Arab Sultans and the Muslims of the East, and through the love he expressed in his discussions with them he was able to build bridges of communication with them and achieve benefits that – in the words of his contemporaries – were greater than any gains that could be won through forty battles.

St. Francis summed up his life and his Christian mission in a strife-torn world with the most famous prayer in Western spiritual literature: “Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring love. Where there is offence, let me bring pardon. Where there is discord, let me bring union. Where there is error, let me bring truth... Where there is despair, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness, let me bring your light. Where there is sadness, let me bring joy... Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.”

¹ Fr. Yusuf Louis: *Sirat al Qaddis Fransis al Assisi*, Cairo, 1965.

Other Christians also carried Jesus of Nazareth's message of peace and rejected violence and war, including St. Martin of Tours, who abandoned a military career in favour of Christianity with the words: "I am a soldier for Christ and I am not permitted to wage war." After becoming Bishop of Tours he called for a non-violent approach in dealing with heretics.

Another committed Christian - St. Nicholas of Flue – was renowned for his ability to settle disputes by persuading the opposing parties to reach a compromise in the interests of genuine reconciliation, on the principle: "My advice is that the issue should be settled amicably, because one good deed produces another."¹

We also have the example of Maximilian Kolbe, who voluntarily gave his life in order to save some of the Jews held in the Nazi concentration camps in Poland – an act of selflessness which inspired awe in the minds of the concentration camp guards. According to one witness: "After Kolbe sacrificed his life, we were not beaten nearly so often or so hard as we had been hitherto."

The most recent example I can think of – from the 1960s – is Martin Luther King, who embraced a philosophy of non-violence because he believed it offered the best approach to tackling humanity's problems.

Can we learn anything useful from the lives of these men?

They were all Christians who understood the true meaning of Christianity as it was preached by Jesus of Nazareth and they realised that peace could not be achieved unless people's hearts were in the right place. They were therefore torchbearers for those who worked to promote peace, about whom Jesus had said that "they shall be called the children of God".

In 1997 the Vatican published an Apostolic Letter entitled "New Hope for Lebanon" in which Pope John Paul II declared: "Today I exhort all Catholics, and at the same time I call upon all Christians and people of good will around the world to... arm themselves with the weapons of peace

¹ Niklaus von Flue in *Berichten von Zeitgenossen*.



and justice. Developing the weapons of peace and justice is crucial, as is the training of consciences to [embrace] peace, reconciliation and harmony between people.”

The Pope added: “We must never forget that by espousing a peace initiative it is possible to disarm one’s opponent, since it often leads him to respond positively and with an open hand. This is because peace - which is the highest good – has a propensity to spread. The history of religion reminds us that the saints were founts of conciliation because of their peaceable dispositions, which were based upon prayer and emulation of the Messiah, the Messenger of Peace.”

Do these words convey a message to the reader?

Indeed they do. They state unequivocally that there are people at the highest levels of the Christian church who believe strongly that they have a part to play in promoting peace.

There is a meaningful relationship between Islam and “*salam*” (peace)

In Islam “*al Salam*” – or “[the Giver of] Peace” – is one of Allah’s Beautiful Names. In verses 23 to 24 of *Surat al Hashr* the Holy Qur’an says: “He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, Knower of the unseen and the witnessed. He is the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful. He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, the Sovereign, the Pure, [the Giver of] Peace (*‘al Salam’*), the Bestower of Faith, the Overseer, the Exalted in Might, the Compeller, the Superior. Exalted is Allah above whatever they associate with Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; to Him belong the Beautiful Names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.”

Why is “*al Salam*” one of Allah’s Beautiful Names in the Islamic faith?

Our immediate reply could be: “Because Allah, Glory be to Him, is the Creator of peace and harmony and He has established laws and principles to enable mankind to enjoy those blessings and He has sent prophets and

revealed holy scriptures in order to promote them. He – the Most High – is the Source of all peace, harmony, goodness and virtue.”

Does Islam offer a basic definition of “*salam*”?

In the Islamic view “*salam*” is both a human activity or condition and a blessing bestowed by Allah upon mankind.

According to Hamdi Zaqqouq,¹ Allah the Most High describes Himself as “*al Salam*” in verse 23 of *Surat al Hashr* and the Arabic word “*salam*” is derived from the same root as Islam (submission). Hence there is a correlation between Islam and “*salam*”.

Experience teaches us that a person who embraces peace and seeks to adopt it as one of his own personal qualities will be able to spread peace to his neighbours and the world in which he lives. When the Noble Qur’an tells us that all human beings belong to the wider family of mankind and can trace their origins back to a single source, we can understand from this that a person who seeks peace seeks it not only for himself but also for others. Peace by its very nature has the quality of uniting human hearts and minds.

