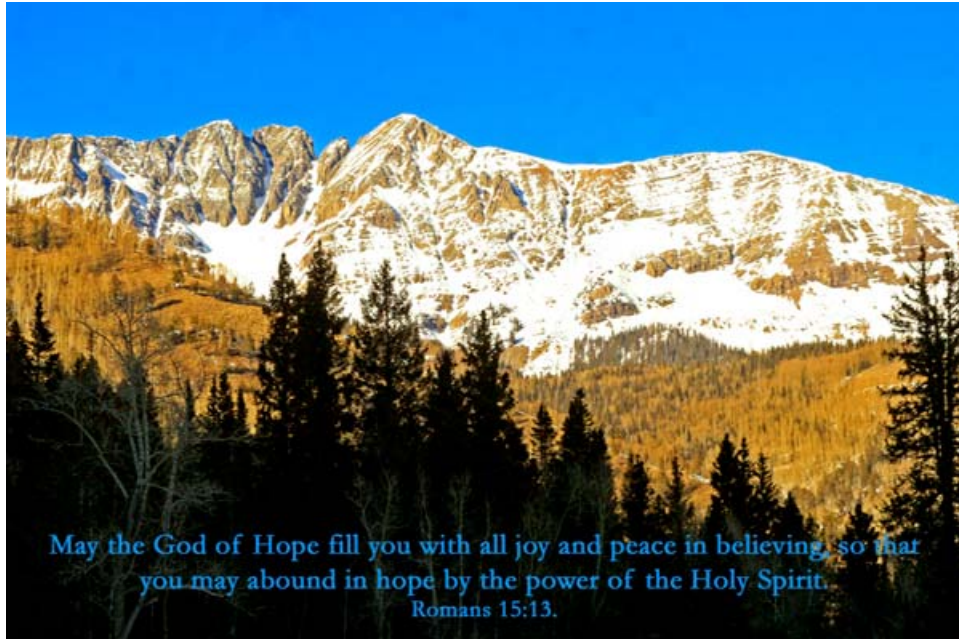




Council of Theological Students
Global Ministries
United Church of Christ
and
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The purpose of the Global Ministries Council of Theological Students (CTS) is to equip diverse groups of ministerial students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective ministers in a global community

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Pain and Healing

In this third newsletter of the Global Ministries Council of Theological Students Class of 2006-07, two members reflect on experiences of pain and healing. Abraham S. Wilar, from Indonesia, shares research and reflections on the pain of inter-religious conflict, while Richard Howe reflects on his story of pain as integral to his personal faith journey. Both suggest possible paths of healing.

**Religious Healing Community for
New Orientation
in Inter-religious Engagement
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Introduction

Is Religion Good for Your Health? That is a title for an interesting book by Harold G. Koenig.¹ Koenig's book perceives the positive impacts of religion on physical and mental health. However, I would like to raise another question in regard to this: *Is there a possibility for Religious communities to heal after the brutality of their religious engagement?*

It is clear to me that we no longer say that religion has never dealt with violence or brutality. Much of religious engagement shows that religion has promoted a dehumanization process and has endangered this world. Much pain has been created in the name of religion. This is an example of labeled "the dark side" for the evilness of religion. The following are the verses from the scripture that illustrate its darkness: Number 31:7, 14-18, John 8:44, Matthew 27:25, and Qs 9:30 or Quran *sūrah al-Baqarah* ayah 62.²

Evilness in religion has occurred both in the developed countries and the undeveloped countries. All of the major

¹ Harold G. Koenig, *Is Religion Good for Your Health? The Effects of Religion on Physical and Mental Health* (New York-London: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1997).

² John J. Shepherd, *Self-critical Children of Abraham? Roots of Violence and Extremism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Islam & the West Post 9/11*, ed. Ron Greaves, Theodore Gabriel, Yvonne Haddad, and Jane I. Smith (England: Ashgate, 2004), 27.

world religions contribute to the process of dehumanization. So, from my perspective, Christian American cannot discriminatively blame Islam for the source of terror because many Christians in Ireland have been involved in fighting each other. Also, Muslim American cannot naively say Islam is never involved in bloody events since Christians in Indonesia have experienced this.

Many atrocities have colored our lives. Pain cannot be separated anymore from religiosity. Traumatic experiences exist within those who have been violated by any religious group. In this context, what we supposed to do to heal our Christians who have been hurt by Muslims and for Muslims who have experienced pain by Christians?

