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The Role of Religion in Nation's Peace Building Process

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Abstract

Religion plays a crucial role in the peace building process of a nation. It is often seen as a source of moral guidance, providing individuals with a sense of purpose and direction. In addition, religion can serve as a unifying force, bringing people from diverse backgrounds together for a common cause.

Furthermore, religious leaders and institutions have the ability to influence political and social structures, making them valuable actors in the peace building process. They can use their platform to promote peace and reconciliation, and to address underlying causes of conflict.

Moreover, religion can offer a sense of hope and comfort to those affected by conflict, providing them with the resilience

and strength to move forward. It can also serve as a tool for healing and forgiveness, as many religious teachings prioritize forgiveness and reconciliation.

However, religion can also be a source of division and conflict in some cases. Different interpretations and practices among different religious groups can lead to tensions and further exacerbate existing conflicts.

In conclusion, the role of religion in the peace building process is complex and multifaceted. It has the potential to both promote and hinder peace, depending on how it is utilized. A thorough understanding of the religious landscape and careful consideration of its impact is necessary for effective peace building efforts in any nation.

Keywords: Religion, Peace, Conflict, Nation's Building and Hope

Introduction

Religion is a system of beliefs, practices, and rituals that seek to understand the nature of, universe, humanity's place within it, and the moral responsibilities that humans have toward the world and each other. Religion is often seen as a source of conflict, yet it can also be a powerful tool for promoting peace. While some religious groups have been associated with violent acts many religions emphasize values and teachings that can foster peaceful coexistence, such as compassion, nonviolence, and reconciliation. Many religions emphasize virtues such as love kindness, and forgiveness, which can foster a culture of compassion and peaceful coexistence. For instance, Christianity emphasizes the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." While Buddhism emphasizes the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion toward all beings.

Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." Mark 12:31: "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' There is no other commandment greater than these." Galatians 5: 14: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Conflict resolution

Many religious traditions offer guidance on resolving conflicts peacefully and maintaining harmonious relationships. In Christianity Jesus taught the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in the Sermon on the Mount, pointed out the value of resolving conflicts directly and peacefully (Matthew 5:21-26). In Judaism for instance, the Jewish teachings emphasize the importance of mediation and arbitration in resolving conflicts, as well as the value of charity and compassion toward one's enemies (Psalm 34:14).

Community service

Religious traditions often encourage their followers to engage in service to others, which can foster a sense of compassion, cooperation, and unity in society. In Islam, the concept of zakat (almsgiving) is one of the five pillars of Islam, emphasizing

the importance of giving to those in need. Furthermore, in Hinduism, the practice of *seva*, or selfless service, is a central component of Hinduism, encouraging followers to engage in acts of charity and compassion. In Buddhism also the *Bodhisattva* ideal in Buddhism encourages followers to delay their own enlightenment in order to work for the enlightenment of all beings, promoting a spirit of altruism and compassion. Furthermore, in Sikhism, *Langar*, or communal meals, is a key component of Sikhism, where anyone regardless of religion, caste, or social status can share a meal. This promotes a sense of equality, community, and charity. Various spiritual practices can promote inner peace, which can radiate outward and impact society.

Here are a few examples:

Meditation: Many religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, emphasize meditation as a means of cultivating inner peace and compassion.

Prayer: In religions such as Islam and Christianity, prayer is a form of communication with God and a way to center oneself on spiritual values. It is important to remember that peace is not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice, love, and harmony. As such, religion can be a powerful tool in helping to build and sustain peaceful societies.

Religion has long played an important role in framing societies and cultures around the world. One of the profound aspects of religious influence is its impact on promoting peace and harmony within communities. Understanding how religions promote peace is essential in fostering a more peaceful and inclusive society. In today's world, marked by conflict and division, the role of religion in peace building is more critical than ever. Religion often serves as a moral compass, guiding individuals and communities towards values such as compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Let us examine how different religions promote peace, so as to gain insights into building bridges across diverse communities and fostering mutual understanding. This presentation seeks to delve into the teachings and practices of various religions that contribute to peace building. Through an exploration of religious texts, traditions, and examples from around the world, we aim to highlight the positive impact of religion on peace in society.