But is it possible for mankind to achieve this without Divine assistance?

Islam states clearly that mankind cannot do so without guidance from Allah, who desires the well-being of all humanity. This Divine guidance begins with a call for “*salam*” or an invitation to “*Dar al Salam*” (the “*Home of Peace*”). Verse 25 of *Surat Yunus* says: “*And Allah invites to the Home of Peace*”.

Muslims around the world regard the Noble Qur’an as the Book of Peace and Love.² We can see clear evidence for this in the fact that their daily greeting is “*Al salamu ‘alaykum*” (“*May peace be upon you*”).

¹ *Al Islam wa Qadhaya al Hiwar*, Maktabat al Usrah, 2007.

² Abdul Qadir Bu ‘Arafah: *Ishkaliyat al Salam al ‘Alami baina Ibn Rushd wa Immanuel Kant*. (See above).



Allah calls upon Muslims to incline towards peace if others incline towards it. However, this does not mean that they should only do so in those circumstances; that is to say, He is not telling them that they should naturally be warriors and battle-ready. Muslims understand that Allah does not like war and fighting between members of the human race, though circumstances sometimes make it inevitable. (The Qur'an recognizes that conflict and rivalry are a part of life.)

The Islamic Shariah is full of instances that highlight the organic relationship between “*salam*” and Islam and the leading role “*salam*” has to play in determining the thinking and behaviour of the Muslim *Ummah* (nation/community). Verse 5 of Surat al Qadr describes “[Lailat al Qadr](#)” (“the Night of Power/Destiny”) – the most important night of the year - as “‘*salam*’ (peace) it is till the rising of the dawn”.

When Muslims meet, the preferred greeting between them includes the word “*salam*”. The Holy Qur'an says: “[When you enter houses, greet one another \[with words of\] peace](#)” and “[Do not enter houses other than your own until you have asked permission and greeted their occupants \[with words of\] peace.](#)”

Let us now pause to consider the many misconceptions entertained by Western and Eastern Orientalists over the question: “Has Islam always promoted peace from the start of the Islamic Mission to the present day?”

The answer to this is extremely important, because if we regard Islam as a faith that is equally applicable to every time and place, we are bound to conclude that its teachings have not only had an impact on the past, but that - on the contrary - they are also just as relevant for world peace today.

Islam has always sought to instil a strong desire for peace in the hearts and minds of its followers. This does not mean a belief in peace only among Muslims, but rather in peace with and between all peoples, regardless of race, religion or colour.

As we pointed out earlier, there is a clear correlation between Islam and “*salam*”, or peace. In Arabic the word “Islam” is derived from the same root as “*salam*”, and the word “*salam*” is used as a greeting between Muslims.

Each of the five daily Muslim congregational prayers concludes with the Islamic salutation “*salam*”, which the worshipper addresses to right and left – an act which can be seen as symbolising the world to his right and the world to his left and expressing the Muslim aspiration for global peace.

Has Islam had a “constitution” for world peace ever since the time it was first revealed?

Yes, it has. It has a “constitution” which even today offers peace and secure coexistence to a world in conflict and turmoil. Verse 8 of *Surat al Mumtahinah* states: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.”

What this verse means is that Islam has given Muslims a general principle for peaceful coexistence with each other and the wider world. They are told that they need to live together with other people - whoever those others may be - and that non-Muslims must be treated with justice and tolerance as long as they do not engage in hostile acts towards Muslims, or work with the enemies of Islam to undermine the Muslim community.

To understand the relationship between Islam and peace (as a concept and a value), we need to unravel the complexities of the relationship between a desire for peace and the limits of justice.

In another *surah*, the Qur’an informs mankind that Allah does not ask them to bear a burden that is beyond their capacity. What does this mean?

If the verse we have just quoted above speaks about refraining from hostile acts against Muslims, their property, their lives and their honour, how should Muslims react when they are forced to confront an aggressor? Would such a confrontation be incompatible with the concept of world peace?



Most reliable interpreters would maintain that tolerance towards enemies who persist in their acts of aggression is undesirable, to say the least, and the Qur'an recognizes this as a human reality. Hence it would be wrong for Muslims to turn to their enemies who wish to destroy them and treat them as friends, because if they were to do so, they would be wronging themselves and helping others to treat them unjustly. Therefore the Qur'an forbids Muslims to befriend such people. Verse 9 of *Surat al Mumtahinah* says: "Allah only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of [your] faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid [others] in driving you forth and as for those [from among you] who turn towards them in friendship, it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers!"