While discussing religion it seems to me to be appropriate to view religion as a social phenomenon, instead of a personal relationship with God, for faith is more focused on the personal relationship with God and religion is concentrated on religious teaching, religious dogma, organization, and so forth. In other word, I distinguish between religion and faith. Both are different in essence.

Let us be honest in acknowledging the reality of evilness and goodness in religions. Thus, it is useless to become an apologist for talking about "the paradise of our religions" while much pain show the dark side of religion. In this way, this article is written for the purpose of bringing about healing in religious communities.

Anatomy of Religion Ambiguity

N. J. Demerath III's book is perhaps one of many books that accurately survey the engagement of religion with worldly politics in which their engagement has brought both

positive and negative impacts.³ In his book, Demerath presents the affairs between religion and politics by discussing the role of Mubarrak in using Islam in his search for legitimacy.⁴ For example, the Egyptian police and military have not only failed to pursue and prosecute the suspects for murdering Coptic Christians in the recent outbreaks of violence, but they actually blamed other Christians. Muslims supposedly suspected for that tragedy were freed.⁵ Based on Ellis's research in the Free Inquiry Journal, religions have been involved in fostering fanatical commitments.⁶ Or, as testified by Bishop John Danbinta from Episcopal Nigeria Church, there were close to 40 churches burned by Nigerian Muslim as a response to the issue of the cartoon of the prophet Muhammad.⁷ Historically, Christians have witnessed violence between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, and the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th century.

On the other side, we can proudly point out many verses from the Bible and the Qur'an to show the noble dimension of Christian faith and Islamic belief. For Islam, one of the essence of Islamic teaching is the conception of *taqwa* (Qs.6:94).⁸ C. T. R Hewer in his book

Understanding Islam: The First Ten Steps states that at the end of the day, each and every human being is called to be the Regent of God and each will be answerable directly to God for the way in which they have fulfilled their duty.⁹ In Amina Wadud's comprehension, *taqwa* never gives any Muslim authority for judging others because it is only God who has the authority to judge human beings.¹⁰ It also has nothing with promoting violence because Muslims are supposed to devote their lives to do good things, to not discriminate women or not to kill people in the name of Islam.¹¹ For Christians, the Golden Rule as taught by Jesus is an everlasting noble teaching of Jesus. It never gives a place for retaliation or killing people, and invading one country in the name of Christianity.

As stated above, I comprehend religion as an organization of belief so in my understanding it has two different natures of evilness and the graciousness. We may find a kind of structure of these two natures in religion. That structure can be seen in the following chart below:

The structure of evilness and graciousness of religion	
A. Evilness	B. Graciousness
1. The Scripture	1. The Scripture
* Violent images or statements	* Precious images or statements
2. Interpretation of the Scripture	2. Interpretation of the Scripture

³ N. J. Demerath III, *Crossing the Gods: World Religions and Worldly Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A. Fellis. Is religiosity pathological? *Free Inquiry* 18, 1988: 27-32.

⁷ Bishop John Danbinta is my classmate at Hartford Seminary. He exposed this issue in our daily conversation on March 25, 2007.

⁸ *An Interpretation of the Qur'an*. Translated by Majid Fakhry. New York: New York University Press, 2004, 139.

⁹ C. T. R. Hewer, *Understanding Islam: The First Ten Steps* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 11.

¹⁰ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: One World Press, 2006), 40.

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

* Exclusiveness-Closed	
* Openness	
* Naïve mindset	
* Not naive	
3. The interpreters	
3. The interpreters	
* Bad intentions/motives	
*	Good
intentions/motives	
in interpreting the scripture	
in interpreting the	
scripture	
* Unhealthy mind/physics	
* Healthy mindedness or	
physics	
4. The community	
4. The community	
* Exclusive-Closed	
* Openness and friendly	
* Rigid with new ideas	
* Welcoming community	
with new	
ideas	
* Fanatic and Extreme	
* Open-minded and	
tolerant	

It will be the best to give further explanation for some of the items in the chart. The first point I want to clarify is the naïve mindset in interpreting the scripture. What I mean by this is the discovery of naïve presumptions while approaching the scripture such as the truth.

Many religious people believe the truth they find in scripture is the ultimate truth and from this point they argue for no truth but their truth. It is clear to me that this kind of understanding is the manifestation of a naïve mindset, for the truth itself cannot fully be understood by human beings. It seems so naïve to me to claim that the truth has been fully known as they have found it in the scripture. For me, it is better to let the truth as free as

we discuss what the truth is because nobody can grasp the truth.