Promotion of Justice and Compassion:

Christianity: Christianity teaches the importance of justice and compassion through the example of Jesus Christ, who advocated for the marginalized and oppressed. The Bible emphasizes the call to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Christian teachings encourage believers to care for the poor, the orphaned, and the widowed, promoting a sense of compassion and social responsibility.

Islam: Islam places a strong emphasis on justice, fairness, and compassion. The Quran instructs believers to stand up for justice, even if it goes against their own interests (Quran 4:135). Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of caring for the less fortunate and practicing charity (*Zakat*) as a means of promoting social justice and compassion.

Judaism: Judaism teaches the importance of justice and righteousness. The Torah commands believers to pursue justice and treat others fairly (Deuteronomy 16:20). Jewish

teachings emphasize the concept of "*Tikkun Olam*," which means "repairing the world" and involves acts of kindness and social responsibility.

Buddhism: Buddhism teaches the importance of compassion (*Karuna*) and empathy towards all living beings. The practice of loving-kindness (*Metta*) is central to Buddhist teachings. Buddhist teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings, promoting a sense of compassion and responsibility towards others.

Hinduism: Hinduism teaches the concept of "*Dharma*," which encompasses righteousness, duty, and justice. It emphasizes the importance of living a life of virtue and fairness. Hindu scriptures, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, stress the importance of upholding justice and righteousness in society.

Conflict and Religion

One can use or mobilise religion to support peacebuilding or conflict resolution. Even when opposing groups—such as Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland—are distinguished from one another by their respective religious identities, religion may not always be the primary source of conflict (David, 2002). Nonetheless, religion has long been and most likely will remain a part in certain violent confrontations, either as a stand-alone issue or as a cover for political struggles, in regions as disparate as Kashmir, Sudan, Indonesia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and the Balkans. "Religion, unfortunately, is often the most visible difference between contesting groups and, as a result, is frequently blamed for conflicts," religious workers involved in interfaith dialogue have emphasised. (Arthur Schneier, 2002).

It is true that religion can be used as a tool or as a cover for violence. (Beatrice, 2006) However, studies have revealed that religious views have also been a factor in a large number of recent violent confrontations. (Monica, 2007) According to Daniel Philpott, a historian, "Analysts often debate whether a war between religious communities in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, or Kashmir is 'really' religious or rather about something else—land, oil, ethnicity, or historical memories." (Daniel, 2007). He contends that religion "shapes the identities and loyalties of warring," and that it "fuels conflict in two broad ways."

"By defining not just the identities and allegiances of communities, but also their very political objectives, which subsequently become *casus belli*, religion more directly drives war. Certain conflicts—like the intra-Muslim disagreements in Iran and Algeria, for instance—even have religion define ends but not communities."⁸ The first dimension—religion forming identities and loyalties—also clarifies why religious actors could support political entrepreneurs by helping to mobilise the populace. The second dimension pertains to the historical influence of religion on social and political transformation, wherein it defines political objectives. For example, there is comparatively more research on the role of religion in democratisation processes than there is on violence.⁹

Violence has occasionally been acknowledged as a necessary price by religious figures and movements that have been actively involved in fostering such political transformation.¹⁰ "In certain conflicts, religious ends and identities mingle," observes Philpott.¹¹ Indeed,

dissatisfaction with the economy, politics, culture, and society can also be "transformed" into identity-based complaints, wherein religious loyalty may take on new significance. For specific purposes, political-military entrepreneurs may use this identity-based registry, which is frequently made worse by widespread violence^[12].

Consequently, some writers claim, "the most fanatical and cruellest political struggles are those that have been coloured, inspired, and legitimised by religion." Thirteen In fact, "conflicts become value conflicts when they are couched in religious terms. Value conflicts often turn into mutually exclusive or zero-sum problems, in contrast to other problems like resource disputes, which can be settled using distributive and practical methods. They involve strong moral convictions and the belief that there is no way for the parties to come to an amicable agreement to work through their disagreements^[14]."

