

WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

Occasional Paper No. 5

Some brief extracts from comments and articles received by the WFDD in the wake of the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001

I believe that there is a clear correlation between the treatment of women and Muslim self-perception, which bears upon the position of women in Islam. When Muslim society is confident and in balance, it treats women with fairness and respect; when Muslim society is threatened and feels vulnerable, it treats women with indifference and even harshness. Only with widespread education and the restoration of Muslim confidence can contemporary Muslim women assume their rightful place in society: it is only then that the Prophet's saying about paradise lying at the feet of the mother will have meaning.

Akbar Ahmed

Many of us are pacifists until a thief enters our home and kills a loved one. Then we are dominated by the same sentiments as the bandit, allowing the assassin hidden in the recesses of our hearts to come out. When he commanded that we should love our enemies, Jesus did not support those who are naïve enough to imagine that peace can exist without being the fruit of justice. On the contrary, he demanded that we should not do to neighbours what we don't wish them to do to us. It is thus not a question of not having enemies, but it is a question of avoiding treating them with inhumanity, fomenting the spiral of violence.

Frei Betto (translated from the Spanish)

I am a Christian leader, but I hope and believe I speak for every one of us when I say we are called by God to resist evil, to pursue justice for all and to seek to live in peace and harmony with our neighbour. These are important goals. They are also great challenges. None of us, I suspect is in a position to evaluate fully how current developments will promote these ends. But we pray that those who bear the heavy responsibility of the leadership of nations will seek to pursue these noble goals, with compassion, mercy and maximum respect for innocent lives.

Dr. George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury

If we are to defeat those who sponsor and carry out acts of terror, we must join together with all men and women of goodwill in every corner of the world to eradicate hatred, violence, selfishness, and contempt from the human heart as well as the root causes of injustice, poverty, and inequality that serve as the breeding grounds of hate.

Let us not surrender to hate, but take this opportunity to renew our pledge to work for a society that reflects the Reign of God, where justice, peace, truth, freedom and solidarity prevail.

Caritas Internationalis

As people of faith and spirit, we call on our religious and spiritual communities, and people of goodwill everywhere, to take the lead in breaking the cycle of violence and working together to create a climate of healing, trust and hope.

Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions

The events of this day cause every thinking person to stop their daily lives, whatever is going on in them, and to ponder deeply the larger questions of life. We search again for not only the meaning of life, but the purpose of our individual and collective experience as we have created it—and we look earnestly for ways in which we might recreate ourselves anew as a human

species, so that we will never treat each other this way again. The hour has come for us to demonstrate at the highest level our most extraordinary thought about Who We Really Are...

If you wish to experience peace, provide peace for another. If you wish to know that you are safe, cause [others] to know that they are safe. If you wish to better understand seemingly incomprehensible things, help another to better understand. If you wish to heal your own sadness or anger, seek to heal the sadness or anger of another. Those others are waiting for you now. They are looking to you for guidance, for help, for courage, for strength, for understanding and for assurance at this hour. Most of all, they are looking to you for love.

My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.
His Holiness the Dalai Lama

What can we all, as people with development experience and communication skills contribute in the coming months? What should be our role?
Drum Beat

A three year old child, called Luca, commented recently "The world doesn't know where its home is". He was looking at a map. He could have been looking at the news.
Eduardo Galeano (Translated from the Spanish)

Respecting the sanctity of life is the cornerstone of all great faiths.
HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Although we share fundamental principles, it remains true that there are real theological differences among the three monotheistic faiths, differences that cannot be ignored or watered down. In the face of this mystery, I find inspiration in the beautiful Qur'anic verse: "To each of you We have prescribed a law and an open way. Had God so willed, He would have made you one community, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you. Vie, then, with one another in good works. Unto God shall you all return, and He will show you the truth of the matters wherein you differ." [s rat al-m 'idah(5):48]. It seems that we must accept diversity as part of God's plan. In the vivid metaphor of a race, the differing communities are challenged to use their gifts to strive to outdo each other in good works, with God as their judge.
Zoe Herzov

A bizarre new world awaits us, where old rules of social and political behaviour have broken down and new ones are yet to be defined. Catapulted into a situation of darkness and horror by the extraordinary force of events, as rational human beings we must urgently formulate a response that is moral, and not based upon considerations of power and practicality.

This requires beginning with a clearly defined moral supposition - the fundamental equality of all human beings. It also requires that we must proceed according to a definite sequence of steps, the order of which is not interchangeable.
Pervez Hoodboy

In the meantime terror has struck in USA. Beyond all that can be said, I see in all this a challenge to create a world where the poor and the rich can feel safe. We have only one planet to share.
Peter Kanyandago

Some Lessons about the Nature of our Challenge.