Meanwhile, bad intentions or motives are related to our physical healthiness and our mind as we interpret the scripture. Many religious scholars tend to discredit other religions when interpreting the scripture. In the name of truth telling, these people will bring a lot of arguments or quotations for bolstering their intention to discriminate people of other faiths.

An unhealthy mind needs to be noticed as we read or compare others scripture. We have been caught in comparing the ideal of Christian faith with the reality of Islamic belief. Such an attitude has continuously contributed to Christians' hatred paradigm in approaching Islam or another religion. What Christians should do in this situation is to be fair as much as possible while comparing Christian belief with others faiths. In order to be fair, Christians must to compare the ideal of Christian faith to the ideal of others' faith, and look the reality of Christian belief with other's reality. If Christians keep this approach in their mind, we can be used to treat people of another faith as the manifestation of loving your neighbors as we love ourselves.

Inter-religious Healing Ministries

Much of the inter-faith struggle has been dealing with the question of "*how to understand the others?*" There are a lot of books published for exploring that question. However, it is rare to hear the question: "*can we heal others who are wounded by my religion?*" in discussing interfaith interaction. Understanding the others is important, but there is another pivotal point that cannot be denied while talking about inter-religious interaction: healing the others who are wounded by my religion.

The scheme above is helpful in identifying the location of problems where

there may be religious hostility. In regard with this, I would like to suggest an integrative approach in dealing with this issue. An integrative/wholeness approach means that we must employ interdisciplinary approach, inter-religious cooperation, and working with a systematic step and the wholeness of ours. To perform this kind of ministry, we can no longer stand for exclusivity in religion or research.

A. Inter-disciplinary research

What needs to be underlined is the importance of using sociological, psychological, theological studies, pastoral counseling, and other fields of study to understand the complexity of the issue. Theological problems are sometimes not regarded with the understanding of God, but it also includes our mentality while thinking about God.¹² It is simply because we are organic units that we have mind, mentality, feelings, and so forth when we are dealing with theological issue. We do not encounter God in a vacuum. All aspects of our ordinary experience is included in how we approach God.

B. Inter-religious cooperation

All of religion should be responsible in healing other faiths whose lives have been wounded by religion. Christians Pakistani that have experienced trauma by the Muslim community and this needs to be healed by Muslims. The Christian community certainly has the obligation to heal the wounded heart, but it is also necessary for other faith communities to participate in the healing process. In other word, Christians Pakistani need to invite another community [Muslim] to heal his fellow

from Pakistan who has been suffered living in a Muslim dominated country.

C. Working with a systematic step and the wholeness

In dealing with a wounded person, it seems difficult to work without a well planned of counseling. Well planned counseling includes the systematic steps to overcome the problems, and also the wholeness in devoting ourselves to assist our wounded fellow.

The integrative approach/wholeness means something organic, that is, many separate parts working together. Within such a framework, we will be able to engage differently to overcome the hostility among religious people. The integrative/wholeness approach can work effectively working if the basic required understandings are fulfilled. The basic requirements for those who interest to be engaged in healing ministry:

- ❖ commit to practice the meaning of “love your God as you love yourself and neighbors”
- ❖ no hatred in the mind or heart toward people of other religion,
- ❖ compassion in listening
- ❖ creative in finding some suggestions or exercises for the healing training purposes
- ❖ having enough knowledge in several fields of studies.

These five basic requirements should become the spirit of Christian involvement in the healing ministry of inter-religious engagement.

As we have several centers for Inter-faith studies, it is also necessary to have centers that aim to focus on the inter-religious healing process. Its focus is not only about “dialogue” or bridging gaps between many religious communities, but it also concentrates in healing our community from hatred and

¹² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience with Introduction and Notes* by Wayne Proudfoot (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 2004).

religious trauma. It can be applied to both youth and adults, even for the children. By having an appropriate curriculum, and well-planned activities, we can address this issue and be able to create a better life or environment within our communities. To end this reflective article, I would like to lift up my prayer as prayed by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner:

Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges, the bitter
hatreds held and nurtured over
generations.

Let the rain wash away the
memory of the hurt, the neglect.
Then let the sun come out and
fill the sky with rainbows.

Let the warmth of the sun heal
us wherever we are broken.

Let it burn away the fog so that
we can see beyond the labels,
beyond the accents, gender or
skin color.

Let the warmth and brightness
of the sun melt our selfishness
so that we can share the joys and
feel the sorrows of our
neighbors.

And let the light of the sun be so
strong that we will see all people
as our neighbors.

Let the earth, nourished by rain,
bring forth flowers to surround
us with beauty.

And let the mountains teach our
hearts to reach upward to
heaven. Amen.

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