If aggressors stop acting unjustly towards Muslims and show a desire for peace, then Muslims should be prepared to deal with them in an amicable way. Verse 61 of *Surat al Anfal* says: "But if they incline to peace, incline thou to it as well, and place thy trust in God."

Is global Islamic solidarity conducive to world peace or does it pose an obstacle to it?

This would seem to be an unnecessary question, but there are many people in the West who see it as an obstacle to world peace. Why should this be so, and how should we reply to them?

In their book *A Sense of Siege: Geopolitics of Islam and the West*,¹ Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser write that the vast majority of Muslims believe solidarity between Islamic states is right, proper and desirable, at least in principle. This, they maintain, is a perfectly natural attitude, but realistically speaking there is a question mark over the extent to which Islam is capable of uniting the Muslim world against its opponents – particularly the West.

¹ *A Sense of Siege: Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser. (In Arabic: *Al Islam wa'l Gharb bain al Ta'awun wa'l Muwajahah* – literally "Islam and the West between Cooperation and Confrontation").

'Abdul 'Aziz bin 'Uthman al Tuwaijiri¹ provides us with the answer. He believes that the question is “booby-trapped” and designed to blow sky-high the notion of “*salam*” being consistent with Islam by suggesting that they are two irreconcilable opposites. Fuller and Lesser, he says, are guilty of an error which is common among Western writers; contrary to what they maintain, Islamic solidarity is not necessarily targeted against the West (or the East for that matter), but aims to serve the higher interests of the Islamic *Ummah*, whether they be political, economic, social, cultural or scientific. It is a benign solidarity which is designed to empower and defend the *Ummah*, while providing it with the means to progress under the banner of world peace. Hence Arab/Islamic cooperation is more than just a tool for shaping the future of the Arab Nation and the Islamic world; it will also be good for the future of humanity and help promote peace around the globe.

Over the past three decades some of the Western media have accused Islam of violence and posing a threat to world peace. For our part, what we need to do is examine Islam's attitude towards those who advocate or practise violence and aggression.

Most thinkers regard Islam as a religion of peace, love and harmony and see Muslim hearts as radiant with the Light of Islam. Islam teaches us that if we are afraid of anyone we must not act treacherously towards them but speak to them frankly so that they understand the situation clearly.²

Verse 58 of *Surat al Anfal* says: “If thou hast reason to fear treachery from people [with whom thou hast made a covenant], cast it back at them in an equitable manner: for, verily, Allah does not love the treacherous!”

Perhaps Islam could make its most effective contribution to world peace by highlighting the forbearance, patience and detachment which tend to characterise Muslim attitudes towards humanity everywhere, regardless of their nationality, colour, creed or age.

¹ *Al Hiwar min Ajli'l Ta'awun*, Dar al Shurooq, p. 43, 1998.

² Mansur al Rifa'i 'Ubaid: *Al Islam wa Mawqifuh min al 'Unf wa'l Tatarruf wa'l Irhab*, Maktabat al Usrah, 2006, p. 16.



Muslims need to interact with those who disagree with them and seek to find satisfactory solutions when differences exist between them. Verse 6 of *Surat al Tawbah* says: “And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know.”

The message of Islam is one that calls upon people to do good and eschew evil so that the world can enjoy security, stability and peace. Verse 104 of *Surat Aali ‘Imran* states: “And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.”

The best way to understand our view of “*salam*” within a Muslim context might be to view it as a pattern of concentric circles.

Seen in this way, the first circle could represent the peace of mind – the mental peace - which exists within a person’s psyche. This can be attained via the second circle – peace with the Creator, which is a state of spiritual peace achieved through religious faith. A combination of these two circles together can lead us on to the third – peace with other people and the wider world around us. Then if we stand back a little, we will see that all these three circles interact with each other.

If a Muslim’s faith requires him to be at peace with others and the world around him, this by definition means that Muslims need to be at peace with the world in which they live. The concept of world peace presupposes that all the peoples of the world should have the opportunity to enjoy peace, and consequently play their part in making peace.

Muslims believe that world peace is a necessary condition for saving the world from disaster and this is why they want to contribute to it. It is indeed vital that they should do so, because they comprise at least twenty per cent of the world’s population.

One thing that distinguishes the Muslim religion from the older Abrahamic faiths is the fact that in principle it recognizes its predecessors; this allows it to live in peace and cooperate with them in spreading the blessings of peace around the world.

According to Feisal Abdul Rauf in his article *Religious Organisations are Key to Mideast Peace*, Islam – particularly today – is able to play a vital and effective role in promoting the notion of world peace.