- Always seek to understand the root of the anger.
- Always seek to understand the nature of the organisation.
- Always remember that realities are constructed. Conflict is, among other things, the process of building and sustaining very different perceptions and interpretations of reality.
- Always understand the capacity for recruitment. The greatest power that terror has is the ability to regenerate itself.
- Recognise complexity, but always understand the power of simplicity – Finally, we must understand the principle of simplicity.

John Paul Lederach

We in the spiritual world will see this as a growing global incapacity to recognise the spirit of God in each other--what we call the sanctity of each human being.... we live in one world, increasingly interconnected with everyone, and the forces that lead people to feel outrage, anger and desperation eventually impact on our own daily lives.

This is a world out of touch with itself, filled with people who have forgotten how to recognise and respond to the sacred in each other because we are so used to looking at others from the standpoint of what they can do for us, how we can use them toward our own ends. The alternatives are stark: either start caring about the fate of everyone on this planet or be prepared for a slippery slope toward violence that will eventually dominate our daily lives.

Rabbi Lerner

To what degree does any religion bear responsibility for those who speak in its name? Yet if any religion is to cope with these deviations it must recognise that they do not arise from nowhere but have roots, however twisted, in the faith itself. Christians who bomb abortion clinics appeal to the Christian Bible and persuade others to join them on Biblical grounds. That Islamic fundamentalism and its militant offshoots appeal to the Koran is therefore not an incidental matter. It means that they have found a way to breed in the religious space opened up by the revelation Islam presupposes.

Mark Lilla

But widespread violence is not the only possibility. If this time of crisis encourages us to see through the rhetoric of a war to exterminate evil, and if we begin to understand the intertwined roots of this evil, including our own responsibility, then perhaps something good may yet come out of this catastrophic tragedy.

David Loy

The death of several thousands in one blinding crash is tragic and heartbreaking. Equally agonizing is the slow death of starving people, who die in their thousands disowned by a world in hot pursuit after unlimited wealth. The challenge in the global village is to create a global community where the worth of human lives will not be measured by scales of affluence, and the needs of all people will be met out of the resources of the Earth.

Multi-Religious Group, India

...Powerlessness can corrupt as insistently as does power. But to comprehend is not to sanction or even to empathise. To take innocent life to achieve a goal is the hallmark of the most extreme secular utilitarian ethic, and stands at the opposite pole of the absolute moral constraints required by religion.

Abdal-Hakim Murad

It is imperative at a time like this to make a clear and unambiguous distinction between the sublime values enshrined in one's religion and those acts which demean and defile the virtuous principles embodied in one's faith. The conference of Muslim and Christian personalities in Rome was right in warning that nobody should "mention the name of God in taking the life of innocent and defenceless victims. Those who use the name of God in hatred and choose the path of violence are abandoning their religion."

Chandra Muzaffar

The tragic and agonising events of September 11 demand of us our deepest spiritual response. In this sense, we are finding ourselves called to new levels of spiritual growth and understanding. This tragedy invokes the highest possibilities of our human nature, and through our response to this devastating injury to us all, we will discover and create new ways to understand and honour one another.

Bruce Schuman

Here (in Israel) too, religion has frequently been abused to fan the flames of hatred, while voices calling for reconciliation through dialogue between the religions have been few and feeble. Despite decades of commendable interfaith activities in the country, to date only an extremely limited circle of individuals has recognised that religious faith and commitment without dialogue threatens the stability of society, and thus seriously engages in dialogue. There is an urgent need to supplement existing interfaith efforts, both through new strategies to draw ever larger numbers of individuals into the circle of interfaith dialogue, and through the development of interactive models for encounter that can affect true and lasting change in the outlook and attitude of participants.

Yehuda Stolov

...But we must go one step further. The greatest long-term challenge for the world community in building a better world is that of fighting poverty and promoting inclusion worldwide. This is even more imperative now, when we know that because of the terrorist attacks, growth in developing countries will falter, pushing millions more into poverty and causing tens of thousands of children to die from malnutrition, disease and deprivation.

Poverty in itself does not immediately and directly lead to conflict, let alone to terrorism. Rather than responding to deprivation by lashing out at others, the vast majority of poor people world wide devote their energy to the day-in, day-out struggle to secure income, food and opportunities for their children.

And yet we know that exclusion can breed violent conflict. Careful research tells us that civil wars have often resulted not so much from ethnic diversity, the usual scapegoat, as from a mix of factors, of which, it must be recognised, poverty is a central ingredient. And conflict-ridden countries in turn become safe havens for terrorists.

Our common goal must be to eradicate poverty, to promote inclusion and social justice, to bring the marginalised into the mainstream of the global economy and society....Success may take years of hard work, but the alternative is a never-ending cycle of violence.

James D. Wolfensohn