In these situations, religious players themselves seem to have a very conflicted stance during the peacebuilding stage. They are a local resource that needs to be considered even though they might be contributing to the issue since they have allied with or been duped by war entrepreneurs.

Frameworks for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation:

Religious Teachings on Conflict Resolution: Many religions provide ethical and moral guidelines for resolving conflicts peacefully. For example, Christianity teaches the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24). Islam emphasizes the importance of resolving conflicts through peaceful means and promotes forgiveness and reconciliation (Quran 8:61).

Religious Practices for Reconciliation: Religious rituals and practices often play a role in promoting reconciliation. For example, in Christianity, the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) is a practice that encourages individuals to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God and others. In Judaism the practice of teshuvah (repentance) is central to the process of reconciliation and forgiveness. **Role of Religious Leaders in Conflict Resolution:** Religious leaders often play a key role in mediating conflicts and promoting reconciliation. Their moral authority and influence can help to bridge divides and bring about peaceful resolutions. Religious leaders can also use their platforms to promote messages of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation, inspiring their followers to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts. **Examples of Religious Contributions to Peace building:** The role of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission) where he used Christian principles of forgiveness and reconciliation to heal the wounds of apartheid. The work of religious leaders in Northern Ireland, such as Rev. Ian Paisley and Rev. John Hume, who played key roles in the peace process through their efforts to bridge divides between Catholic and Protestant communities. **Challenges in Applying Religious Frameworks:** Challenges include the interpretation of religious teachings, cultural differences, and political influences that can complicate efforts to resolve conflicts. Overcoming these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of religious teachings and practices, as well as a commitment to dialogue and mutual respect.

Promotion of Social Justice and Equality:

Religious Teachings on Social Justice: Many religions

emphasize the importance of social justice and equality. For example, Christianity teaches that all people are equal in the eyes of God (Galatians 3:28) and that believers should care for the poor and marginalized (Mathew 25:40). Islam teaches the importance of social justice and fairness, instructing believers to give to the needy and treat others with compassion and respect (Quran 4:36). Judaism emphasizes the concept of "zcdakah," or charity, as a means of promoting social justice and caring for the less fortunate (Deuteronomy 15:11). **Religious Practices for Social Justice:** Religious communities often engage in charitable activities, such as feeding the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, and caring for the sick, as a way of promoting social justice and equality. Many religious traditions have teachings and practices that encourage believers to advocate for justice and equality in society, such as through peaceful protest, activism, and community organizing. **Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting Social Justice:** Religious leaders often play a key role in advocating for social justice and equality. Their moral authority and influence can be used to raise awareness about social issues and promote positive change. Religious leaders can also use their platforms to challenge unjust systems and practices, inspiring their followers to work towards a more just and equitable society. **Examples of Religious Contributions to Social Justice:** The Civil Rights Movement in the 1st States, led by figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., drew heavily on Christian teachings of justice and equality in its efforts to end racial segregation and discrimination. The work of Mother Teresa in India, inspired by her Christian faith, focused on caring for the poorest of the poor and advocating for their rights and dignity. **Challenges in Promoting Social Justice:** Challenges include overcoming cultural and societal barriers, addressing systemic injustices, and ensuring that a) members of society have equal access to resources and opportunities. Overcoming these challenges requires a commitment to social change, advocacy, and collaboration among religious and secular organization.

Conclusion

Religion plays a significant role in promoting peace building and fostering a more harmonious society. Through its teachings, practices, and values, religion offers frameworks for conflict resolution, reconciliation, social justice, and equality. By accentuating compassion, forgiveness, and understanding, religions encourage individuals and communities to transcend differences and work towards common goals. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation further enhance these efforts by promoting mutual respect and understanding among different religious traditions. While challenges exist, such as interpreting religious teachings and addressing cultural differences, the potential for religions to contribute positively to peace building is profound. By harnessing the moral and ethical principles of religions, individuals and communities can strive towards a world where peace, justice and equality prevail.

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