For the benefit of those who do not know him, Abdul Rauf is the co-founder and chairman of the Cordoba Initiative – an independent, multi-national Islamic project which seeks to improve relations between Muslims and the West – and author of the book *What's Right with Islam Is What's Right with America*.

Abdul Rauf states that Islam defines itself not as the religion of Muhammad, but as the religion of Allah the Most High which was originally established by the Prophet Abraham – the source of a common legacy shared with Jews and Christians, whom the Qur'an refers to as "*Ahl al Kitab*" (the People of the Scripture). Verse 46 of *Surat al 'Ankabut* says: "And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, apart from those among them who commit injustice, and say, 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him'."

This verse means that Muslims are called upon to seek what unites rather than what divides, and that they should shun anything that threatens to divide mankind into mutually hostile sects because of differences in religious beliefs. Religion should be a beacon of world peace – now and always.

As we conclude this brief overview – which gives only the meagrest description of the reality of "*salam*" in Islam – we should like to consider the question: "Have the Arab and Islamic peoples really been able to benefit from the recent Renaissance and revolutions in order to play their part in promoting the concept of '*salam*' in the way that it should be understood?"

The coming years will undoubtedly produce a verdict on how (or whether) Muslims around the world have helped spread harmony, prevent wars and create something similar to "*al Madinah al Fadhilah*" ("the Virtuous City") envisioned by the Muslim philosopher al Farabi.



There can be no peace between nations without peace between religions

In his book *Christianity: Essence, History, Future*, the famous Swiss theologian Hans Kung observes that there can be “no peace among the nations without peace among the religions”.

Hans Kung has carried out an in-depth examination of the different faiths and this has led him to conclude that they are “vehicles of peace” rather than “instruments of conflict”. In an age when man possesses every kind of technology – new, old and “Mediaeval” – it is incumbent upon all faiths, particularly the three prophetic ones (which have more often than not been at each other’s throats), to do everything in their power to avoid wars and spread peace. In Kung’s view, the only way this can be done is through a meticulous reappraisal and reinterpretation of every element of their respective religious traditions.

We need to understand the Qur’an as it applies to the world of today. This means that we should not necessarily accept every one of its statements about war at face value – that is to say, as categorical precepts and rigid laws. Instead, they should be understood in their historical context.

In this connection, Kung proposes the following approach:

Firstly: Since all references to fighting that occur in the religious traditions of the three Abrahamic religions should be interpreted in the context of the historical eras in which they occurred, we should:

- Consider the cruel “Jehovah wars” and vengeful psalms in the Old Testament as relating to the seizing of territory and subsequent acts of self-defence against more powerful enemies.

- Apply the same criteria to the way we interpret the Christian Crusades and religious wars in the Middle Ages.

- Understand that the Qur’an’s call to arms reflects the Prophet’s particular circumstances during the Madinan period. Consequently,

the message of the Madinan surahs – especially those calling upon the Believers to fight the Makkan polytheists – cannot possibly be used today as a justification for war.

Secondly: Words and deeds that support and advocate peace should provide the inspiration for the modern age.

Kung wonders whether peace is doomed to be for ever an illusion as far as followers of the different faiths are concerned. Is anyone alive today – however great, wise or powerful – capable of establishing peace between Muslims, Christians and Jews; particularly between the Arabs and Jews (or the Israelis and the Palestinians)?

People have been dying every day in the Balkans and the Middle East while the world looks on in expectation of a sixth Arab-Israeli war. Even so, after seeing how peace between the Catholics and Protestants has become possible after all the hot and cold conflicts that have occurred between them, many people are asking themselves whether peace might not also be achievable on a “step-by-step basis” between Jews, Christians and Muslims. And after all, if peace has been established between the French and Germans – those traditional bitter enemies – why should it be out of the question between the Arabs and Israelis?

As Hans Kung wisely observes, peace was established between the Catholics and Protestants and the French and the Germans when the opposing sides agreed to stop trying to “deny each other’s existence”. On the other hand, modern Zionism is based upon denying the Palestinians an independent country of their own and preventing them from exercising their innate right of self-determination; this means that peace in this situation is impossible not because of Islam or Judaism, but because of the nature of Zionism.

Hans Kung’s enlightened vision may be summed up as follows: All three of the Abrahamic faiths have the power and the ability to create a better future on the basis of their spiritual and moral qualities, and all three of them are capable of making a greater contribution through mutual



understanding and cooperation. We should therefore look forward to each of them playing its respective and vital role in creating a more peaceful world in which a greater degree of justice prevails.

There can be no peace between nations without peace between religions, and there can be no peace between religions without serious dialogue between their followers.